**Filthy Lucre.**

by risky_business

**Summary**

AU. Ryan Ross is living the American wet dream. He’s rich, he’s good looking, he’s paid just to turn up at parties and he spends his days doing drugs and climbing into bed with eager and willing boys and girls. Brendon Urie is a man bordering on desperation – whoring himself out to wealthy men in an attempt to support himself and his best friend’s worsening drug habit. When his job ensnares him in the glamorous world of the rich and the infamous, it’s not long before their paths cross and Ryan starts living his dark fantasies though Brendon – but only for a price.

*See tags for triggers.*
Grateful thanks to my beta Tumblr user insufferablehipsterscum.

Why not follow my (NSFW) blog on Tumblr, where we can be the best of friends?

I do try and tag all triggers, but if I've missed any please message me and I'll be more than happy to add them for you.

There are some wonderful and talented readers who have been kind (and awesome) enough to create “works inspired by…” Poetry! Fan Art! Playlists! Edits! Role Play blogs! Networks! Find them here! Remember to show these artists some love because they sure as heck deserve it.

I've had a couple of messages on Tumblr asking me to compile posts of how I imagine the characters as I write, which allowed me the time to simply sit and search Google, looking for hot pics of hot guys. Dang! What a tough evening that was. I created photo sets for each main character, and a Filthy Lucre Character Masterpost can be found by clicking the link. Enjoy!

I also made this post, as a quick reference for those readers unfamiliar with Lake Tahoe, as mentioned for the first time in Chapter 33.

Lastly, Filthy Lucre is a work of fiction. This is a fictional story about fictional representations of real people. None of the events are true.

• Inspired by Filthy Lucre by stereo_junkie (that's me!) and posted on LiveJournal in May 2007 as a Gerard Way/Frank Iero fic
Chapter 1

Brendon’s face was buried in the pillow.

He concentrated on the dull bang of the headboard against the wall and let it play through his ears like a litany. Behind him, a stranger held tight onto his hips, his palm rubbing over Brendon’s ass tenderly as if he’d somehow earned that right to intimacy. Brendon tried to ignore it – the way the stranger grunted his name; not *his* name, just *a* name and called him *baby*.

He turned his head to blink in his surroundings. This was a high-class hotel. Brendon could tell by the quality of the bedding. He inhaled the familiar scent of hotel laundry detergent and bit a silent cry into the pillow. This trick was getting *rough*. Biting his lip, he looked out across the room; a mess of clothes littered the floor, all of them his, none of them belonged to the stranger. The TV was on mute behind them, some crappy laugh-track sitcom rolling across the screen and he could hear the hum of the bathroom vent over the stranger’s moans. Brendon’s mind started to wander…

It was his mother’s birthday next week; he’d have to remember to send her a card – and a little bit more cash than usual. She’d been struggling with the bills. *Again.* She’d called him last month, reminding him that his father’s medical bills were due and Brendon didn’t work *just* so he could help his parents out, but it was one of the reasons. His parents had no idea how he actually was able to help fund his father’s treatment but they sure as hell wouldn’t be nagging him to send checks every few months if they did.

He’d come into some good money recently and perhaps if he made the conscious effort to put a couple of hundred dollars of it to one side, he could afford to go back to Las Vegas to visit his family at the end of the month. Perhaps even take Jon along too. It was high time that they all met.

The stranger was slowing down behind him. Brendon inhaled deeply. The smell of freshly laundered bedding was almost intoxicating to him.

“It’s been almost an hour. It’s sixty bucks for every fifteen minutes if you go over,” Brendon warned, biting the inside of his lip and screwing his eyes closed as he felt the stranger’s hips buck forward into him again and again and again, another three minutes of relentless pressure gripping his hips. The man’s hand pushed at the back of Brendon’s head, forcing him down into the pillow. His hair was too short at the back for the stranger to get a grip on it; that was no mistake on Brendon’s part, but it was long enough on top. He gripped the pillow as his head was yanked back, his hair held tight in the stranger’s fist.

Brendon hated these sort of tricks, the rough assholes that got a kick out of paying to fuck someone. He hated the hair pulling and the ugly bruises that were left behind long after the deed was over. He hated the words that slipped out of their mouths between moans, words like *dirty* and *slut* and *bitch*.

Brendon felt the stranger’s hips snap forward one final time and then he spasmed to climax, a string of derogatory expletives leaving his mouth as he came. The man’s grip tightened impossibly hard around Brendon’s hips, all nails and sweat and bone.

He pulled away when he felt the man’s chest against his back and shivered at the hands that slid around his chest to stroke down his stomach. They brushed against his flaccid cock and gave it a quick jerk. “You didn’t come,” the stranger noted.

Brendon wasn’t being paid to enjoy it – and neither was he being paid for post-coital bonding. He swung his legs off the bed and winced as he sat on the edge of the mattress. He was going to be
hurting later; his muscles were already burning. He heard the stranger pull the condom off his cock and stood to pick through his clothes silently. Pulling his pants on and slipping his creased t-shirt over his head, he grazed a hand through his dark hair and looked back towards the bed at the man sat on top of it, red dick still bobbing against his stomach, a fine sheen on sweat collected on his neck and chest. He was actually quite handsome for an older man, Brendon realized – he had a fit body anyway. He was in his fifties, but he wasn’t gross. Brendon toed his feet into his shoes.

“You’re leaving already?” the man on the bed puffed, pushing sweat-damp, grey hair back off his face. Brendon spotted the glint of his wedding ring. He flashed the man a weary smile and counted through the money on the tabletop, three hundred bucks, in pristine twenty-dollar notes. Where the hell else are you going to earn that much money for an hours work?, he remembered Jon saying to him once. He folded the notes away into the inside pocket of his leather jacket and checked his reflection in the mirror. He looked tired and drained – why anyone wanted to pay so much money to fuck him was beyond him.

“No rest for the wicked, huh?” he sighed. “You’ve got my number though, right? If ever you need anything else, you can just give me a call. I’m always around.” It was always at this point; after they were through with sex and he’d changed back into his clothes that Brendon felt the hatred bubbling in his veins. He always had the urge to disappear into the bathroom for half an hour and scrub himself down until his skin was red and raw and gargle mouthwash and brush his teeth until his gums bled just to get the taste of cock out of his mouth.

“Maybe I’ll uh, maybe I’ll call you – next week sometime? My wife’s taking off for a few nights, so I’ll have the evenings to myself.”

Brendon smiled over his shoulder, looking at the man still sprawled on the bed, his dick now soft between his legs. He gave a nod and forced a natural, easy smile. “I’ll look forward to it,” he lied.

“You’re beautiful by the way,” the stranger told him as Brendon crossed the room toward the door. He waited for the juxtaposition, the added insult that usually followed when his tricks told him this, but it didn’t come.

“Thanks,” he replied and he made the mistake of lingering at the door.

“Maybe you could just allow me one kiss before you leave?”

Brendon rolled his eyes and pulled the door open. Fuck that shit. It swung to a heavy close behind him, but he didn’t hear it – he was already stood at the elevators, three minutes late for his next client.

* * *

Ryan was the liability of the Ross family. Ever since he’d smoked his first joint at thirteen, he’d had a taste for excess and as the notorious gateway drug of marijuana gave way to mushrooms and acid and later to ecstasy and speed and coke, his father and stepmother had smiled through gritted teeth at the man their son was turning into.

Ryan was now twenty-six and his parents had almost grown accustomed to his wild ways – the drugs and the tabloid gossip about his sexuality, the drink driving charge he’d been slapped with at only seventeen years old… the numerous arrests, the tantrums, the attention seeking – they took it all with a pinch of salt.

Ryan’s real mother had died when he was young. Ryan barely even remembered her - he was only one and a half - and his father had remarried a few years later, to a woman called Pamela, who he’d
been calling mom since he was three. Pamela was a saint marrying a widower and taking on three young children as if they were her own, but she was a dull woman - beautiful, but dull. When questioned about Ryan’s drinking habits or his depraved, playboy lifestyle she would always smile something asinine like well, boys will be boys!

Ryan’s father, George was a little less laid back about it. The Ross family hadn’t had it easy in recent years and had been the subjects of some vicious tabloid rumors so it certainly didn’t help having a pathetic, gossip mongering son like Ryan. He was meant to go to Harvard or Yale like his brother and sister. He was meant to get a job and make his own living, not just sponge off his inheritance. George Ross had never mollycoddled his kids; he’d always encouraged them to keep their heads down, to study hard and pave their own way in the world. Ryan’s sister was one of the top attorneys in New York City; she had a successful husband and two beautiful kids. His brother, Jacob - always the more academic of the Ross boys - had become involved with the family’s Real Estate business. He was the apple of George’s eye – intelligent and driven and a shining example of The Perfect Son. He did shit like charity boat races and helped build schools in Africa and fucking hell, Ryan hated him.

Ryan it seemed was the lost cause, the wild card, the one that got away because for over a decade, his antics had driven his father slowly up the wall. Just recently in *Time* magazine, there had been an article declaring Ryan Ross “the one liability George can’t pay off.” It said that the multi-billion dollar Ross name was now nothing more than a national joke, all because of Ryan’s “precarious behavior”, likening him to Paris Hilton and Kim Kardashian – there were people that George knew - old family friends, who were putting bets on how long it’d be until his son leaked a sex tape.

One morning, George had opened the newspaper to a mug shot of his son’s face and almost choked on his orange juice. He’d been arrested for soliciting and George’s face grew whiter as he read the article. Ryan had been caught trawling the streets of the East Village for male escorts, the newspaper told him. George had glanced uneasily back at the unflattering picture of his son’s face and swallowed hard. The next day he’d demanded that Ryan tell him what the hell was going on.

“You need to go to rehab, these drugs you take, this goddamn article, son!” George shouted, holding yesterday’s newspaper out in front of him, his anger peaking as Ryan sunk down on his couch and scrolled through his phone. “I’m not going to support this lifestyle anymore, Ryan, do you hear me?”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. Whatever.” Ryan had just looked up at his father and shrugged his shoulders. *He’s experimenting*, Pamela told George later that evening. *Boys will be boys.*

“We’re enabling him,” George had seethed. “That boy’s twenty-six and he’s never done a day’s work in his life, the goddamn son of a bitch.”

His wife had knotted her brows, but she hadn’t argued with him. She never did. For years George had turned a blind eye to the partying and the excessive drinking and the flings with Manhattan’s elite, but trawling the East Village for male escorts was the final nail in the coffin. Ryan’s father had his reputation to think about. *Time* magazine was right; his son was the one liability he couldn’t pay off. The Ross name that George had worked so hard to build up was being torn down and pissed all over by his irresponsible third child.

“What’s this, some kind of intervention?” Ryan drawled one Sunday afternoon, after he turned up at his parents’ mansion in Long Island to find his brother and sister and both their families sitting in the main sitting room.

“Well, only if you want it to be,” George replied, splaying his hands. “We’re cutting you off, Ryan.
Financially – until you get yourself clean and stop desecrating our name. You need to stay out of the gossip columns for a few weeks. Maybe, you know… try keeping your private life… well, private.”

Ryan’s father was no prude, he didn’t care if his son was gay, straight or somewhere in between, but he certainly didn’t want him parading around high on cocaine and getting arrested for soliciting men for sex. George’s business partners would shake their heads when he walked into the office and he’d heard them mumbling about his parenting skills when his back was turned. Where the hell did he go wrong with that one?, they’d whisper to each other after reading about yet another of Ryan’s attention grabbing antics in the tabloid press.

Ryan had shrugged another blasé whatever at his father. “Do you think that’s going to stop me? You cutting me off? I get paid to show up at parties. Goddamn Jack Nicholson invited me to his birthday party next week and I had to turn him down because I’d already told James Franco I’d turn up at his.”

Ryan’s brother muffled a laugh behind his hand and Ryan shot him a glare. Goddamn asshole never knew when to keep his fucking mouth closed. “Fuck off, Jacob. What the hell do you know? When was the last time anyone cool invited you anywhere?”

Jacob shrugged, still battling a grin.

“Your brother had dinner with the President last month, he’s-” Pamela interjected, but Ryan cut her off with a heavy sigh.

“I said someone cool, mom. Jesus.”

Ryan’s father huffed. His son was a fucking nightmare. George Ross was slowly slipping down the stakes of America’s Most Respected Man, and it seemed that everyone was pointing an accusing finger at Ryan.
Chapter 2

Brendon was tired – and he was sore. The muscles in his thighs were aching, his back and his neck were stiff, his hips were colored with bruises. It had been a long night, but now he was curled up in his own bed where he could lay flat and close his eyes.

He’d left the apartment earlier that evening and had serviced seven guys during the nine hours he’d been out. Two of those seven only wanted blowjobs, but he was feeling beat and it was nearing four AM. Jon would be home soon – he rarely stayed out past three thirty. That was just tempting fate; staying out after the bars started to close.

As he rolled up a blunt, he flicked absentmindedly through a glossy magazine that he’d taken from a hotel lobby a few weeks ago – it was full of advertisements for watches he’d never be able to afford and suits that cost more than his month’s rent, but it was nice to dream. He needed to relax and there was nothing like a few hits of weed before bedtime to ease his aches and pains and put his thoughts on mute.

Brendon and his friend, Jon, shared a room above a massage parlor in Hamilton Heights, New York City. It had been advertised as a prime location “studio apartment” when they moved in a few years back but it was in fact, a rather dismal looking room on the third floor of a rundown apartment block - a small boxy space that was sweltering hot in the summer and plunged to arctic temperatures in the winter. No heating, no air. The kitchen area was minimal – a refrigerator that never had food in it, a small gas stove and a microwave that had been broken for way longer than it had ever worked. They had a bed, which they shared, and a grubby old couch they inherited from the previous occupants and that was about it. Living in Manhattan was expensive, the money Brendon earned hooking went on rent, paying off debts to angry dealers and what was left, he used to help his parents out as best he could. Jon squandered his cash on cigarettes and cocaine when he could get a good enough deal on it.

Jon took a lot of drugs. Brendon accepted this, but it didn’t stop him worrying. Whatever gets you through the day, he used to think to himself, as he watched his friend smoke heroin before passing out in their bed. Jon hadn’t taken smack for over a year, but sometimes he’d return home at night with that familiar glazed look in his eyes and Brendon would spend the night watching him, listening to his breathing and making sure Jon didn’t roll over onto his back in his sleep and choke and die.

Brendon had been totally in love with Jon Walker from the very moment they met. He’d have done anything for that hopeless bastard.

He lit up the blunt and turned the page of his magazine, happily surprised to see an incredibly homoerotic photograph of that billionaire’s son.

Ryan Ross, the title read, The American Wet Dream.

Ryan Ross was a good-looking guy, so it was a shame he came across in the press as a total tool – but there he was, spread over Brendon’s lap on a double page, his tight pants slung dangerously low, his left hand pushed precariously down inside his jeans, his other laid against his cheek, lips parted, his little finger curled into his mouth. His hair was tousled, as if he’d just been fucked. Ryan Ross was all sharp hipbones and tight, pale skin. He’d read the stories of that boy’s wild antics in all the tabloid papers and maybe, under vastly different circumstances, they could’ve been friends. Brendon’s eyes lingered. Long limbs and a prominent Adam’s apple. He was impossibly beautiful.

After that scandal had broken out in the press that Ryan Ross had stalked the streets of the East
Village looking for male escorts, all of the hookers Brendon knew suddenly picked up their pitch and moved to that part of town in hopes of being picked up by him. Brendon thought it was kind of pathetic really, chasing some spoiled little rich boy across the city like that.

He heard the key in the lock and slapped the magazine closed. Brendon’s heart always skipped a beat when he saw Jon and he smiled up at him, sympathetic to the exhaustion plastered over his friend’s face.

“Hard night?” he asked, as Jon slipped out of his jacket and hooked it over the metal bedpost.

Jon shrugged and made a noise of indifference. He sat down slowly on the mattress, lowering himself cautiously and then pulled his t-shirt off over his head. Jon was looking thin these days.

“You could be a model, you’re so skinny,” Brendon told him, reaching his fingers out to stroke tenderly across his friend’s visible ribs. Jon flinched and pulled away with a hiss.

“Don’t. A guy did a number on me earlier. I’ll probably have bruises tomorrow.”

“I’m sorry,” Brendon said, shifting up on the bed and slipping between the covers. It was a sincere apology and he didn’t pry.

“How was your evening?” Jon asked, climbing into bed beside Brendon with some difficulty. Jon was always bruised, always hurting. His physical injuries matched his heart.

Brendon watched Jon’s eyes shut softly, dark lashes and stubble rough jaw. He was still so handsome. He leaned forward to kiss his cheek. “It was okay,” he sighed, curling up next to Jon. “Better now you’re home.” Brendon smiled as he noticed Jon’s lips curling up at the edges. He liked making Jon smile.

“Ya big softie. C’mere.” Jon turned onto his side, pulling Brendon’s body into his. His lips pressed forward and Brendon opened his mouth against the kiss, looping his arms carefully around Jon’s neck as to not aggravate his tender ribs. The two men drew back after a few moments and their foreheads came to a gentle rest against each other. It must have been a tough night, because Jon fell almost immediately asleep, usually they lay awake talking, discussing their evenings like a regular couple, but tonight Jon was already breathing softly next to him within minutes of climbing into bed. Their relationship shouldn’t have worked, but it did. They met years back, when Brendon was still new to the business. Jon had been a mentor of sorts; he’d been working the streets since he was sixteen and he’d taken Brendon under his wing. He showed him the places he could walk, the people he could talk to and after just a few weeks, their camaraderie was so strong they were living together.

Jon was a lot different back when Brendon first met him. He smiled a lot more; he joked and teased and worked because he wanted to. He’d been in control of his lifestyle when Brendon met him, not how it was now - the lifestyle controlling him.

The two men had their fair share of drug-induced arguments, even fist fights on occasions, but they always managed to pull together in the end. They were like family. The pair just sort of needed each other – and Brendon had to admit, it was nice to fall asleep next to someone who wasn’t paying for the privilege.

It was nice to kiss someone at the end of a long night, because as a common rule, Brendon didn’t kiss any of his clients. Jon was his rock, his shining star. Jon knew all his dirty secrets and Brendon trusted him with his life.
Jon Walker was the only person Brendon would take a bullet for. He was the only thing he had.

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Ryan sat back on the soft leather couch in the penthouse suite of the Four Seasons in LA, one long leg folded across the other. He shrugged and smiled at the pretty female journalist in front of him and held her gaze.

“It’s simple mathematics, really. Bisexuality immediately doubles your chances of getting laid,” he proclaimed. He read that somewhere on the Internet. The journalist blushed and leaned towards him slightly, tape recorder in hand.

“So, are you claiming you enjoy playing for both sides? Women and men?” she asked. She was cute. Ryan wanted to fuck her.

“What I’m saying is I don’t understand why I should limit myself to just one half of the people around me.” He read that on the Internet, too. “Life’s too short to give a fuck about what people think of you. We are all natural beings, floating through space on a little rock – and people are concerning themselves with who I sleep with? It’s all but a drop in the ocean, really.”

Ryan watched as the woman smiled at him, long, dark bangs hanging in her eyes, a sharp collarbone visible above the neckline of her shirt, no tits and slim hips. Ryan wondered if she’d ever been fucked in the ass.

Ryan had enough experience with journalists that he knew she’d press him until he gave her something that was worth writing about, but he liked the ambiguity. If he pigeonholed himself as exclusively gay or straight, people would think he was unattainable, that was alienating fifty percent of his market and he didn’t want that.

In the past he had flings with men and women. He’d never been in a relationship that lasted more than four months and it had been a while since he’d slept with a chick. He liked them flat chested and skinny, tall and dark-haired, kind of androgynous-looking – that had always been his type. He was a lot fussier with his women than he was with his men. The majority of girls he associated with in LA were far from his ideal – a load of silicone enhanced Playboy Bunnies who would have had no interest in him if he wasn’t Ryan Ross: Heir to a Multi-Billion-Dollar Fortune.

Maybe he could get this journalist’s number and invite her back to his hotel room later that night? He was certain she’d go for it, most of them did. Maybe she had a boyfriend? He thought about it briefly – double-teaming that girl with another dude, feeling his dick slide against someone else’s as they both fucked her pussy at the same time. He loved that. One thing guaranteed to make him come when he fucked a girl was double penetration.

“What about your brush with the law recently? Have you ever paid for sex, Ryan?”

“No,” he lied with a smile. “Never.”

Recently, Ryan noticed a dull feeling inside him that he couldn’t quite put his finger on. One evening that feeling had driven him to take coke and drive the backstreets of the East Village, not because he couldn’t get laid normally, because he’d never had any trouble with that, but because the thrill of illegal sex was something that turned him on.

He would fantasize about it when he was on drug comedowns – getting caught with his pants around his ankles, being sucked off by some nameless Manhattan hooker. It had been niggling in the back of his head for years now and not only did Ryan have the money to make his fantasies happen, but he
had enough of it to make them happen in the most divine and humiliating way imaginable. Ryan wasn’t this out-of-control curb-crawler that the press made him out to be. He only ever paid for sex once before, but it had been one hell of a fucking night – booze and coke and a hot, willing boy who’d long given up on any morals - but it was a part of him that he wanted to keep secret. The press knew almost all there was to know about his private affairs, he’d gotten used to it over the years but he wasn’t willing to admit to his darker desires. It would only piss off his father.

He’d gotten away with it the first time, but Ryan couldn’t forget about it, couldn’t forget about the way the boy had tried to refuse his suggestions, tried to act like he had any kind of dignity left – like he really had a choice in the matter. Ryan wanted to jerk off in the dude’s mouth, he wanted to see him swallow his come and the boy tried to refuse. Ryan ended up paying an extra grand for the privilege, because a thousand dollars was pocket change. Hell, he made that money before he even woke up in the morning.

He couldn’t forget about the tight vice of that young boy's throat, or the way he didn’t complain when Ryan pulled at his hair and pressed his hand around his neck as they fucked – Ryan had been rough, but the boy didn’t even whimper, just took it all like a man, moaned like a slut, collected his money and then left the hotel room without another word. It was a turn-on and it was convenient.

At least with a whore he didn’t have to pretend like he was still into them the next morning. He liked to think he was helping those in need – being charitable, if you will, like some hipster Robin Hood. Ryan often thought about that boy. He’d been young and attractive, all pale, unmarked skin and messy blond hair; he deserved better than a life on the streets. He wondered where he was now; if he’d managed to pull himself together and get out of the game. Probably not.

When Ryan was arrested, his father was livid. George had scolded him like a child and the prick had cut off his allowance. Some punishment! It was the inconvenience that bothered Ryan the most. He could make it on his own; he didn’t need to rely on his dad for handouts. In fact, it was probably a good thing. Now, his parents had absolutely no right to tell him what he could or couldn’t blow his cash on. He was a free agent, as it were.

“Squandering my money, Ryan – the money I’ve worked hard my entire life for – on paying some desperate little junkie to sleep with you? What, so that you feel better about yourself?”

“Well,” Ryan had sighed, offering his father a deprecating look. He’d never admit it, but his dad had been pretty spot-on with that observation. “I blame the parents.”

George Ross turned red with anger, veins popping out at his temples. Ryan took a certain glee in the fact that he could still wind his father up so easily. It made him feel good to see other people feeling bad.

Sat in make-up after the interview, Ryan was feeling tired. All he did was stand around all day, waiting to go places, being told what to do. He hated photo shoots – all the people who would fuss over him, telling him what to wear, where to look, how to stand… It was tedious, even if he did get paid well – because Ryan Ross’s face sold magazines. All the high-fashion glossies wanted him on their front covers and all the world’s best designers wanted him to wear their suits, but he rarely got to make his own decisions. His father paid someone to do that for him.

William Beckett had been Ryan’s long-suffering personal assistant for the past three years. William was handsome, but he never slept with Ryan because he said it was “unprofessional.” Oh, that and the fact that he had a fiancée and a kid and claimed being a father was easy compared to looking after Ryan’s ass all day.

Ryan had given up flirting with William a long time ago. He was tall and skinny and smiled a lot. It
was his job to make sure Ryan was kept in check and George Ross paid him handsomely. William was there to try and keep him out of trouble, to make sure he was eating enough and not taking too many drugs. William was basically a glorified babysitter - he was there to advise Ryan what to do in certain situations, to give him guidance and write personal statements but basically had to pander to the needs of Ryan Ross at all hours of the day and night.

They shared different views about a lot of things, but William was someone Ryan considered a friend. He was someone who he trusted. They spent an awful lot of time together and it was only natural that they built up somewhat of a bond. Despite William’s natural warmth and friendly smile, he was the one person who didn’t take any of Ryan’s shit. William was constantly complaining about having to leave his family for impromptu visits to LA or Paris or Milan.

“You should count yourself lucky that thanks to me, you live such a lavish lifestyle. Some people would kill for your job,” Ryan would tell him, as William fawned over pictures of his daughter that his fiancée sent him. “Not everyone gets to fly first class to Europe every other month.”

“When you’re in love and when you have kids, Ryan, you get back to me. Until then, I don’t care what you say. A weekend at home with my daughter beats accompanying you to celebrity soirees at Paris Fashion Week, or whatever. I miss my daughter, dude. She makes me so happy, you wouldn’t believe.”

Ryan hated when William said things like that. He didn’t like the insinuation that he couldn’t be happy until he settled down with someone stupid enough to love him or had a girl pop out a couple of his kids. William once had the audacity to accuse him of being jealous. He really hadn’t liked that.

Ryan didn’t care for Los Angeles. It was too busy and too phony; a totally soulless city where he spent too much of his time. California had some good drugs and great weather, but Ryan hated the people.

He spent a lot of his childhood in LA. In addition to the real estate he owned in New York, his father also owned a string of five-star hotels in California and Nevada – even a couple of resorts up in Aspen, Colorado and as a child, Ryan was forever back and forth between cities, in and out of private schools in the Hamptons and Manhattan and Beverly Hills. His childhood had been volatile. He’d never been allowed to settle in one place for too long and his grades had suffered because of it. That was his excuse anyway. George said it was because he was lazy and more interested in smoking pot with his friends and taking acid than studying hard at school. Ryan would never admit it, but his father was damn near right with most of his observations.

Ryan’s best friend, Gabe Saporta, owned a beautiful home in Holmby Hills that was way too big for just one man, so he constantly surrounded himself with people he loosely defined as friends. Gabe lived in the richest neighborhood in America – right in the Platinum Triangle - he was but a hop, skip and a jump from the Playboy Mansion and together he and Ryan had gained a somewhat wild reputation.

Gabe liked LA. He fit in well with all the vain and shallow Southern Californians. He was tall and dark and good-looking and his parents owned a bunch of casinos all across the United States and South America. In the Forbes Top 100 Rich List, the Saportas were three places ahead of the Ross family and Gabe loved bringing that up at every possible opportunity.

The two families were good friends; they used to spend Thanksgiving together every year and when Ryan was barely even thirteen years old, he used to hang out with Gabe and all his older friends from LA and smoke cigarettes and drink vodka and was continually pressured into having a hit of weed or a tab of acid. Friendly peer pressure eventually resulted in Ryan taking cocaine every single
day by the time he was fifteen.

Gabe was incredibly handsome – he knew it too - which was what attracted Ryan to him in the first place. He was a good few years older than him, but equally as irresponsible. He always had the best drugs and the most expensive cars and the most beautiful women – and men too, because Gabe and Ryan had fooled around together in the past, when they were either drunk or high, sometimes both, but one thing about Gabe was that he knew how to throw an awesome party.

“Ryan Ross, you old dog; bienvenidos, amigo. I didn’t think you’d turn up.” Gabe greeted him on the outside terrace overlooking the pool, which was filled with bikini-clad beauties and handsome, chiseled men – some of them looking like they just stepped straight out of an Abercrombie & Fitch advertisement.

Damn... Ryan wanted to fuck one of them. He’d bet they all had perfectly bleached, tight assholes and would be more than willing to climb into bed with him after a few lines of coke - and there he’d hold the lucky guy down on the mattress and fuck his hot little ass until the sun came up. Ryan could fuck for hours on coke.

“Where’s that pretty little PA of yours?” Gabe asked, searching behind Ryan’s shoulder.

“Back at his hotel. He wanted to stay in and Skype with his kid. Says he hasn’t talked to her in like, two days. He said he doesn’t like being around drugs very much and he’s not even gay, Gabe. He says you’re too intense for him,” he explained with a grin. Gabe had always made his attraction toward William very obvious. Much like Ryan, Gabe Saporta was used to getting what he wanted and when he couldn’t get it, it kind of pissed him off.

Ryan had already located the drugs – a silver platter of cocaine, on the table behind his friend. Gabe pouted at the absence of William and wound Ryan into a tight hug. “Never mind,” he grinned, his mouth pressing up against Ryan’s ear. “You’ll do for tonight, mi cariño.” He nodded over at the pile of coke on the table. “Do it ’til you feel guilty, man.”

“Ryan, hey!” An attractive blonde dragged him out of Gabe’s embrace. He never met her before, but she sure knew who he was. She was topless and spilling champagne drunkenly over his jacket. “My name’s Jac. Fuck, it’s good to finally meet you. Gabe promised you were coming.”

“Wow, you’re pretty,” he told her and it wasn’t long before she wound herself around him and he could feel her wet heat on the tips of his fingers as he pressed his hand between her legs. She was totally shaven – and she wasn’t wearing panties - but as they made-out he found his mind wandering. He wondered if Gabe would be up for double-teaming this chick later – it had been a while since they’d both done that and those fantasies about that hot journalist earlier had got his mind racing. He got hard inside his pants picturing it - his dick tight against Gabe’s inside this Jac chick’s cunt. It got him so turned on, thinking about Gabe sucking his cock at the same time as the girl that he had to turn back to the table and take another bump of coke to distract himself. The shit was strong. When he glanced over at Gabe, he was watching them and his pants were tented so he was probably imagining the same thing.

Gabe gave him the look Ryan knew so well – a small, slow nod of affirmation. So it was set. A threesome definitely would happen. Ryan turned back to the girl sat beside him and flashed her a smile. This chick wouldn’t take much convincing, Gabe was already sat on the other side of her, his arm around her shoulder as Ryan’s hand returned to the heat between her legs.
Chapter 3

*Ryan Ross and Gabe Saporta in sex-romp shocker!*

“They were more into each other than they were me,” says model.

Brendon scanned over the tabloid headline and rubbed at his eyes. He was tired and it was late. Hotel bars at 1AM sure were depressing places to be. The newspaper was a couple of days old; that’s how Brendon generally found out what was going on in the world these days; from old newspapers left behind in hotel lobbies. Ryan Ross was in the papers again – for an apparent threesome he’d had with that Gabe Saporta. *Jesus*, Brendon thought to himself, *some life that guy must lead.* He turned to the puzzle page, but the Sudoku had already been filled in.

Recently, Brendon stumbled on some good fortune. After six years of trailing the streets of New York, he worked his way up the ranks - from the quick blowjob-in-an-alleyway and handjob-for-ten-bucks - he progressed to two, sometimes three hour-long sessions at some of Manhattan’s most expensive hotels.

Years ago, Brendon’s specialty was deep throating and his skills were still second-to-none. When he first moved to New York City, that’d been all he’d done – suck off tired cab drivers before they went home to their wives or give head to sexually curious young men after they’d been drinking all night. Naturally, over time, he’d become almost perfect at it. There was no dick too big or too thick. He found that if he was willing to let these men ride to the back of his throat, swallow them down like it was his one and only goal in life and let them fuck his face as they pleased, then they tipped pretty well.

When Brendon met Jon, that’s all he was doing – giving blowjobs when he needed the cash. When Brendon was twenty, Jon entered his life like a hurricane. He was strong and handsome and charismatic, only a couple of years older, but a million times wiser. They looked out for each other; they even shared the same pitch at one point and Jon used to return from seeing clients with hundred dollar bills in his pockets, talking fast and rubbing at his nose, his pupils blown.

Brendon may have been reasonably naïve when he was younger, but he wasn’t stupid enough that he didn’t know Jon was using drugs. Brendon dabbled before, with nothing harder than a few tabs of acid or tokes of a joint from the few acquaintances he’d met when he arrived in New York, but he never mixed with the drug crowd when he was in school - he never really mixed with anyone - but not long after meeting Jon Walker, they’d taken coke together in Brendon’s small, rundown apartment. Jon had pushed his hands against his face to relieve the ache and scrubbed them over his beard.

“How are you paying rent, Brendon?” Jon asked him.

At the time, Brendon was renting a small room in a neglected old hotel in Chinatown. He managed to pay his rent every month, but only just. He kept low bills and lived off cheap ramen and discounted TV dinners, but things like new clothes or evenings out were a luxury that he could rarely afford. Jon seemed to be doing okay though. He always had enough money for things like cigarettes and take-out and getting high.

“I manage,” Brendon shrugged. He remembered feeling breathless because of the drugs. He could still remember how fast his heart was beating and that unnerving sense of panic creeping up his spine, the feeling that he wasn’t really in control.

“I’ll bet you’ve got to suck a lot of dick to pay your bills. Have you ever thought about taking it a
little further? People pay way more money, you know?”

Brendon blushed and his head surged at the thought. He couldn’t lie, it had crossed his mind before, but he wanted it to be his very final option. Prostitution was hardly something he was going to enter into lightly.

His parents would be so ashamed of him, he thought in that moment – they were respectable, religious folks. They’d given him a good childhood. They really loved him. If they had any idea that their youngest son was living alone in New York City, sucking dick for cash and doing drugs, they’d probably both have a breakdown.

“I know a guy. He might be able to help you out. His name’s Pete, he’s a good dude - despite his reputation. I told him about you and he wants to meet you.”

“Who is this guy, some kind of pimp?”

Jon had laughed. He was always so handsome when he laughed; it made Brendon’s stomach flip. “Kind of. He could set you up, look after you. He only takes a thirty percent cut and that’s way less than a lot of other people. There’s some dangerous streets out there, Brendon; it’s nice to know someone’s watching your back.”

Brendon had hummed and told Jon that he’d think about it, but within a week, Brendon met this Pete character, already decided he didn’t like the guy and fucked his first proper client in the back of a clapped-out old Toyota, beneath an overpass in Brooklyn. It was a distinctly unpleasant experience, but it sure could have been a whole lot worse. The client was a lot older than him and he was rough and clumsy and smelled like cheap whisky.

Later that night, Brendon crawled into bed and Jon held him and stroked his hair. Nothing that Jon did was ever particularly sexual, but it always made his heart thump a little harder. Brendon had let silent tears dampen his friend’s shirt, but Jon had been kind enough to ignore it.

“I wish I could tell you it gets better, but it doesn’t. It gets easier, but it doesn’t get any better. How much did he pay you?”

“Hundred bucks,” he sniffed. It had been seventy after Pete took his cut, something that Brendon always really resented. His muscles made a cry of protest as he turned over on the mattress and pressed his back against Jon’s chest. Jon’s arms looped around his waist.

“And he paid you in full? They usually try and haggle with me,” Jon told him with a laugh. “You’re going to make a lot of money. You look young, plus you’re like, fresh meat – men like that.”

Brendon remembered furrowing his brow at Jon’s words. That’s so gross, he remembered thinking, the fact that there are so many men out there who are willing to pay for sex – just like a transaction in a store - they were taking something that was his and keeping it for themselves.

As he lay there in Jon’s arms that night he thought about his parents back in Las Vegas, proudly telling everyone in church how Brendon made it to Manhattan and was living out his dreams of playing music. They would’ve been completely outraged to know the truth. He wished he could go back, just live life from a new perspective, ask Jon back to Nevada with him. They could’ve had a nice little life together.

“So you ever want to move back to Chicago; get out of Manhattan?” Brendon asked.

Jon answered quickly. “No. Never. I’ll die before I go back to Chicago. The best way to see my hometown is through the rearview mirror of a fucking fast car.”
His friend never exclusively talked about his childhood back in Illinois and Brendon didn’t ask; he didn’t want to pry. People didn’t end up fucking for cash, taking drugs every day because they led good childhoods - quite the opposite - in fact, Brendon only wished he had the same excuse for his fuck-ups as Jon did.

Things progressed for him since his first time though. He’d gone up in the world. Even though Jon constantly reminded him that you couldn’t polish a turd, nowadays there were no rusty old Toyota’s, or grimy back alleys. Brendon fucked in only the best hotels these days – expensive cotton sheets under his back as rich businessmen and realtors and high-flying lawyers paid him hundreds of dollars for the privilege of his ass.

In all the time that he’d been working though he’d never, in his life, felt as demeaned as he did while having sex with these men. Over time, he noticed that when he’d climb into backseats to be fucked by cab drivers or truckers, he could at least hold onto some dignity. Those guys just wanted a quick, easy fuck – all Brendon had had to do was lay there and let his mind wander - but with him pushing up his prices and moving onto greener pastures, he found that his clients expected a certain amount of active interest out of him. These days he had to moan and groan and pretend that he was enjoying it and every single second killed him.

He and Jon would sometimes joke about writing memoirs and making millions of dollars, because they’d both come across some crazy bastards in their time; it would’ve made for good reading. The men who paid well, Brendon had realized, were the worst of the lot. Hush money, Jon called it – all these successful, Wall Street stockbrokers and CEOs hid their debauched, kinky fantasies behind their pinstripe suits and briefcases and they were willing to pay the price for someone discreet. They always looked a lot less intimidating naked, panting away with their black socks still on and their gray hair stuck to their sweaty brows, their shirts creased when they put their clothes back on.

The guy he’d seen the previous week had contacted him a few days ago – the man whose wife was now out of town. Brendon agreed to meet him, but for no less than five hundred dollars. Last time he asked for a kiss – this time he wanted two hours of Brendon’s time – at the very least, he told him over the phone - and a little more involvement, he continued. Brendon picked a price at random and was surprised when the man immediately agreed – he probably could’ve asked for a grand. He’d have to remember that for next time.

He remembered the man being reasonably good-looking, which always sort of helped. He was probably going to want to make him come, or at least for Brendon to get hard – something that Brendon rarely did when tricks fucked him. That’s probably what he meant by more involvement. He was already dreading it.

As he sat in the hotel bar, rereading the same old articles in the newspaper, he spotted his client from across the room and straightened up on the barstool. The man was well dressed and tall, slim for a guy who was probably in his fifties. Brendon smiled a friendly hello as he pulled up a seat and sat down.

They talked for a little while – the guy even bought Brendon a drink. His name was Marc, he was involved in something called hedge funds, something Brendon didn’t understand or particularly care about, but he quickly realized that five hundred bucks was probably pocket change to him – this guy was a fucking multi-millionaire.

Twenty minutes later, Brendon was on his knees between Marc’s legs and he turned into a fucking asshole as soon as they entered the suite. Marc was throwing down insults as Brendon sucked his cock – he was used to hearing them; there was little a trick could do to shock him these days, but it was still distracting. Brendon played along because he was a professional, pulling off the man’s dick
long enough to moan and earn his tip.

“What happened to you as a kid, huh; someone rape you? Is that why you do this? Did mom and dad throw you out for being queer? Did your daddy fuck you?”

Brendon closed his eyes and slid the man’s cock down the back of his throat so he wouldn’t be expected to answer. He hadn’t even adjusted to the feeling when he felt hips thrust upwards, making him gag. He tried to pull off to catch his breath, but Marc’s hands were holding the back of his head, forcing him down into his lap.

“I’d have liked to have met you when you were a kid; bet you’ve always had a loose jaw, huh? I’d’ve liked to fuck your little virgin ass – Jesus! That’s it, you dirty little boy.”

Brendon pulled off, struggling against the press of the man’s hands and ran his tongue up his shaft – he had a decent dick too. Despite the insults and the apparent lust for young boys the guy had, it certainly wasn’t the worst situation he’d been in.

“I can be your little boy for tonight, sir,” Brendon told him, looking up from between his legs through long lashes. “Your cock is so beautiful. I can’t wait to feel it fuck me.” Like lines from a script. He gave the same spiel every time.

“Shut the fuck up. Last week I asked you to give me a kiss before you left and you walked out the door like you were too goddamned good for me, you little prick. You’re not going to say no to me again, do you understand?”

Brendon dropped his eyes and started to slowly jerk him off, lapping at the leaking head of his cock. The man bucked forward again, grabbing a fistful of Brendon’s hair and forcing him down hard onto his dick.

“God, your throat,” the man groaned, his fingers linked around the back of Brendon’s head, holding him in place. He couldn’t breathe - his nose was pressed tight against the man’s sparse, gray pubic hair. He pressed his teeth softly against the base and hoped it’d serve as a warning – just back the fuck off, asshole, he thought, let go of my head, I know what I’m doing.

Brendon hadn’t even seen it coming. His eyes were closed, his mind elsewhere when an open palm struck hard against the side of his face.

He fell away from between the man’s legs in shock, struggling to get to his feet, but his goddamn pants were around his ankles and he couldn’t scramble up from the floor quick enough. Marc was suddenly on him; hands fisted in his t-shirt as he pulled him up and pushed him down onto the bed. Marc wasn’t very strong, but Brendon wasn’t very heavy. As he tried to scoot up towards the headboard, his client yanked his pants all the way off and threw them down on the floor with a proud flourish.

Brendon held his hand out in front of him to try and calm the situation, call a truce so to speak. He was halfway through begging him not to get too rough when Marc advanced on him and Brendon couldn’t duck away fast enough when he saw the man’s fist flying towards his jaw; slow motion - the noise that followed wasn’t bone cracking; it was the dull thud of muscle against flesh, rolling through Brendon’s brain like tidal wave. His head flew back with the force and all he could think about was Jon and all those times he returned home with black eyes, all the broken noses and bruised ribs.

Brendon blinked furiously, trying to clear his vision – being punched square in face knocks everything out of you for what feels like minutes, even though Brendon knew it was only a few seconds. He had to stay on his feet. He tried to coordinate his brain with his legs to climb off the bed,
but his struggle was futile. Marc was taller than him and he wasn’t dazed after taking a punch. Marc had the advantage. When he felt the mattress under his back, he knew his battle was already lost. The man’s grip came to a tight hold around Brendon’s neck and his head pulsed. His hands flew up automatically, clawing at Marc’s fingers with his nails.

“Fuck you,” the man sneered. “Couldn’t even fucking kiss me last week? Too fucking proud? Fuck you.”

His hands held Brendon down against the mattress by his neck, thumbs pressing hard against his windpipe as he tried to kick himself free. His legs were useless – as was his struggle he’d learned that the hard way in his time, but the fight for survival was instinctive - he couldn’t let this fucker win. Inside his chest, Brendon’s heart was thumping; the realization that he was definitely no longer in control of this situation filled him with fear, because if he died, Jon would be totally alone – he’d probably go back to taking smack and overdose. Jon wouldn’t have anything to live for if Brendon died. He needed to fight back, if only for his friend’s sake and the fact that he didn’t want to be found dead in a hotel suite on the Upper West Side.

“You’re a hooker, goddamn it, give it up to me,” the man shouted. He had the upper hand – he was on top and Brendon was beginning to gasp for air – all he could feel was the swell of his brain and nothing else, not even the bruise that he was sure was appearing on his jaw, nor his legs or the hammering of his heart. Brendon stopped struggling after a few more moments. He didn’t have the energy anymore; he let his muscles go loose and didn’t resist when his trick forced him over onto his stomach, held him down on the bed and penetrated him.

When Brendon looked up the definition of rape one time, he read “a form of assault where one person forces another to have sexual intercourse against their will.” In any normal circumstance, Brendon would definitely consider this rape, but he put himself out there for this kind of treatment; it was all in the job description. When he felt the sharp intrusion of the man’s cock inside him, he tried not to pass out; instead he bit his lip and counted the seconds silently in his head. He lost count after four hundred and something, but the assault lasted thirty-three minutes.

After it was over and the man pulled out, Brendon felt warm, wet lips press against his spine and he cowered away, falling back down onto the mattress and curling himself up. He lay there for a little while after he heard the man zip up his pants and leave the room, blinking back the wetness from his eyes and assessing the pain.

When he did sit up, his muscles screamed in protest and he glanced automatically towards the dresser where his money had once lay.

“Motherfucker,” he cursed under his breath, dropping his face into his hands. The promised fee of five hundred dollars was gone and Brendon didn’t know who he was most angry with – Marc or himself because he really should’ve learnt a long time ago not to leave his money lying around.

What a rookie.
“Hey, this Ryan Ross guy… do you think he’s attractive?”

Brendon was brushing his teeth at the sink when he heard Jon shout the question from their bed. He was looking through the glossy magazine Brendon had stolen from a hotel lobby and he turned towards his friend and shrugged. He kind of did. Actually he really did, but he wasn’t going to tell Jon that.

“I don’t know,” he said, spitting the toothpaste into the sink. “I think he’s okay.”

“I’ll bet he’s absolutely insufferable,” Jon commented, joint moving between his lips as he spoke. “Just another poor, little rich boy. Did you read this interview?” he asked, tapping at the page. “I mean, it must be really hard growing up the son of a millionaire-”

“Billionaire,” Brendon corrected, slipping into his jacket.

“Same thing - getting everything he wants, breaking the law and getting away with it just because his dad’s fucking loaded. Man,” Jon sighed, throwing the magazine down on the floor beside the bed, “what a tough old life.”

Brendon smiled softly and sat down on the bed beside his friend. Jon questioned the bruised jaw he returned home with a few nights ago after the situation with Marc got out of hand and Brendon briefly explained what happened, but he didn’t tell Jon how he’d been robbed. Jon would only berate him for leaving his cash out and Brendon didn’t need the headache. He knew he fucked up, he didn’t need Jon to remind him.

He pushed his hand up inside of Jon’s shirt and let his palm rub over his ribs. Jon flinched. “I’ve got to get going,” he said, leaning in to peck Jon’s cheek, inhaling the scent of smoke and cheap aftershave on his hair.

“You got anyone booked for today?” he asked, stubbing out the joint in the ashtray by his side. Jon’s hand looped around Brendon’s neck, holding him against his chest for a few moments until Brendon pulled away.

“A guy at two. We got a lunch date.”

“Nice,” Jon nodded, “all I got to look forward to later are perverts in crappy cars. Twenty bucks a go,” he smiled, tongue pushing into the side of his cheek and curled fist moving in front of his mouth before he broke into a wide smile and pulled Brendon in for a kiss.

“At least I get fed,” Brendon teased.

Jon batted him away fondly and looked up at him with a sigh. “There’s no such thing as a free lunch, Bren,” he said. Jon was kind of cynical these days – not that Brendon blamed him. He’d been working a lot longer than Brendon had; he’d seen a lot more shit.

“You should come with me. I’ll try and smuggle you in under my jacket. You look like you could do with a decent meal.”

His boyfriend flipped him off, but the smile lingered on his lips. Brendon knew he was lucky to have someone like Jon; someone who cared about him in a way that no one else did – he could look past the fucked-up job, to Jon, Brendon wasn’t just his career choice – he had a name and character and
hopes for the future. To each other, they were both humans – flawed and desperate, but still worthy of love.

An hour after leaving the apartment, Brendon was waiting patiently in the lobby of a grand office building on Wall Street. He hoped this wouldn’t take long – he had to meet a client at two for lunch in the Time Warner Center and it was all the way on the other side of town. He’d done his research, making quick work of typing all the information he remembered about that motherfucker and Marc into Google, until he found what he was certain was the old bastard’s place of work. It hadn’t been too difficult to narrow down his search.

He approached the front desk ten minutes later and kindly asked to speak to Mr. Marc Willis. The pretty, young receptionist arched her eyebrow and asked if he had an appointment.

“I was assured I wouldn’t need one,” he told her breezily. “I’m a business associate. We had a meeting the other evening at the Mandarin Oriental. If you tell him that he’ll know who I am. Tell him I’ll be waiting.” He walked over to a plush leather couch in the corner of the room and started to rifle through the business magazines on the glass table in front of him. He was drawing more than a little attention, but the more attention the better, he thought. This bitch, Marc, owed him big time – he assaulted him and he’d robbed him of five hundred bucks; he wasn’t going to get away with it that easily.

“Hello! My man, what a surprise!” Brendon heard the call from across the lobby and stood up from the couch. Marc was walking towards him smiling, hand out ready for Brendon to shake.

“What exactly do you think you’re doing here?” he asked, dropping his voice low as they shook hands. “Are you out of your mind?”

Brendon kept the smiling façade up until they entered the man’s office and the door was locked behind them. Marc’s face was flushed with embarrassment; he pushed his fingers into his collar and loosened his tie.

Brendon took his time, familiarizing himself with the office – it was incredibly flashy, all glass and shiny black furnishings with red accents. Adorning the walls were pictures of Marc Willis in tuxedos hobnobbing with politicians and respected celebrities. On his desk was a framed picture of him and his wife on their wedding day. Perfect, Brendon thought – his plan couldn’t fail.

“I believe you have something of mine, Mr. Willis,” Brendon told him, pulling out a leather chair from under the desk and sitting down heavily. Marc looked flustered, but he shook his head and shrugged at the statement.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Oh, I think you do. You see, when you payed to fuck me the other night, we agreed on a price – five hundred dollars was what we agreed on - and after you assaulted me and left the hotel room, my money, Mr. Willis, was nowhere to be seen. Maybe you picked it up by mistake, hmm?”

That was his first chance. Brendon hoped he wasn’t stupid enough not to take it. He let the words sink in and scanned his eyes across the room again – Marc’s certificate of graduation from Yale University hung proudly on the wall. There were pictures of him with past Presidents and shaking the hands of famous entrepreneurs.

“I’m afraid I have no idea what you’re talking about. I’m going to have to ask you to leave, I will call the police.”

“Cut the bullshit, Marc, and pay the fuck up. I think the cops would be very interested to know your
whereabouts the other night, don’t you agree?” He picked up the picture frame of Marc and his wife and ran his finger down the glass. “Couple of other people might be interested too…”

Brendon saw the silent panic flicker across the man’s face, but Marc composed himself after a few seconds. “You wouldn’t dare,” he said with a scoff.

“Try me, motherfucker. The other night, we met up and I let you fuck me. I’ll say it again, seeing as you can’t seem to get it through your thick skull, but the price we agreed on was five hundred dollars and you took that money with you when you left – and now, because of that I’m going to be behind on my payments and I’m going to have a lot of angry people knocking at my door. I work so I can help my parents pay their bills, Mr. Willis, so I hope you grasp the severity of this situation. You pay me my money right now or I will bring you down,” he said slowly. “I’ll tell your wife and all these fancy people you work with that you’ve been soliciting men for sex, don’t you think I won’t do it.”

Marc shook his head and reached across his desk for the phone. “I’m calling security. You should leave right now without a fuss.” Motherfucker was a millionaire and he was griping about five hundred bucks? Brendon’s hand sprung forward quickly, pressing his palm over Marc’s hand and directing the phone back onto the hook.

“Sir, please, we can be civil about this. You walked away with my money and I think you made the mistake of thinking I’d let you get away with it. You can pay me now and I’ll leave; you won’t ever see me again, I promise. Or you can call the cops and I’ll tell them you raped me the other night, the choice is yours.”

It wasn’t the first time Brendon had to hunt someone down for his money. After it happened the first time, Jon had become so wound up that he left their apartment and hadn’t returned for two days. He’d gone on a massive coke binge with an old friend from Chicago and Brendon spent the entire time half expecting a phone call to inform him that his best friend was dead.

He still remembered the evening that Jon return home, high on something other than coke and trying to hide it, griping at how careless Brendon had been to allow a client to rob him. “It’s not my fault. Don’t tell me you’ve never been rolled on,” Brendon spat as their argument erupted after stewing dangerously since Jon’s disappearance.

“Not while I was working for Pete I didn’t, but everything’s gone to shit since I left him – and I did that for you, because for some inexplicable reason, you were jealous of him,” Jon bit back.

Brendon would never have admitted it, but he had been jealous of Pete. More so of the ridiculous amount of blind faith Jon placed on the dude than anything else.

For a supposedly practical man, Jon sure acted stupid around Pete Wentz, a man who, essentially, had started pimping Jon out to the men of New York City when he was still only sixteen years old.

The silence swelled. “Five hundred dollars, right?” Marc pushed up from the desk and made his way towards a small safe in the far wall. “And then you’ll leave?”

“Well, it’s been kind of an inconvenience having to come all the way down here this afternoon – and you see this bruise? You did that,” he said pointing to his jaw. “No one wants to pay me shit when I look like this. Why don’t we call it an even thousand and then I swear you’ll never hear another word from me again.”

“One thou- you’ve got to be kidding!” Marc spluttered as he unlocked the door to the safe. “We agreed on five hundred.”
“Yeah, and that was before you punched me in the jaw, before you tried to throttle me and then fucked me without any preparation – that’s an expensive orgasm, huh? Was it worth it?” Brendon asked raising his eyebrows and grinning.

Brendon watched as Marc peeked into his safe, pulling out bundles of cash and glancing nervously back at him. The power dynamic between them had suddenly been turned on its head. It made Brendon feel dizzy.

“This is blackmail,” he huffed. He was sweating over the collar of his shirt, a thin sheen of perspiration building up on his furrowed brow. Brendon chuckled and stood to walk towards the man who was crouched in the corner of his office, hunched over his safe.

“You are no less pathetic with your clothes on, Marc. Now, I want my money, plus interest, or I’ll tell your wife and I’ll tell the press and I’ll tell all your business associates what kind of man you really are and by the end of the day, your perfect little life will be in ruins. Don’t think I don’t know what I’m doing. I will devastate you. Now, pay the fuck up, I haven’t got all day.”

Marc took his time counting the cash, placing the notes into Brendon’s open palm like a teller at the bank. When Marc counted out the final note, he was forty dollars short. “Nine sixty, that’s all I have,” Marc explained with a nervous shrug.

“Well, you’d better go do a run-around the office and hope your colleagues are feeling charitable, my friend, because I’m not leaving until you pay me.” Marc made another attempt to loosen his collar and Brendon saw him swallow the lump in his throat. “Tick tock, tick tock. I looked you up online, Marc, you’re worth like, seventy-five mil’, let’s not cry over one thousand dollars now, shall we?”

Marc dug into his jacket pocket for his wallet and fished out two twenty-dollar notes, pushing them against Brendon’s chest. “One thousand. There. Now you can leave.”

Brendon broke into a wide smile. “It’s been a pleasure doing business with you, Mr. Willis,” he said, holding out his hand. “You have my word. I’ll never tell a soul.”

After a moment, Marc Willis, quite to Brendon’s surprise, shook his hand. Brendon could feel the sweat of his palm and leant forward, dropping his voice to a low whisper, his mouth right next to the man’s ear. “Next time you hire another guy to fuck, you better remember to pay up, asshole. There are some guys out there who’d take great pleasure in ruining your life.”

Brendon pulled back, but only slightly. He pecked Marc’s cheek, allowing him the kiss he’d been hankering for, before turning on his heel and leaving the office, his pockets weighed down with one thousand dollars in crisp twenty dollar bills.

* * *

Ryan had an awful afternoon. He’d been forced out of bed by William at eleven that morning and grudgingly accepted the news that he’d been invited to a family dinner at a restaurant in the Time Warner Center at one thirty.

William was getting on his nerves – he had a tendency to treat Ryan the same way he probably treated his young daughter, like a weary father and Ryan refused to get out of bed until William had to drag him off the mattress and push him towards the bathroom. “My daughter is five years old and even she can get herself out of bed in the mornings. Up, now,” he ordered. Ryan called that tone his Dad Voice. “I’m driving you and you know how bad I am with Manhattan traffic. You’ve got until twelve o’clock – I swear to god, Ryan, your dad comes down so hard on me when you’re late for family shit. Please, just make my life easy on this one.”
Ryan stood in the doorway of his bathroom, blinking over at William. “You’re driving?” he asked, rolling his eyes in distaste. “What the fuck happened to Shane?”

“Your dad cut you off, remember? He didn’t think it was particularly necessary to still pay for your driver, so Shane’s gone to work for your brother. You’re lucky you still got me to pick up after you, your father wanted to send me to work for Jacob too – he means business, Ryan – he’s serious about this whole cutting-you-off thing.”

“Well, I refuse to get in a car with you. You’re a terrible driver. If Shane doesn’t pick me up, then you can tell my dad that I’m not turning up at his stupid lunch.”

“Tell him yourself,” William shrugged tiredly. “Oh,” he called from over his shoulder, “it’s Pamela’s birthday tomorrow – your dad’s throwing her a party. You’re expected to be there to greet guests at midday, so don’t get too fucked up tonight.” William looked at his watch and gave him a stern look. “You got one hour.”

Fuck Pamela’s birthday party and fuck stupid, fucking George Ross and his stupid fucking power trip, what the fuck? Getting rid of his driver just to spite him, what a facetious old prick, Ryan cursed to himself as he paced into the en-suite and showered. William was a terrible city-driver; he was risking his life climbing into a car with him. Then his dad would be sorry, if he ended up dead in a car accident caused by William’s negligent driving.

Ryan was still riled up over it when, one hour and ten minutes later, William was pounding on his bedroom door telling him – begging him to just please hurry the fuck up. At twelve thirty, Ryan exited his bedroom feeling stressed. He made sure he looked good, but he sure felt like shit. He was pissed about Shane being let go. He was pissed that William hadn’t reminded him of this family lunch sooner. Fuck, he was pissed at himself for not staying in LA with Gabe for an extra week – that threesome had been a lot of fun after all, even if the bitch had sold her story to the press. Ryan didn’t care. It all added to his mystique.

He felt terrible, irritated by the whole situation and everyone around him, but Ryan was prepared; in the inside pocket of his jacket, he had a flask of Macallan 55-Year-Old whisky and a small bag of cocaine – enough to get him through lunch at least. When he climbed into the backseat of William’s car, his assistant looked at him in the rearview and knotted his brows as he started on the whisky and took a couple of bumps of coke. Ryan noticed William’s knuckles turn white around the steering wheel and smiled to himself. It was very easy to push William’s buttons.

“Jesus, Ryan, you’re going for lunch with your parents, couldn’t you have left that at home?” he commented when Ryan took his third bump, rubbing the remnants into his gums. “Your father is going to kill me,” Ryan heard his PA mutter under his breath.

“Wow, just chill the hell out, Bill. Jesus, Shane never bitched at me like this. You are way too polite to be a driver in New York City, dude – the longer we’re stuck in traffic, the more wasted I’m going to get and it’s your job to make sure I make it to my appointments on time, so…”

“Ryan, please!” William almost wailed, dropping his head down onto the steering wheel as they came to a standstill in traffic. “My job is seriously in jeopardy here. I know it’s nothing to you, but I need this. Fuck, I wish I didn’t but I do. Just… please; no more coke, no more drink, after lunch you can do whatever the fuck you want, I don’t care, I’m going home to read to my little girl and have dinner with my fiancée and under no circumstances do I want your dad up my ass, telling me off for your bad behavior.”

Ryan slugged the rest of the whisky defiantly, holding William’s gaze in the rearview mirror as he
By the time they arrived at the restaurant, Ryan was flying high. William had given up nagging him about the coke about ten blocks ago and they were only ten minutes late, but they’d been stuck in traffic for a long time. Ryan actually got a little bit higher than he first planned, but walking through the restaurant, he felt like he found his equilibrium – he felt good; he felt like the inside now matched how he knew he looked on the outside – *fucking fantastic!* He certainly needed that whole half-gram if he was expected to make stilted conversation with his dad and Pamela for the next few hours. His parents were already seated at a table at the back of the restaurant, away from prying eyes. His sister was too busy at work to show her face, she had some big case that she’d been working on for the last few months and just couldn’t tear herself away for an hour to join them. Ryan wished he had the same excuse – this lunch was going to be dull as fuck…

Ryan’s older brother Jacob was sat there too – they never got on, even as kids. They had vastly different interests in life and there’d always been friction between them. Jacob even had the gall to once accuse Ryan of being *jealous. I’m dad’s favorite,* he spat at Ryan once when they were teenagers, *and you can’t stand it.*

Jacob Ross was all about saving the world. He was the spokesperson of several charities based both in the US and overseas and there were always pictures of him pumping water from wells in poor African communities or looking handsome at some charity marathon or boat race or AIDs fundraiser – *fuck, Ryan hated him.*

“So, William managed to get you here *almost* on time,” his father noted, looking at his watch as Ryan pulled out a chair and sat down.

“Shane would’ve gotten me here quicker,” Ryan smiled at his dad. “But I hear he’s working for Jacob now. That’s pretty petty.” He couldn’t help himself from making his displeasure at the situation known – Shane scored him drugs. What the hell was he going to do now he didn’t have someone to pick up for him?

“Yes, well – just until you clean yourself up, son. You remembered it’s Pamela’s birthday tomorrow, right? You’re expected to be there at-”

Ryan cut him off. “Yes, yes. Midday – I know, William already told me.”

“Good, good,” George nodded, clapping his hands together and smiling to try and lighten the mood. “We’ll order a couple of bottles of mineral water for the table, shall we?”

Ryan rubbed his hand across his nose. His heart was starting to thump – the euphoria he usually got after taking coke was bordering on paranoia right now. He needed a drink to take the edge off it and mineral water certainly wasn’t going to cut it.

“I’m going to the bar,” Ryan announced, pushing his seat back. Pamela averted her eyes, distracting herself with polishing the silverware and his father shook his head in obvious annoyance, but neither of them said anything when he walked away. Jacob, however, decided to follow.

“Did you take something before coming here today?” his brother asked as they approached the bar. “Are you high?”

“No,” Ryan lied. “I’m high off a zest for life, brother – because I woke up this morning and I thought to myself; *Man, I wish today that I could spend my lunchtime being berated by my mom and dad – I’ve not done that in a while*, and low and behold – here I am!” He flashed a phony smile that darkened a few seconds later.
“Jesus, Ryan – you’re having lunch with the family; you’re not partying in LA – and I saw that story about you and Gabriel in the newspapers, that’s just…” Jacob trailed off, obviously at a loss for words regarding his brother’s threesome with the son of a lifelong family friend. “Is that true?”

“Yes. It is true. I’m not ashamed of my sexuality, Jacob…”

Jacob shook his head. “You’re absolutely insufferable.”

“You’re absolutely insufferable,” Ryan bit back petulantly as he waved his money at the bartender.

They had only just been served their food when George’s face brightened and he broke into a wide smile. Ryan glanced derisively over at his brother’s lunch – some raw, vegan monstrosity that probably tasted just as bland as it looked. Jacob Ross was all about clean living and he loved to boast about it. Ryan took a mouthful of his medium-rare filet mignon before he noticed the presence of a gentleman stood at the side of their table, closely tailed by another – a dark-haired young man who had the dreamiest eyes Ryan had seen in a long time. A handsome face too – and perfect teeth… beautiful lips, Ryan immediately started to wonder what he’d look like with a cock between them.

Ryan recognized the older man, but only barely – most likely as some colleague or another old friend of his father’s but the man behind him made Ryan put down his cutlery as he stared him up and down, wondering how he’d never been made aware of his dad’s friend’s hot son until right now.

The boy was probably around his age, dark hair and matching dark eyes and Ryan could already feel himself burning up – the dude was awkward though, lingering behind the older man and trying to avoid Ryan’s gaze. He was dressed reasonably well, but his clothes looked cheap – definitely not designer, that was actually screamingly obvious to Ryan upon closer inspection.

He wasn’t really listening to the conversation that was happening, but after another few awkward moments, his father’s friend turned and held his hand gently against the other man’s shoulder.

“This is a friend of mine – a… uh, *business associate.*”

“Hi,” Ryan said – he was the only one in his family to even acknowledge the younger man.

“Hey,” the boy replied, barely audible as he dropped his eyes and blushed – fuck, that was *hot.* A grin pulled at Ryan’s lips. Like hell was he a business associate! The guy was a fucking hustler. Ryan felt the excitement prick in his stomach, he felt all rational thought slowly slip away – he simply *had* to have him; there was absolutely no question about it.
Holy shit! Brendon couldn’t believe it.

Just that morning, he’d been having a conversation about Ryan Ross with Jon and a few hours later, he was stood in front of him and his family, trying not to flush red under his gaze.

Ryan Ross was attractive – Brendon had always thought that. He wasn’t his usual type in that he looked nothing like Jon, but if Brendon was asked to describe his perfect man, Ryan Ross would be a pretty close fit – tall and skinny, with soft features and brown doe eyes. He was skinnier in real life than he ever looked in any of the photographs Brendon had seen – probably the endless amounts of cocaine he took… The guy looked high just sat with his parents having lunch.

Brendon stood there behind his client, trying not to catch his eye. He had to remain professional after all; he was still on a date - but when Ryan Ross acknowledged him and he had to return his greeting, Brendon felt himself blush. He couldn’t even look at the man. He never met anyone famous before and it was oddly unnerving.

His client – yet another older, successful, stupidly rich gentleman – seemed a little embarrassed by the situation. He probably wasn’t expecting to run into George Ross and his family when he was out for lunch with a male escort. Having to tell the rather obvious lie that Brendon was a “business associate” made the man’s face redden and he mumbled his way through a few more minutes of awkward conversation before they sat down at their own table on the other side of the restaurant. While he stood there, Brendon hadn’t missed the small, knowing smile that appeared on Ryan Ross’s face. It made his stomach feel like it had been dropkicked across the floor.

The client fretted about the run-in for the first five minutes after they sat down. “I mean, I’m out but only to my family and friends. It’s not public knowledge and nor do I want it to be. Christ,” the man sighed, shaking his head. “This could really fuck things up for me.”

Eventually Brendon managed to reassure him enough to turn the conversation around to the usual questions: Any upcoming vacations? Favorite Manhattan restaurants? Tell me more about Europe, please. I’ve never been. Talking about their job never failed either, most of his tricks could talk for hours about themselves, these rich businessmen with their inflated egos but never ask about the family. Brendon learned that the hard way when he first started accompanying men on these dinner dates.

The dinner date had only been a recent thing. He’d only been on half a dozen; dinner was paid for and sex was never guaranteed, but four out of his six dates so far paid for the benefit afterwards. Some lonely men just wanted someone to talk to for an hour, an attractive young man to keep them company, but in all honesty, Brendon found them tiring. Back in the day of cheap blowjobs and quick fucks, it was easy – he was never expected to enjoy it or to make conversation or dress up smart and pretend like he was interested in these men - but when he was working the streets, he was often lucky to earn his full fee. He was hoping that date seven would follow much the same procedure as the majority of his other dates and his client would pay extra to fuck him – he’d been out of action for the past few days thanks to Marc’s eager fists and the rough fuck he had to endure. Brendon and Jon needed the money.

One positive about the dinner date was that he got fed. He always felt a little out of his depth ordering food in fancy restaurants – they offered things like foie gras and caviar and white truffles, whatever the fuck they were. Today his client picked for him – which was a thing these kinds of men liked to do - be in control of everything, right down to the food their partners ate.
Today it was fillet of Atlantic monkfish, with applewood smoked bacon, new crop potatoes and clam glaçage, which meant glaze in French, his client told him, tucking into his own lunch – lamb with Tokyo turnips, steel-cut oat crûton and smoked Greek yogurt jus. Brendon would’ve preferred that to his monkfish.

“So, how do you know George Ross?” Brendon asked as they finished their meals – the lunch had been delicious. He sat in awe of the tiny portions, laid out like masterpieces on their square china canvases.

“He’s an old pal of mine – we go way back. We graduated Stanford together back in ’71. I haven’t seen him in years though – always reading about that son of his.”

“Oh yes, bit of a wild one that Ryan Ross, huh?”

The man wiped at the corners of his mouth with his napkin and nodded his head. “I don’t understand – his other children are so successful. How could he go so wrong with the last one?”

Brendon often wondered the same thing about his own family.

After lunch, his client ordered a brandy and chewed Brendon’s ear about his successful business. Brendon wasn’t interested, but he nodded in all the right places and asked questions whenever there was a lull in the conversation. Brendon was a good people person - that’s what made him so ideal for these long and drawn-out lunches – he could talk to anyone about anything. Jon would be lousy at something like this, he thought to himself as he tuned out of his client’s conversation. Jon was too abrupt. Brendon could imagine him sat there just rolling his eyes and sighing. Brendon had a good poker face. He was a lot better at hiding his feelings than Jon Walker.

Brendon’s emotions were like diamonds, able to stand the most extreme of pressures. Jon’s were like iron, rusting out in the rain.

The lunch date was dragging; Brendon was keen to wrap it up and find out whether this guy wanted to fuck him or not, because ideal as it may have sounded, he didn’t have all day to waste sat talking about equity and real estate and the decreasing price of property in Tribeca.

Brendon’s mind started to wander again – he already missed his mom’s birthday; it totally slipped his mind and the end of the month was rolling around again. She’d need money for his father’s medical expenses. At least he had that grand from Marc; that should keep his parents at bay for a few months, he thought as he took a sip of mineral water.

As his mind wandered, so did his eyes. This client was boring, droning on and on, now with very little input from Brendon. It wasn’t long before he was searching the restaurant for Ryan Ross – he did have a penchant for male prostitutes after all, so maybe his luck was in.

A few minutes later and Brendon spotted him standing alone at the bar behind his client’s shoulder. His family had dispersed and obviously their lunch was over. Fuck, he was handsome – effortlessly beautiful, almost like a girl. When he caught Ryan’s gaze, Brendon flicked his eyes back to his client – still talking about something that Brendon had stopped paying attention to five minutes ago. He looked back towards the bar with a neutral expression, but inside, Brendon almost felt like his guts were unraveling. He remembered feeling the exact same way when he first met Jon.

Ryan Ross was stood with his elbow propping himself up against the bar and a fancy cocktail in hand. His hips were cocked, crotch pushed obviously forward – and he would not take his eyes off Brendon; every time Brendon glanced back up at him, he was still staring and it was making him burn up.
He was getting too distracted. He forced himself to pay attention to his client’s words – he focused on the man’s lips and tried to catch up to the conversation but it was futile. He kept thinking about that one story from a few months ago – the one where Ryan had been caught in the East Village, looking for sex with male prostitutes. He couldn’t get the thought out of his head and his imagination started to run away with him. Brendon pushed his hand through his hair and wet his lips. He could feel a long forgotten warmth building up in either his crotch or his stomach, he couldn’t decide – presently they were both merging into one.

He saw Ryan mouth a silent, “Hey,” at him from the bar and raise his fingers in a subtle wave. Brendon had to drop his eyes to contain himself. He focused in on the man in front of him for another long second in an attempt to gather his senses. When he flicked his eyes back towards the man at the bar, he watched as Ryan took a drink from his straw, hollowing his cheeks as he sucked up the last of his cocktail, all the time keeping his eyes trained on Brendon.

Brendon swallowed the lump in his throat and shifted uncomfortably in his chair. Shit like this didn’t happen to boys like him. When he looked back, Ryan Ross’s fingers were curled into his fist and his tongue was pushed into his cheek – he remembered Jon doing a similar motion earlier that morning – the international mime for giving head; Ryan’s hand moved in front of his lips just the once as his tongue pressed into the side of his mouth and then he pointed at Brendon from across the bar before turning his finger back towards himself.

Ryan Ross had figured out that he was only sat with this man because he was being paid to do so. He wanted a blowjob and he just propositioned Brendon silently from across the room. Brendon thought about it for about a millisecond before he nodded his head, barely, just the once, and waited for Ryan’s riposte to come back in the form of a sly grin. He had absolutely nothing to lose agreeing to Ryan’s silent demand and so, with that in mind, he turned his attention back to his client, hushed his one-sided conversation and reached across the table to rub at his hand.

“How about we check into a hotel and continue this conversation in the bedroom, mister?” he flirted. His client looked taken aback and for a split second, Brendon regretted speaking out of turn. Perhaps he was jumping the gun. Damn Ryan Ross and his distracting eyes and hands and obscene gestures.

“I’m sorry? Check into a hotel? I enjoyed talking with you but I’m not sure you understood our agreement when we talked on the phone. I just wanted lunch with someone – not sex,” the man bumbled, turning red again. “You’re a nice boy; why do you do what you do?”

Brendon ignored the man’s question. These rich clients were always trying to fix the unfixable, repair the broken, change the past and mend the future – all during their goddamn lunch break.

“We can have sex, if you want or I can suck your dick for an extra twenty bucks…”

His client’s brow furrowed and he shook his head, dabbing at the sides of his mouth with the napkin again. “No,” he sighed. “Thank you for the offer, but no. My schedule this afternoon is actually pretty busy. You’re an attractive boy; you shouldn’t be offering yourself to people like that. Plus,” he added, pointing a finger at Brendon, “if this gets out, I am done for. Thank you for your company, it’s been a pleasure.”

With that, Brendon’s client pushed his chair back and wiped at the perspiration on his brow, digging into his wallet for two one hundred dollar bills – Brendon’s fee for the afternoon, plus a rather generous tip. Without another word, he exited the restaurant, leaving Brendon to push his cash into the inside pocket of his suit jacket.

Weird, he thought, shaking his head – sometimes his clients still had the power to surprise him. He was sure this guy would’ve gone for a quickie - or at least a blowjob - he certainly seemed like the
type, but he obviously assumed wrong. Clients rarely turned down Brendon’s suggestions, especially for the bargain price of twenty bucks but he wasn’t too disappointed by it. There was still the matter of Ryan Ross in the bar to deal with and that one thought alone made his heart rate spike with an enthusiasm he’d not felt in years.

As he was checking his cellphone for missed calls from Jon – of which, there were none – his attention was pulled towards a tall figure moving across the restaurant floor towards him. He swallowed, told himself to keep his shit together and then raised his eyes and smiled at the man at the side of his table.

“How can I help you?” Those were Brendon’s first words to him.

A grin pulled at the man’s mouth. “Well, hello. I’m Ryan Ross,” said Ryan Ross, offering his hand and sitting down on the chair Brendon’s client just vacated. Ryan’s hands were cold and his skin was dry. Brendon’s heart felt like it was in his throat. “Please tell me that you’re in the line of work I think you are, because you are very fucking sexy. I’ve been watching you since you first arrived. Can I get you a drink?” he offered, clicking his fingers at a passing waiter and raising an expectant eyebrow at Brendon.

Brendon accepted an ornately decorated cocktail from Ryan and sucked it down quickly. He felt kind of ridiculous, sat drinking such a stupid, girly drink in the company of Ryan Ross. He felt like he needed a shot of whisky or a couple swigs of vodka. A watered down, fruity cocktail was doing little to calm his nerves.

They talked for a few minutes about the restaurant and Brendon praised his meal, droning on about how great the service was and how tasty the complimentary bread was as Ryan watched him in amusement. After a few moments, he bit his tongue and decided to stay silent. Ryan Ross probably didn’t care about his inferior opinions.

Brendon didn’t make a habit of drinking on the job - he rarely drank at all - but Ryan was making him uneasy. He was pretty intense and as they sat there together, Ryan made his attraction toward Brendon very clear indeed. In fact, he was extremely blunt and had come out with the question after five minutes without scooting around the subject.

“So, are you an escort then?” he asked, sat opposite him in the restaurant, his chin propped in his hand. Brendon noticed the curve of his throat, the knuckles in his slim fingers, the veins in his hands and his slim wrists. He wasn’t sure if he was getting swept away by this man’s good looks because he really was incredibly handsome, or because he was famous. Probably the latter, Brendon told himself, trying to ignore Ryan Ross’s penetrating gaze.

Brendon nodded because he knew his voice would fail him if he committed to speech. He cleared his throat and tried to gather his thoughts; this dude probably had clueless men falling for him all the time - he wanted to make an impression, not just sit there gawking like an idiot. This is a situation in which Jon would flourish. He’d be so cool, Brendon told himself – none of this helpless fawning over the color of Ryan's eyes or the curve of his lips. Jon was no-nonsense. He would probably already be around the back of the building sucking his cock by now. The thought sent bile up the back of Brendon’s throat.

“Well then, would you be interested in escorting me to a hotel room and spending a few hours getting to know each other?” Ryan sipped on the drink the waiter had brought him. Brendon’s fingers closed tight around his glass as he raised it to his mouth. Much to his disappointment, it was empty.

Ryan Ross wanted to fuck him and Brendon couldn’t get his head around it. He ignored the dull
flickering of excitement in the pit of his stomach and leant forward towards Ryan across the
table. *Just be cool, man,* he told himself. *He’s only human – a very rich and handsome one, but he’s
still just another guy. Made from blood and bone and bad decisions.*

“Well, Ryan, that all depends on how much you want to pay me,” Brendon told him. His heart
thumped hard inside his ribcage, awaiting the answer.

Ryan’s eyes sparked. He nodded thoughtfully, mimicking Brendon’s action by leaning across the
table as well. Ryan was almost out of his seat - they were nearly touching and Brendon could smell
him - could feel his hot breath on his lips. Ryan smiled – the restaurant was empty after the lunch
crowd and nobody was about to disturb them now. Ryan wrapped his long fingers around Brendon’s
tie and pulled him closer, his lips brushing Brendon's ear. “How much would five thousand dollars
get me?” he asked.

*Oh man...* The blood pumped to his head. Brendon pulled back and turned to catch Ryan’s ear with
his mouth.

“Everything,” he whispered and he could almost feel Ryan's grin against his jaw.
Chapter 6

Brendon felt like he’d just walked onto a movie set.

He’d seen some pretty fancy hotel rooms since he’d been working, but this was something else. He was blown away. The guest bathroom alone was double the size of his and Jon’s whole apartment – the room had a goddamn grand piano in the lounge - it had mood lighting and floor to ceiling windows extending across the length of the far wall. Outside, the buildings gave way to the sun setting over west Central Park.

*How the other half lives*, Brendon thought as he looked out of the window down on Fifth Avenue - the evening was approaching - and the sky was turning dark fast. Jon would be getting ready for another night on a street corner in a bad neighborhood and here he was, stood in the premier suite of a five-star hotel – he really should call him. Jon wouldn’t believe this.

He looked back over his shoulder to watch Ryan snort another line of coke off the glass coffee table. He didn’t really seem too aware of Brendon watching him, so he turned back to the window and watched the traffic. He recalled those pictures of Ryan in the glossy magazine - with his fuck-me mouth and his hand down his pants. He couldn’t believe that it was the same man sat just behind him, cutting lines with his keycard, his slender shoulders hunched over the table.

“*So,*” Ryan started, leaning back on the couch and sniffing hard, his long arms stretched across the cushions behind him. “What did you mean by *everything*?”

Brendon smiled. “I meant just that – *everything*. Whatever you want, so long as I get the money up front.”

Ryan nodded with a half-roll of his eyes, waving his hand dismissively at Brendon’s request. “Sure, sure. I need someone discrete,” he said. “The last thing I need right now is for you to get greedy and go running to the motherfucking press. I’m in my parents’ bad books as it is. They can’t ever find out about this. I need a promise that this will stay between just the two of us, okay?”

Brendon nodded again, moving away from the window to sit on the couch beside Ryan. “You can trust me,” he smiled, letting his hand reach forward to curl around the back of Ryan’s neck. “I promise.” He pushed his fingers through the long curls of hair at the back of his head and flicked his eyes down towards his lips. He really was very handsome. Brendon was filled with the sudden desire to lean forward and kiss him.

Ryan looked him dead in the eye and asked, “Will you let me come on your face, you little slut?”

Brendon felt his mouth twitch at the words. They sounded alien coming from Ryan Ross’s mouth, like lines from a badly written porno.

He didn’t usually consent to that, but he just agreed to anything Ryan wanted so he cocked his head, pretended to consider the question and then bit his lip. “*Yes.*”

“What’s your name? Your real one,” Ryan asked, pulling away from Brendon’s touch and leaning over the table again. Brendon heard him sniff. He saw the powder disappear up the straw and let out a silent sigh. Brendon never usually gave his real name out to clients, but this time it was different – this was *Ryan Ross*, this was *five grand*.
“It’s Brendon.”

“Are you sure?”

“Last time I checked,” Brendon chuckled.

Ryan fell back against the couch, rubbing the heel of his palm across his nose. He blinked over at Brendon. “Because usually hookers use fake names. I mean, right? Personal security and all that? Whatever. When I fuck you,” Ryan told him, turning his body and gripping tight at Brendon’s hip, “I want to call you by your real name.”

“Well. What? D’you want to check my ID or something?” he smiled.

“Yeah,” Ryan nodded and held his hand out expectantly. Brendon wished he hadn’t offered something so fucking stupid. He reached into the back pocket of his pants for his wallet and slipped his identification out of the folds.

“There you go, officer.”

Ryan broke into a smile. “Las Vegas, huh? I was actually born in Las Vegas. My dad owns some hotels out there.”

“I know – the nice ones. It must be nice being able to stay in hotels like this whenever you want. You’re very lucky.” Brendon let his fingers brush Ryan’s hair behind his ear and he watched him, his eyes still scanning over his Nevada driver’s license.

“What turns you on then, Brendon Urie of Summerlin, Las Vegas?”

“I love sucking dick,” he said slowly. “And I love getting fucked. I like it on my stomach or from behind – I love being a little slut for handsome men like you.”

Ryan pouted. “Do you like kissing? You’ve got the mouth for it – look at these fucking lips,” he muttered, dragging his thumb over Brendon’s bottom lip. “Will you let me kiss you, like, properly?”

That was the one thing he never did with clients, even in the beginning, before he met Jon. Sometimes men would try and he would clamp his lips together and turn his head away from the press of their mouths until they gave up. It was the only pact that he and Jon had together – never make-out with a trick. Kissing was too intimate – it was almost like cheating.

“Yes, you can kiss me, like, properly,” he laughed. Ryan returned his grin – he had a beautiful smile; perfect white teeth and dusty brown eyes, no wonder he was so successful with the ladies – and apparently the men. Brendon could feel himself burning up from just being allowed to touch him. “I love kissing, Ryan and I’m great with my mouth. I can deep throat a dick like a pro.”

“What else?” Ryan asked quickly. Brendon could see the heavy rise and fall of his chest. “What else gets you off?”

Brendon paused for a second to consider his answer. “Shower sex. I like to be fucked against the wall.”

That wasn’t particularly true, but it felt good to fuck someone who smelled and tasted clean – not that he doubted Ryan Ross’s personal hygiene, but he had bad experiences with past clients - some
disgusting tricks smelled like they hadn’t washed their balls in days.

Ryan leant over the coffee table again – it seemed like the guy was hell-bent on self-destruction. “So, for five grand you’ll do absolutely anything I say?” he asked, after another line. Dude was going to give himself a nosebleed.

Brendon nodded and after a pause, added, “Well, within reason.” Just in case.

“Stand here,” Ryan ordered, pointing to the space in between him and the coffee table. “Strip for me, Brendon. Slowly. Show me what you got.”

Brendon stood from the couch and moved in front of Ryan. He was sprawled back on the couch, legs spread wide, pupils blown. He looked high as fuck. Brendon started to loosen his tie, easing it out of its knot slowly and sliding it from the collar of his shirt. He threw it at Ryan’s chest and Ryan fingered the material, pulling it through his hands. He slipped from his jacket and let it fall at his feet, moving his hand down the buttons of his shirt until it was open, exposing his chest and stomach. He watched Ryan’s face intently as he unbuckled his belt and then slowly unzipped his fly.

Brendon kept in shape – he had sex several times a day and he worked out whenever he was alone in the apartment. He was flexible – men appreciated that – and he was proud of his body but as he pulled his pants open, he felt himself blush under Ryan’s gaze. By the time he was stood in only his underwear, he could see the bulge in Ryan’s tight slacks.

Brendon turned around, arched his back and slid his briefs over his ass, letting them fall around his ankles. When he turned back, Ryan’s lips were parted and he was rubbing himself through his pants.

Brendon jerked his dick a few times and then stood with his hands on his hips, waiting for Ryan’s next move.

“You’ll stay until tomorrow morning, okay?” Ryan said, sitting forward and pressing his hands against his face, dragging them down his cheeks. He remembered Jon doing a similar thing the very first time they’d done coke together. Ryan was obviously feeling it. Brendon wondered if the guy was ever actually sober. His pupils were wide, his jaw tense. Brendon had only ever done a handful of over-nighters in his time. He didn't make a habit of it, because the men who paid him were usually the type of men he had no desire to share a bed with. Jon would lay awake all night worrying – he’d be in so much trouble when he got home for not calling, but he’d been offered an opportunity to earn a huge amount of money. Five grand was life changing – he blinked down at Ryan and nodded his head.

“Okay,” he smiled.

“Good. Now, do you want some coke? How rude of me for not offering you sooner.” Ryan arched his eyebrow and fanned his hand across the table like a game show model. Brendon paused – he hadn’t done coke in months and he never made a habit of taking drugs with his tricks, but this was Ryan Ross - some things he could just let slide. Just this once.

Jon would definitely have accepted Ryan’s offer if he was in this situation but Brendon never really needed the drugs like Jon did. He’d never been addicted but when he was offered – especially for free - he never refused. Unless it was smack. Brendon had done everything in his time, but he’d never taken heroin. 'Shrooms and weed, coke and speed but he drew the line at smack.
He’d take a bump, maybe a line or two – what harm could it do? After all, this was a once in a lifetime opportunity, he assured himself. Ryan Ross was one of America’s most famous men and he was stood in his beautiful hotel suite, being paid five thousand dollars to fuck him. For a male escort, life didn’t get much better than this.

When Brendon leaned over the table to snort a line, he could feel the cold press of Ryan’s hands at the small of his back. He shivered as they moved to slide over his ass.

“You have a beautiful body,” Ryan remarked, pressing his lips down against Brendon’s shoulder blades as he took a little more coke and then a little more, until his head pulsed and he could feel his heart hammering hard behind his ribs. He sat back against Ryan’s chest, blearily. That coke was some quality shit; he could feel the effects almost immediately but he now remembered why he didn’t take drugs with his clients. It impaired his judgment too much; he didn’t like the feeling of not being in control. He’d never really been too good with drugs. Most people – obviously people like Ryan Ross - relished the high; Brendon always feared the heart palpitations, the paranoia and the anxiety too much to truly enjoy it.

As he was trying to blink his vision back into focus, he felt the tips of Ryan’s fingers brush against his lips. He opened his mouth automatically and closed his mouth around the digits, sucking around his fingertips, flicking his tongue across Ryan’s knuckles. Finger-sucking was akin to a blowjob, so Brendon gave it his best shot. After a moment, Ryan pulled away, pushing his wet fingers through the last of the coke. He pressed his hand between Brendon’s ass, parting the cheeks with one hand. Brendon’s whole body clamped up in resistance. Coke-coated fingers pressed against Brendon’s asshole, barely just pushing inside him.

“Numbs the nerve endings,” Ryan noted, his voice hot in Brendon’s ear. “You’re gonna need it.”

Within a few minutes, they made it to the bathroom – a huge, all-marble affair with heated floors and a huge shower cubical with double showerhead. This was Brendon’s idea of absolute luxury – it sure was a big step up from backseats or scummy motels on the edge of town.

Ryan stripped without a fuss, dropping his clothes to the floor in a messy pile. As they stepped under the warm stream of water together, Brendon felt his muscles relaxing under the powerful jets. Ryan was quick to slide his hands over his shoulders, across his chest and around his hips and Brendon mimicked his actions until their cocks were semi-hard and touching between their stomachs.

After a minute, Ryan’s lips were pressing towards Brendon’s and the high of the coke and the fact that he was showering with Ryan Fucking Ross pushed the guilt right out of Brendon’s head. Jon didn’t need to know that he was making out with a client. In fact, Jon didn’t need to know anything. What Jon doesn’t know, can’t hurt him and it wasn’t like Jon didn’t have secrets of his own. Ryan’s lips were soft and wet and tasteless from the shower water. In his chest, Brendon’s heart was thumping in anticipation. He hadn’t kissed anyone apart from Jon like this in years and Ryan didn’t disappoint. He kissed with a mixture of rough desperation and soft sensuality and Brendon couldn’t believe this was happening…

Their mouths moved together and Ryan backed him against the wall, pressing him against the cold tiles of the shower, his hands sliding down to his ass then pulling their bodies flush. Brendon could feel Ryan growing hard against his thigh. He dropped to his knees and sucked the head of his dick slowly into his mouth.

Ryan groaned – he sounded so hot - his hand at the back of Brendon’s head as he deep throated him before pulling off and jerking his erection with his hand. The noises that Ryan was making were
such a turn-on. His hips thrust forward into Brendon’s mouth and between his legs, Brendon could feel his own dick starting to get hard as Ryan fucked his throat and pulled gently at the back of his hair.

Brendon gripped Ryan’s hips, bent his head so he could get at the man’s balls and taint and tongued over them before slipping the shaft back down his throat. Ryan Ross’s dick wasn’t the biggest cock he’d ever seen, but it was by no means the smallest either – about seven, maybe seven and a half inches. A perfect size, Brendon deduced quickly before pushing his face all the way forward against Ryan’s neatly trimmed pubic hair. He could feel his dick pulsing inside his throat. Brendon grabbed his own erection and wrapped his fist gently around the base. He couldn’t remember the last time he got hard during sex.

He turned Ryan around, the water from the showerhead beating down on them and Ryan held himself up against the wall, his back arched, his ass sticking out. Brendon rimmed him, pulling his cheeks apart and pressing his tongue against his asshole. Ryan was smooth and he tasted like skin and clean water and it seemed like he couldn’t stop the moans falling from his lips – Brendon was obviously doing something he liked, fucking his asshole with his tongue as Ryan reached back and pulled him closer into him by his head.

“Holy shit,” Ryan sighed. “This must be the coke talking, but you’re excellent with your tongue – and one of the best little dicksuckers I ever met in my life.”

“Well, the coke doesn’t lie, Mr. Ross.” Brendon drew back from Ryan’s ass and gave it a gentle slap. “I had a hell of a lot of practice. Shall we dry off?” he suggested, getting to his feet. “I really can’t wait to feel your dick inside me.”

Ryan grinned and Brendon was fully aware that Ryan was watching his ass as he exited the shower.

* * *

Ryan was in absolute ecstasy.

In the past, very few of his one-night stands rimmed him – and if they had, they never put much effort into it and now, here he was, lying on his back on the couch, high as fuck on coke, with a hooker’s tongue buried deep inside him. Life really didn’t get any better than this.

Brendon was working it. He hadn’t lied when he said he was good with his mouth; this boy was on fire and he looked so hot buried between his legs that Ryan had to override the urge to pull him up by his hair and make-out with the dude.

Fuck, it felt good to have his asshole eaten out like that. Brendon was alternating between pressing feather light kisses between his cheeks and flicking his tongue around and inside his hole. He attached his mouth to his cock again and sucked, his cheeks hollowing around the shaft of his dick as he flicked his eyes up to meet Ryan’s. He was really beautiful – Ryan’s ideal sex partner, with his eyes so dark they looked black and his hot body. The guy obviously worked out, Ryan thought as he admired Brendon’s physique. Michelangelo himself couldn’t have carved a more perfect specimen of a man.

“Your dick tastes so good. Fuck, I can’t wait to feel it inside me.”

He even talked like a whore. Ryan’s cock pulsed at his statement and Brendon moved from his
knees and straddled Ryan’s hips on the couch. He leaned forward for another greedy kiss and Ryan let Brendon lead it this time.

“You got a condom? I think I’m ready to fuck you now,” Ryan told him – the roughness of his voice surprised even himself - and he cleared his throat as Brendon climbed off the couch and sauntered towards his jacket, discarded on the floor. Fuck, Ryan wanted his dick in that boy’s ass as soon as possible. He couldn’t wait to feel Brendon’s tight asshole clenching around the base of his dick. Brendon was obviously an expert and he climbed back into Ryan’s lap, reached around behind him and slid the condom down Ryan’s dick with one swift and practiced movement. Within seconds, Brendon was directing him inside his ass and sitting down slowly on his cock. Ryan reveled in the groan that escaped Brendon’s mouth.

“Oh, fuck yeah,” the man sighed, rocking his hips forward in a steady rhythm. Brendon's dick was hard between his legs, his balls tight as they slapped against Ryan’s stomach as he rode himself out. Ryan’s hands slid around the small of Brendon’s back and then down the smooth globes of his ass cheeks. He pressed his luck and let his finger stray between his ass cheeks – after all; he said he’d do anything for five grand…

He pressed his fingertip around Brendon’s asshole, slipping it in beside his dick when Brendon pushed down. The sound that left his lips sent shivers right down Ryan’s spine, across his taint and up his dick. He wanted to double-team this guy – perhaps invite Gabe over one evening and pay Brendon for another all-nighter so that they could ass-fuck him together. Double penetration inside a pussy was fucking incredible; he could only imagine how good it’d feel inside this dude’s tight ass.

“Fuck, you feel good,” Ryan told him, pushing him back against the cushions of the couch and leaning over him. “You’re tight as hell.”

Brendon nodded a slow, dazed agreement and complied when Ryan pushed his knees into his chest and spread his legs open. He fucked into the boy with ease; that warm, tight heat welcoming him back with little resistance.

“You’re flexible, huh?” he smiled. Brendon’s knees were almost by his ears and he pounded his ass, listening to the quiet sounds of encouragement he fucked from Brendon’s mouth. His dick looked perfect between his legs, hard and red and dripping pre-come over his stomach. Ryan let go of one of Brendon’s ankles and trailed his finger down the shaft, over his balls and along his taint. “D’you always get this hard for your tricks?” he asked.

“Only when they’re hot as fuck,” Brendon smiled back, pulling Ryan against his mouth by his neck. Ryan slowed his thrusts, rolling his hips into Brendon gently as they made out. The guy was a great kisser too, but it was no wonder with those perfect fuck-me lips.

They ended up on the floor in front of the couch. Ryan on his back as Brendon sucked his cock – slowly at first, his head bobbing between his legs. Ryan was beginning to think that there was nothing this guy couldn’t do. Brendon would have been wasted as anything other than a hooker. It was as if that was his one calling in life – to suck dick and fuck for cash - and Ryan needed more, he needed it faster and harder and dirtier. He thrust his hips up off the rug, roughly fucking his dick into Brendon’s throat and the boy didn’t even gag, just pressed his mouth further down his cock until his nose was buried in his pubes and he was looking up at Ryan with wide, watering eyes.

“You’re so fucking beautiful right now,” Ryan sighed, pushing Brendon’s head back and forcing him down onto the floor on his stomach. Ryan wished he could film this, tattoo this very scene on the back of his eyelids so he’d always have jerk-off material.
Ryan had a lot of sex in his time and he was a good fuck - he knew that to be a fact - but it had been a long time since he met someone he felt this compatible with, this attracted to, this in-tune with. He felt like the stars had suddenly aligned or that the world had tilted slightly on its axis and as he pushed his dick into Brendon’s tight hole from behind, he felt that the entire, awful lunch with his parents was worth it. He was now fucking an incredible whore on the floor of his penthouse suite – life seriously didn’t get any better than this.

Brendon’s back was arched, his tight little ass pushed up into the air against Ryan’s hips and Ryan gripped the small of his back and held him down, desperately humping him as he chased his orgasm. Fuck, he was close. Ryan couldn’t remember the last time sex turned him on quite this much. Fucking hookers was Ryan’s ultimate kink, he realized as he pressed his chest against Brendon’s back and gripped his hair.

“You’re such a slut,” he breathed against Brendon’s ear. “What are you? Say it. Let me hear you say it.” He sat up, dragging Brendon into doggy-style by his hair.

“I’m a slut, I’m a slut, I’m a slut,” the man cried after each in-stroke and then his words trailed off into moans, Ryan’s dick feeling like a rock between his legs. He could feel the sweat building at the small of his back – he was in the final stretch.

Brendon looked so dirty in front of him, knees wide on either side of Ryan’s hips, his face pushed into the carpet – and those noises he was making, as if he’d not been fucked like this in years. Ryan’s head fell back and he blinked up at the ceiling, eager to delay his orgasm for as long as possible, but fuck, the dude was just too hot.

“Fuck me,” he heard Brendon moan. “Fuck me harder. My ass fucking needs it.”

That had almost caused Ryan to come right then, but he bit his lip and gripped Brendon’s hips, digging his fingers into the bone and skin. He pulled out all the way, fucking roughly back in without any consideration for the boy whose ass he was using. Brendon howled – that was the only way that Ryan could describe it - and after a few more blurry minutes, he felt his orgasm wash over him; he felt his whole body tense up before going slack as he released himself inside the condom.

Brendon’s asshole was tightening around his dick, his ass cheeks were flexing and his muscles shaking and then he was coming too, with one hand wrapped loosely around his cock as Ryan pulled out and sat back on his heels, his hair stuck to his forehead with sweat.

Brendon was still coming, jerking his dick and shooting come into his other hand and Ryan watched him finish himself off, his face screwed up as his climax possessed his body, turning his muscles to jelly as it eventually subsided and Brendon blinked open his eyes.


“No one’s made me come like that in years,” Brendon told him, lying prone on the floor with a handful of come.

Ryan rolled his eyes and pushed himself up onto his feet. “I bet you say that to all the boys,” he teased, poking his toe against Brendon’s still exposed asshole. Brendon tensed and rolled onto his back, his sex-flushed chest red in the low lighting of the lounge.

Ryan ignored the desire to kiss him and moved to the coffee table to snort another line.
Chapter 7

Ryan chewed holes in his lips.

The copious amounts of cocaine last night caused his jaw to move involuntarily in his sleep and now the inside of his mouth was sore and torn. He ran his tongue across it and winced at the pain. That’d be bothering him for weeks. He wouldn’t be able to leave it alone. Ryan was a bit of a self-saboteur – whether it was drugs or booze or his relationships with his family and friends, even himself and his own body, Ryan had always been willingly destructive.

It wasn’t like he didn’t realize that the things he did were bad for him – he was fully aware of all that, but Ryan liked to test his limits. He was self-destructive. He always had been. When he was in school, he’d do his homework and then throw it away the morning it was due in. He used to say things to his parents that he knew would piss them off, just to create a bit of drama – in adulthood, Ryan wasn’t much different. Now, instead of starting petty arguments with his family, he took drugs to keep him balanced and he drank so he didn’t have to take any responsibility.

Ryan cracked his eyes open against the morning sunlight streaming in through the open curtain and groaned – last night was slowly coming back to him. He shifted over on the mattress and craned his head to look over his shoulder - lying beside him in bed was a sleeping boy, dark-haired and peaceful and absolutely beautiful. Brendon.

He was surprised he even remembered the boy’s name. He watched him for a long moment, his eyes moving behind his eyelids, his dark eyelashes fanned across pale cheeks with the bed sheets pulled up around his face. Brendon was striking. Ryan wished he could remember more about him because all he currently remembered was that he agreed to pay this dude five thousand dollars to sleep with him.

Maybe that made him look desperate – paying someone that much money for sex - but Ryan didn’t worry about it for too long. The boy was probably eternally grateful, he was probably counting his blessings that they’d run into each other at the bar yesterday afternoon – Brendon probably thought him very generous and charitable. Ryan was thinking Richard Gere in Pretty Woman, or Ebenezer Scrooge on Christmas morning - a true philanthropist. 5K to this dude was probably an obscene amount of money.

Part of him wanted to shake the boy awake and get his money’s worth but as he turned over to face him on his side, he hesitated. It had been weeks, no, it had been months since Ryan had woken up next to anyone. The bed was warm and comforting with the heat of another body and Ryan had the sudden, unusual desire to reach out, stroke the man’s cheek and kiss him awake; he wanted to run his fingers through that dark hair and wrap him up in his arms and just keep him there, in his bed, until they got bored of each other.

The realization was disconcerting and Ryan decided to combat it in the same way he had last night, the same way he did every night. With drugs.

He rolled out of bed and stretched naked in the middle of the room, scratching at his belly. It was still early and they’d done a hell of a lot of cocaine together last night. At least the hooker couldn’t complain that he’d been stingy with his drugs, because he got this Brendon character fucked up last night. He looked back at the bed and willed him awake – he could really go for a morning blowjob right now and after that, sex in the shower and maybe once again on the bed before this guy inevitably made his excuses and left.
He pulled on his underwear and padded blearily towards the lounge. He knew that this man was only sleeping in his bed because he paid him to stay until morning – and even if he hadn’t paid him, he’d only be lying there because of his surname.

His father constantly liked to remind his son about that. When there was a new sordid story in the press about Ryan’s exploits, George would call him up or turn up at his apartment and say things like, “These people are only hanging around you because they think it’ll make them famous. You know that, don’t you, Ryan?” or he’d bark, “If you weren’t Ryan Ross, no one would care about you. You wouldn’t have these friends; you wouldn’t have girls throwing themselves at you. If it wasn’t for the family fortune, Ryan, you’d be a very lonely man.”

Ryan would shrug his shoulders and roll his eyes and act unconcerned but he’d think, fuck you, dad. Fuck you, fuck you.Fuck. You. He’d never say his words out loud, he was always very guarded with his emotions but in his sober moments, it upset him to think his father thought him that void of personality, that the people around him were just there to leech off of his generosity.

In fact, it really pissed him off when his dad said dumb shit like that because without drink and drugs to numb the feelings, he knew that his father was right. Again. The prick.

Ryan was old enough to realize his faults, but he wasn’t mature enough to address them. He’d been a difficult, spoiled third child, managing to slip under the radar most of the time as his brother and sister got good grades and contributed to the family fortune. Ryan never wanted for anything. His father bought him a brand new Lamborghini Aventador for his sixteenth birthday – Ryan couldn’t even drive. He wrecked the car a year later after driving drunk, which was when the media’s obsession with George Ross’s reckless son really started. George bought him his own penthouse apartment on the Upper East Side when he was eighteen, because spending forty-five million dollars was easier than telling Ryan he loved him. Ryan wasn’t bitter, but he fucking hated his father for never saying it – just a simple, I love you, son – that's all he ever wanted. Ryan would’ve slept a lot better at night knowing his father didn’t secretly hate him.

As an adult Ryan was obnoxious and careless – he was used to getting his own way and it had made him selfish and unrelatable. It wasn’t really Ryan’s fault; his whole family was unrelatable – growing up with billions of dollars in the bank tends to do that to a kid - but Ryan Ross had grown into a man who was exceptionally hard to please. He was overly critical and pigheaded and he had absolutely no motivation to do anything with his life except fly first-class around the world, fuck whoever he wanted and dine out at expensive restaurants. His father had always taken issue with his son's laziness the most.

In Ryan’s opinion, George Ross had his priorities all skewed. Ryan was too stubborn to admit it and his father was too worried about his reputation to notice, but Ryan had been calling out for guidance since he was thirteen years old. His father was never around, his mom was dead, his stepmother was always way too much of a soft touch to ever enforce any rules and so Ryan had turned to the other male figures in his life and watched how they dealt with the world. His brother, Jacob, had always been perfect, his father’s much revered older son - smart and handsome and charismatic. Jacob and Ryan hated each other as kids; they’d learned to accept each others’ presence as adults, but their relationship was still hostile. His other male superior growing up had been Gabe and Gabe taught him that nothing really mattered when you had weed or pills or coke – not his parents’ expectations or the media rumors. The drugs were there to help him not give a shit and forget all that.

And well, getting high certainly helped him forget – where he went last night, what he did, what happened to that last hundred, two hundred, three hundred dollars and if he got high enough, he could forget everything else too – the name of his apartment, where he was, who he was. Ryan’s life was made up of late nights, forgotten places and bad mornings after the night before.
He sat down on the couch and rubbed his hand over his face. Most of his coke was gone – on the table in front of him was maybe enough for a few gummers at most. He looked despondently around the room, recalling his blurry memories from the previous night.

He remembered fingering that dude with cocaine last night and fucking him until past three in the morning – that blowjob in the shower, the feeling of Brendon’s tongue inside his asshole... Ryan pulled his hair as they fucked on the floor and later in the evening, after a bit more coke, the guy had let him jerk off on his face. Ryan had watched in awe as Brendon blinked come out of his eyelashes.

His dick twitched at the memory – that’s why he loved the idea of fucking a whore so much - they couldn’t say no to him if he gave them enough money. He didn’t have to feel guilty if he embarrassed himself in front of a hooker.

Ryan wasn’t totally heartless though. He sort of felt sorry for the kid – Brendon seemed like a nice boy who’d just lost his way. Talk about taking a wrong path in life, Brendon seemed to have skidded off-road and been stuck in the same ditch for years. It was sad that he ended up selling his body to desperate perverts who were gullible enough to think that a quick, illicit fuck with a hooker meant they were beautiful and loved and needed – desperate perverts just like Ryan.

He got to his feet again and sniffed – his head was thumping, his sinuses aching - this morning’s cocaine comedown was going to be difficult to get through without a quick line to take the edge off things. He pressed his thumb down to pick up the last of the powder still left on the table and rubbed it into his gums. His limbs felt weak and heavy and he rubbed at his face in annoyance – the morning after a big coke bender was never something he looked forward to. He was irritated and out of drugs. He wondered how long that kid was planning on sleeping for because he needed to call Shane and organize a pick-up.

Maybe he should wake him up, fuck him, give him his money and ask him to leave. Ryan pondered that scenario for a moment, but first thing first, he needed a drink. He could feel his hands shaking as he approached the minibar, bottles of Tanqueray and Ketel One and Jim Beam; all average spirits, totally over-priced. He picked through the bottles, dispensed two ice cubes into a glass and poured himself a stiff drink.

The vodka burned as it slid down his throat but the second glass burned a little less and by the time he was nursing his third, he could hardly notice it.

Brendon had been a good screw – and he was certainly good-looking for a prostitute, there was no doubt about that. It looked like he took care of himself - he was the epitome of perfection in Ryan’s eyes - soft, dark hair and his incredible, tight, toned body, his loose jaw and filthy mouth. Utterly flawless.

His kisses had been rough and desperate, exactly what kissing a man should be and his blowjobs had been something else. That nagging feeling in the pit of his stomach was back – paying Brendon turned him on and as he sat there, sipping on his vodka and reminiscing about the previous night, he felt his cock start to grow hard inside his underwear. That boy had been so tight around his dick; all muscle and burning need and he couldn’t force those memories out of his head for long enough – the image of Brendon on his knees on the bathroom floor, his face covered in Ryan's come. The dude wanted it too; or at least he acted like he had. He moaned like the slut he was, pushed out his tongue and let him carry on. Brendon got to his feet and hadn’t moved to wipe himself clean until Ryan pulled him back into the shower. That memory was definite jerk-off material, he thought, rubbing absently at the bulge inside his underwear.

For a brief moment, while he was finishing off his drink, Ryan wondered what must’ve gone wrong in that man’s life that he ended up having sex for money. He wondered what kind of awful family he
must come from back in Las Vegas, that he was now living in New York, sucking dick for cash. Maybe he had someone who cared for him, someone who stayed awake all night, awaiting his return. Ryan hoped not – the thought of a whore being more successful in love than he was kind of depressed him.

It was nearing 8AM when Ryan heard movement from the bedroom. He finished off the minibar in the hour he’d been waiting and he was feeling buzzed. He pushed into the bedroom without warning and stood in the threshold catching Brendon off-guard. He was struggling into his pants.

“Hi,” the man mumbled, straightening up and bucking his belt. “Sorry for sleeping so long,” he blushed. Ryan desperately wanted to fuck his mouth again. He wanted to come on his face and smear himself all over him so that the next man he went off and fucked would be able to smell him, be able to taste him when they kissed.

“Why are you putting your clothes back on?” Ryan asked, his body heavy after his quick intake of minibar booze. Brendon flushed redder – that was so hot, watching him try and disguise his embarrassment. Ryan enjoyed having the upper hand when it came to sex. He liked making people feel uncomfortable because it meant he had the power.

“Well, I mean… I didn’t know whether you wanted me to leave or not, so…” he trailed off. Maybe all that faux-confidence from last night had been a result of the drugs, Ryan thought. If it was possible, he liked the awkward, nervous young man stood in front of him this morning even more than the man he met last night because if there was one thing he hadn’t liked about the way Brendon presented himself yesterday, it was the fact that he hadn’t seemed at all fazed by his presence. Most people fell head-over-heels for him; they pandered to his needs and constantly told him how amazing he was. He liked that. He loved watching the awe in a man’s eyes as he slid his dick down his throat.

“I can take them off, if you’d like – and umm, maybe we can have a little more fun for an hour or so? Before I have to leave. I really should be getting back though…” he told him, glancing over at the alarm clock on the bedside.

“Come here,” Ryan ordered, ignoring the protestation – and the man walked towards him, stopping a few feet in front of him. “Closer.” Brendon stepped closer, until their toes were touching. “Get down on your knees and open your mouth.”

Brendon knelt and opened his mouth, his eyes flicking up towards Ryan, awaiting his next instructions.

“Why did you become a hooker?” Ryan asked, pulling his underwear down over his ass and letting his dick spring free in front of Brendon’s lips.

“My teacher said I didn’t have the grades to become a brain surgeon.”

Ryan wrinkled his nose at Brendon’s joke but soon felt his lips pull into a smile. “You’re fucking dumb,” he laughed, shaking his head and battling a grin. He let his hand brush Brendon’s hair back and closed his eyes when he felt his warm mouth envelop his dick. After a minute, Ryan grabbed his cheeks and skull-fucked him. He wanted to hear this guy gag on his cock.

The blowjob Brendon gave him was straight out of a porno – over-stretched lips and too much spit, dark eyes watering and hollowed cheeks. Fuck, this is what he craved; someone – a man, who was compliant and needy - a true slut he could dominate. This dude was beautiful and he couldn’t tear his eyes away from those lips wrapped around his cock. The only sound in Ryan’s ears was the gagging Brendon was doing on his dick and his own heavy breaths rumbling through his chest. He hunched
over him and kissed the top of his head, drawing his dick out of Brendon’s mouth and pulling him up towards the bed. He needed to feel it again, he decided. He needed to feel his tight asshole around him right now. It was an overwhelming need that he couldn’t ignore for one more second.

He didn’t even have to say anything. Within seconds, Brendon was sheathing his dick, sitting down on top of him and rocking back and forth like he was born to fuck. His head was thrown back, his mouth open, one hand wrapped around his dick and all Ryan could do was stare up at him in awe. This sexual, dirty young man was just riding his dick and giving him the best screw he had in recent memory – maybe even the best screw of his life.

Ryan could already feel himself peaking. He’d not even been fucking Brendon for five minutes before he sighed the boy’s name and spilt his load into the condom. Brendon glared down at him, steadying himself with one palm pressed into Ryan’s chest as he ground down onto his dick and tightened his asshole – it was just one slow, unbearable pressure around him until Brendon started pumping his erection, still fucking himself on Ryan’s cock. Ryan lay there watching him. Brendon came into his palm a few seconds later.

“That was hot,” he smiled. “You’re cute when you come.”

Brendon gave a breathless laugh and pulled himself off Ryan’s dick, flopping down on the mattress next to him.

“I’d like to see you again,” Ryan said, turning to look at the man lying beside him. Brendon turned his head and their noses brushed.

“Me too. I’ll leave you my number. You can call me again if you want. I’m always around.”

Ryan smiled and brushed Brendon’s cheek, watching the soft rise and fall of his chest as he tried to catch his breath. “You’re beautiful,” he whispered. Brendon opened his eyes and smiled at him. “One more kiss and then you can leave.”

Brendon rolled into him and connected their lips.

* * *

Currently there were several things bothering Brendon Urie.

The main one being that he’d just gone against all his morals to please Ryan Ross. When he left the hotel that morning, he did so with a gaping sense of unease in his belly.

He’d broken all the rules last night – but he’d done it for five thousand dollars and that was the only reason, he had to remind himself. It had nothing to do with the fact that he found Ryan attractive, it was all because of the hefty fee. He’d taken drugs; he let Ryan come on his face and when Ryan fucked him, he jerked off, enjoyed it and climaxed. They made out as if it was the most natural thing in the world, but despite the five thousand dollars rolled into the inside pocket of his jacket, Brendon had never felt more guilty.

Ryan Ross was just some spoiled rich kid with a drug problem and Brendon acted like a true slut for him. Ryan made Brendon come – and no one had done that for him in years. None of his clients ever bothered to jerk him off and the few who attempted it in the past had been discouraged from doing so. Brendon didn’t mind getting other people off, after all, that was his job but usually, he couldn’t stand the thought of anyone else doing the same for him.

On rare occasions, Jon would rut up against Brendon until he got hard or until he would attempt to direct Jon’s hand or mouth around his dick - but Jon would always, always pull away. Brendon
never fucked Jon; Jon never fucked Brendon and it was the thing that brought him most misery in life. Sometimes, he would lie in bed and wrap his hand around his cock to relieve himself but sex had lost its intimacy over the years. Often, even the thought of getting himself off completely disgusted him.

Brendon wasn’t meant to enjoy sex. He was embarrassed because he should’ve had a little more poise than that. He imagined how he’d feel if Jon arrived home one morning after not calling and announced he’d been picked up by some cute, young socialite or how he’d feel if Jon then admitted that said socialite made him come, that they made out and slept in the same bed together.

Brendon loved Jon. He loved him more than he ever loved anyone else in his life but Jon had always been totally uninterested in sex. They slept in the same bed every single night and yet the two of them had never done anything more intimate than kissing – maybe one or two drunken gropes back in the day. Jon claimed that sex would just cheapen their relationship, that there was more to love than just fucking. Brendon was consumed with the thought that Jon gave it up to everyone apart from him and now, after a few lines of coke and five grand from someone famous, Brendon had as good as cheated on the man he loved for six years. Jon can’t ever find out about this, he told himself as he walked back to their apartment with a heavy heart.

He should’ve called. He should have called as soon as Ryan Ross made eyes at him from across the bar, but he hadn’t. He’d been so swept away by the man’s soft brown eyes and long fingers and the tone of his voice when he asked him if they could make out that he’d not been able to take even ten seconds out to call his boyfriend and Jon had most likely waited up all night, out of his mind with worry.

Jon was probably going to kill him.

It was close to 10AM by the time Brendon arrived back at their apartment and he opened the door quietly, as slowly as he could, fully prepared for the onslaught of questions Jon would bombard him with as soon as they were stood in front of each other, who and where and how much? Brendon spent his entire walk home making up lies.

When Brendon stepped into the room, Jon was passed out on the bed, still fully clothed with his boots on. He struggled awake as Brendon’s eyes fell on the dirty rectangle of aluminum foil and the lighter and the toilet roll tube littering the mattress next to him.

Brendon sighed and turned away from the bed, giving Jon a chance to blink himself awake and push the evidence of his drug use into the drawer of the side table. He knew how smoking heroin worked; it worked a lot better when you had someone to smoke it with. He wondered who Jon invited over in his absence and even the thought of it pushed an ugly jealousy to the forefront of his chest. He could feel the bile rising up his throat at the image of Jon on his knees for some drug-dealer, sucking dick for a hit of smack.

“Where were you last night?” Jon pushed the words out of his mouth as if it was a struggle to even talk. His eyes were red, his face gaunt – the weight was just dropping off him these days; he didn’t even look like himself. Brendon wondered how long he’d been smoking again. “I was worried.” Yeah? Evidently.

“That lunch date I was telling you about yesterday. The guy paid me for an over-night,” he lied, watching Jon carefully from the corner of his eye. Jon scrubbed his hand over his face and sat hunched over on the edge of the mattress. “He paid me good money,” he added, when Jon didn’t press him for any more information.

“Yeah? How much?”
Brendon hated to think Jon was back to smoking heroin again. Thinking on his feet, he said, “A thousand bucks.”

The lie was snowballing and he didn’t really know why he lied about his fee – probably because five thousand dollars was an obscene amount of money for someone to pay him. Jon would just be up his ass about what he’d done to earn so much and besides, what would Jon say if he found out he slept with Ryan Ross? What would he say if he knew he kissed him? Brendon had taken drugs for the first time in months last night; he let some bratty son of a billionaire finger his asshole with cocaine and now he was lying about it because he needed to save face in front of his drug-addict boyfriend.

“One grand? Fuck,” Jon whistled, straightening up. “How much of that are you going to send off to your parents, huh?” he asked. The question was blunt and Jon’s hands were shaking as he reached for his lighter and sparked up a half-smoked blunt. Brendon sending his money back to Las Vegas to fund his father’s medical treatment was a sore subject between them. Jon didn’t have a family; at least not one who cared about him and he couldn’t understand why Brendon felt the constant need to help his parents out, not when they could be using that money to advance their own lives.

“Some of it. I don’t know, not all of it. We owe that Zack guy at the club, so I guess we can pay him off. He’s always up my ass about how much we owe him; it’ll be good to get him off our backs. He’s friends with some pretty scary dudes,” he rambled – he was nervous. He wondered if Jon would be able to smell Ryan Ross on his skin next time they laid down together or taste him when they made out.

“Dude, one thousand bucks? That’s our month’s rent you earned in just one night and we’re still living in this shithole? Fuck,” Jon sighed with a sad shake of his head. The silence dragged between them. Brendon’s heart was thumping; he just lied and got away with it. Jon believed him without any question. “I bumped into Joe last night.”

Brendon’s heart suddenly clamped up at the mention of that name, his stomach twisted in envy. “Oh.” It came out of his mouth forced and tight and Jon looked up at him from the bed and rolled his eyes.

“Don’t start like that,” he sighed tiredly.

Brendon’s imagination was already filling in blanks for him – Jon and his old friend Joe fucking each other in their bed, Jon with his mouth around his cock before they got high together. “Oh, I’m sorry; did you bump into him, or did he track you down? Because in case you forgot, he has a tendency to do that. Is that who you were smoking heroin with?” Brendon stood there, expecting an answer. When Jon stood to push past him into the bathroom, he grabbed his wrist and yanked him back. “Fucking answer me, Jon, don’t try and hide the truth because I will find out.”

“Yes, okay. Yeah, I was smoking with Joe last night – is that what you wanted to hear? He hit me up, because he’s back in New York and we went out to a bar and then we came back here and we smoked a little junk and where the fuck were you, huh? Not even a phone call, dude – fuck. I try and call your cell and it’s dead – you didn’t come home, so I got high and yeah, Joe was hitting on me. He asked to stay the night but I told him to leave because I was waiting for you, because I love you, Brendon–” he trailed off, his anger quickly losing steam. When he spoke again his voice was softer, more controlled. “Babe, you can’t just do that. You can’t just agree to stay out all night and not call me.”

“I’m sorry,” he mumbled, because he really should have called and he really was sorry – but Jon should no way have smoked heroin with his creepy friend from Chicago at the very first opportunity he had. Brendon didn’t like Joe and he didn’t want Jon hanging out with him, especially after he’d just been informed that Joe had been hitting on him. Brendon expected an apology too. When it
didn’t come, he huffed in annoyance and bit, “So, did you work last night or what?”

“No, I didn’t, but it sounds like you made enough money for the both of us, so I wouldn’t get too upset about it.” Jon frowned at him and pushed past into the bathroom, slamming the door behind him. The sound reverberated around Brendon’s head.

Fuck, Brendon didn’t want Joe Trohman to be back on the scene. He was never anything but trouble – some cocky asshole that Jon knew from Chicago or through Pete Wentz, one of the two; Brendon never really paid much attention to the details of Jon’s past; especially when it came to that prick, Pete.

He sat down on the bed and pushed his head into his hands. He wished it were just him and Jon – none of these friends from Jon’s past turning up at the door without warning. They could maybe move out to Vegas together and start afresh; they could rent a house and they wouldn’t need to hook and Jon could get clean and they’d be happy out there – somewhere no one would find them, where they wouldn’t have to worry about angry dealers knocking down their door in the middle of the night. Somewhere Pete Wentz and his cronies wouldn’t be able to threaten their relationship.

Brendon sighed and pulled his fee from Ryan Ross out of his jacket pocket as soon as he heard the shower start. He counted it through quickly – it was all there, all five thousand dollars of it, plus the grand he’d blackmailed out of his client, Marc the previous afternoon. It seemed like a lifetime ago that he was stood in that fucker’s office watching him sweat.

He hid the money at the back of the closet, in the pocket of an old winter coat he’d not worn in years – somewhere Jon would never look and then he lingered at the bathroom door, his fingers wrapped around the handle. When he pushed it open, the bathroom was foggy with condensation – he could see Jon’s body through the frosted glass of the shower door and brushed his teeth to clean Ryan’s taste out of his mouth before shucking his clothes and stepping under the water behind him.

“I’m sorry,” he sighed again, dipping his lips between Jon’s shoulder blades. “I should’ve called.”

Jon shrugged. “You’ll be the death of me, Brendon, seriously.”

“I love you,” Brendon told him, pressing his grin against Jon’s bony shoulder.

“Yeah. I love you too.” He felt Jon relax under his touch. “Remember that next time some weird, old pervert pays you to spend the night with him.”

Brendon’s smile faltered as Jon turned in his arms and pressed their lips together. He opened his mouth against Jon’s tongue and held the back of his head. After a short, heated moment Brendon wound his other hand around the swell of Jon’s ass and kneaded his cheeks. He pushed forward into the kiss, backing Jon against the cold Plexiglas of the shower cubical. Brendon’s dick was hard between their bodies when he felt Jon’s muscles tense as he pushed him away.

“Sorry,” Jon mumbled, rinsing the last of the soap off his body. “I can’t do that, you know?”

“I wish you could,” Brendon mentioned, a distinct amount of hope in his voice.

“Damn, me too, baby. Maybe one day - but don’t hold your breath.” He watched Jon step out of the shower and wrap a towel around his waist, leaving Brendon with a painful boner between his legs. If Brendon had been a smart man, he’d have pinpointed that morning as the very beginning of the end of him and Jon Walker, but instead he finished his shower and jerked off under the cold stream of water.
After Brendon left, Ryan called Shane.

“Bro, I’m on strict orders not to help you out,” Shane whispered down the phone. “If your dad finds out, I’m fuckin’ fired, dude.”

“Please!” Ryan cried. There was definitely no way in hell that Shane - his driver, Shane - was going to say no to him. “I’ll give you like, five hundred bucks if you do me this one favor – just an eight ball of coke, that’s all I’m asking for.”

Shane sighed heavily and then silence flooded his cellphone. Ryan battled a grin, imagining Shane’s jaw setting in frustration, knowing he already convinced his driver to do his bidding. Shane rarely said no to extra cash.

“You owe me, dude. Big time.”

Ryan let out a small noise of victory and flopped back on the hotel bed with a triumphant smile on his face. “You’re amazing. I love you, you know that, right?”

“Bro, whatever. I’ll pick up for you, man, but I’m not doing this shit on the reg’ – this is a one-time thing, okay? If your dad finds out I’m doing this for you-”

“Sure, okay. Whatever,” Ryan interjected, waving off Shane’s trepidations. “What George Ross doesn’t know, won’t hurt him, right?”

He gave his instructions over the cellphone – he was staying at the Peninsula on Fifth Avenue. Be here as quickly as possible and I’ll make it worth your while, he promised Shane before he hung up.

With the knowledge his drugs would soon be on their way, Ryan relaxed against the mattress and fantasized about Brendon’s tight asshole – he could still smell him on his skin and on the sheets of the bed and he let his hand slip inside the waistband of his underwear as he felt himself grow hard at the memory.

Ryan was wondering whether to commit to jerking off when William’s name flashed on the screen on his iPhone. For a short second, he thought about ignoring it. William would only be calling to remind him of some tedious lunch date or family gathering or birthday party… Oh. Shit. He’d totally forgotten about Pamela’s goddamn birthday party. He brought his cellphone to his ear.

“What?” he barked.

“Ryan, where the hell are you? I’ve been outside your apartment for half an hour. We got to drive all the way up to Suffolk County, dude. I’m well aware. I’m waiting for Shane. I’m on my way home.”

“I spent last night at a hotel, Bill. I’m like, seven blocks from home – Jesus, keep your goddamn hair on. I hadn’t forgotten about mom’s thing,” he lied.

“I have to be at my parents’ place at midday, I’m well aware. I’m waiting for Shane. I’m on my way home.”
William huffed. “Oh, waiting for Shane are you? I see. You do realize you’re meant to be sober for your stepmother’s birthday party, don’t you? Donald Trump is going to be there. Oprah’s been invited – I don’t think your dad wants you turning up high.”

“William – please,” Ryan simpered, ignoring his PA’s apprehensions. “Shane is on his way to pick me up and he’ll drop me right off at the front door. It’s all going to be fine, William. I promise.”

William grumbled down the line to him for another minute but eventually agreed to sit tight and wait for him to arrive home. Ryan knew there’d been something he was forgetting. Pamela’s birthday totally slipped his mind between the sex and the coke and Brendon’s beautiful ass last night and he hated to sound selfish, but her birthday was the very least of his priorities this morning. Conversing with his father’s friends or rubbing shoulders with America’s richest entrepreneurs was not the way he wanted to spend his afternoon. All he wanted to do was get high, order room service and laze around watching porn.

His dick now soft and all memories of Brendon the Hooker slipping away, he decided to shower; he didn’t want to turn up at his parents’ house stinking of sex. However, despite his rough coke-hangover, he’d been craving a morning like this for months – the sweat at the back of his neck, the dried come on his stomach, his muscles aching from such enthusiastic sex. It was different with a hooker than it was with boys he picked up at clubs or celebrity parties. It felt dirtier, grimier… more taboo.

He liked paying someone to fuck someone – there was no shame in that - and loaning Brendon’s ass and throat for the evening had certainly been a wise purchase. He thought about him as he showered and jerked his dick, thinking about his ass in the air as he came into his palm in the middle of the carpet.

When Shane showed up with the coke forty minutes later, Ryan was relieved. He cut two fat lines immediately and snorted them off the tabletop, offering the straw to Shane.

“I’m on the clock, bro,” Shane sulked, shaking his head. He paused, watching Ryan as he hunched over the table. “Y’all gonna be getting to your parents’ place on time? I’ve heard from Jacob that your dad’s been stressing about this party for months. He’s gone all out, apparently. Ice sculptures and shit – one of those big-ass champagne pyramid things, you know what I’m talking about? They’re actually pretty sick.”

“Yes, Shane. They’re called champagne fountains and they’re so 1975. Oprah’s going to be there,” Ryan told his driver with a roll of his eyes. “I doubt she’s going to be impressed with a champagne fountain. They’re so lame.”

“If by lame you mean cool-as-fuck then yeah.” Shane cackled and moved to sit on the couch next to Ryan. “One little bump won’t hurt, will it?” His driver cut himself a small line and pulled a grubby five-dollar bill from the pocket of his slacks.

Ryan wrinkled his nose in disgust. “Do you know how dirty money is, Shane?” he asked, watching him. “I wouldn’t be putting that up my nose, no fucking way.”

“You’re using it to sniff coke, bro. This shit’s probably been cut three or four times since it left Columbia and you’re tripping over a dirty bill?” Shane took another bump. “Speaking of which, you owe me. Pay up, motherfucker.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Ryan waved a dismissive hand. “I’ll transfer the money into your account when I get the chance. First, I need a lift back to my apartment.” Ryan gathered up his drugs and rubbed at his nose. “I’m going to be late. Bill’s going to be pissed.” The paranoia was already kicking in hard with
This batch of coke. He pinched his nose between his fingers. “Fuck. My dad’s going to kill me.”

It wasn’t often Ryan regretted taking drugs, but when he arrived at his parents’ house after constantly doing bumps in the backseat on the drive there he really began to wish he hadn’t got so high.

His parents owned a mansion on an eight-acre plot of land on the eastern side of Long Island. Ryan spent a lot of his early childhood there with his siblings, being cared for by his stepmother while his father worked out in Manhattan. The property was on the shores of Mecox Bay – residing in the fourteenth most expensive zip-code area in the United States and Ryan hated the place; slap bang in the middle of nowhere, Ryan saw it as nothing more than a huge sprawling white house, nestled on some forgettable waterfront – it wasn’t a home. It was merely unused rooms and grand interior furnishings - like something out of a goddamn catalogue.

As a youngster, Ryan had been restless living out in the country but in the most abstract sense, he had fond memories of the place – Thanksgivings with Gabe and his family, his first joint out on the jetty at thirteen, summers spent with friends, jumping in that freezing cold bay without any clothes on… The house had recently been valued at fifty million dollars, something his father was very proud of - being as he bought the place during a market slump - but these days his family only spent a fraction of their time there, a handful of holidays and a few weeks during the summer when George and Pamela needed a break from the city.

He was trying to slip past George without being spotted when he heard his father call his name from across the room. He paused mid-step and thought about ignoring him and just carrying on his merry way towards the champagne fountain, but he turned and shuffled towards his father. “What the hell do you think you’re doing?” he spat through gritted teeth as his son approached, grabbing his arm and pulling him off to the side.

Ryan had to concentrate very hard on trying to appear sober. He knew he looked high, he could feel his top lip sweating, the anxiety that he just wanted to smother with more drugs was creeping up his spine.

“I was looking for Gabe. Is he here?”

“You knew it was Pamela’s birthday today, I told you about it yesterday. Are you high, Ryan? I swear to god, son, you’re going to send me to an early grave. I got other things to think about today without having to worry about you – I thought I could trust you!” George looked away and shook his head with a jaded sigh. If there was an Oscar for Most Ashamed Male Parent, George Ross would probably win it. “This is William’s fault; not doing his damned job properly again. I asked him to make sure you were sober when you arrived and look at you-”

“This isn’t Bill’s fault,” Ryan interjected weakly.

George Ross was angry - vein poppingly angry, his face bright red. Ryan had never seen him looking so stressed before and it was actually a little disconcerting. He couldn’t do anything right this morning – Bill was pissed at him, his father was fuming, his stepmom was about to have her day ruined by his high ass… He shouldn’t have even bothered getting up this morning, he thought. It had all gone downhill after that escort left.

“You get upstairs and you sober yourself up immediately, you little bastard. I’m not having you ruin another family party. Shower. Sober up. Now. You got one hour.”

“Fuck, dad, you’re beginning to sound like my PA,” he mumbled as he turned away.

Six months ago, Ryan’s sister turned thirty-five and her husband organized a party for her in Los
Angeles. It was a very glitzy affair, held at the Chateau Marmont - full of press and photographers, attended by only the finest millionaires in the land - so, in an act of defiance against The System, he and Gabe turned up to the party on acid. A lot of acid. Within a half hour of arriving, Ryan started tripping that his clothes were made of poison oak and he stripped down naked and stumbled through the hallways of the Chateau Marmont at nine in the evening to the hotel restaurant which was full of LA’s elite. He’d been arrested for swearing at guests, butt-naked in the lobby.

He spent the night in a police cell just off of Sunset Boulevard – a far cry from the suite he’d been booked into at the Chateau Marmont. His father bailed him out the next morning and Ryan was released with a caution. On his sister’s special day, all the spotlight was on him – after Ryan’s arrest, the party descended into madness, press and photographers filmed Ryan’s entire meltdown. Pamela cried, his dad used his Stern Voice and told him there’d be repercussions if he broke the law again.

I’ll cut you off, he threatened and Ryan just rolled his eyes and thought, I’ll believe that when I see it. His sister refused to talk to him for two months – he eventually apologized but she still held a grudge against him, the petty bitch.

On his way through the house, Ryan spotted Gabe loitering alone at the bar and whistled for his attention. Gabe was immaculately groomed and dressed in an expensive-looking navy blue suit. Ryan always envied Gabe’s dashing good looks – his lean physique and high cheekbones. Gabe Saporta was an incredibly attractive man. Perfect in every way, Ryan often thought – apart from his huge-ass ego and ceaseless audacity. When Ryan caught his gaze, Gabe rolled his dark eyes and started towards him.

“Thank god you’re here. I was just about to hang myself from the chandelier,” he said, mimicking a noose with his tie and flopping his tongue out of his mouth. He cast his eyes glumly around the room. “This party sucks. I just spent the last twenty minutes talking to Richard Branson about the weather in England. You got any blow, amigo? Because – and no offense or nothing, dude, but you look pretty chalked up. Fuck, man. Go easy on that shit, it’s only fifteen past noon.” Gabe elbowed his ribs and chuckled.

“Do I really look that high?” he worried, trying to relax his face, trying hard not to grind his teeth. Ryan was feeling restless – his stepmother’s birthday party was full of guests he didn’t know and had no intention of conversing with in his current state. It made him anxious.

“You look real high, fool. Rough one last night, was it?” his friend asked with an arched brow.

“Shit, man – you wouldn’t believe the night I had last night…” He was about to launch into a detailed description of that Brendon character and his non-existent gag-reflex when he spotted a tall, attractive blonde approaching them purposefully from across the marble floor, her heels click, click, clicking until she came to a stop beside Gabe.

The woman was incredibly attractive. Ryan wanted to fuck her – she was tall and skinny, small tits and big blue eyes. He glanced back over at Gabe, waiting to be introduced.

“Ryan, this is Erin. She’s a fashion designer from San Francisco,” Gabe told him, winding his arm around Erin’s slim waist. “She designed this suit especially for this very occasion, isn’t she talented?” His friend’s dark eyes twinkled as he opened his jacket, cocking his hip like a model. “I look good, huh?”

Ryan suddenly took an immediate dislike to Gabe’s stupid suit and glanced dismissively over at his date to try and find something he disliked about her as well. “You two are dating?” he asked dubiously, waving his finger between them both.
“Well…” Gabe Saporta actually blushed. “We’ve been spending a lot of time together recently. Nothing official though – don’t go running to the press quite yet,” he laughed, the color rising on his cheeks.

“It’s so lovely to meet you,” Erin said, holding out her hand with a sincere smile. Her voice was soft and pleasant and her hand was warm when he took it. “Gabe’s told me a lot about you.”

“Oh yeah? You listen to all that gossip, do you?” He pouted at the woman and folded his arms across his chest. She glanced nervously over at Gabe for some support.


Ryan forced a smile. “So, I have the coke you were asking for,” he said, hoping to trip the ballsy fucker up in front of his new girlfriend. He knew Gabe pretty well and if there was one thing he hated, it was being shown up in front of people he was trying to impress. He shifted his eyes over at Erin to gauge her reaction.

“Brilliant!” his friend enthused, rubbing his hands together. “You got enough for the three of us, right?”

Ryan huffed an annoyed sigh. No such luck. Gabe was too much of a charmer to let any of Ryan’s head games faze him. Grudgingly, he nodded his head and led the way up the grand marble staircase to his bedroom.

All Ryan wanted to talk about was his experience with Brendon the previous night and now he was being forced into strained conversation with Gabe’s latest female screw. He wanted to go into detail about how the guy rimmed him in the shower and just how tight his ass had been, and of course, he’d leave out the fact that the dude was a hooker and that he paid him five grand, but he and Gabe hadn’t had a minute alone together since this chick Erin showed up.

Ryan didn’t like her. She turned Gabe into a simpering idiot and he sighed as he watched them teasing each other and flirting between lines of coke off the mirrored dresser. He snuck bumps as they canoodled on the bed and when Erin got up and excused herself to the bathroom, Ryan looked pointedly over at Gabe and asked, “So, what’s up with that chick, huh? Is she down for a threesome or what?”

Gabe furrowed his brows. “She’s a potential girlfriend, homes and I actually really like her – she’s not just some socialite wannabe, so no – there’ll be no threesome this time.”

“What? Afraid she’ll like my dick more than yours?” Ryan waggled his eyebrows – he only said it to try and rile his friend up. He’d stolen a couple of Gabe’s love interests in the past. It wasn’t Ryan’s fault that women wanted him so much.

“Well, I’m definitely not afraid of that seeing as there’s no way in hell it’d happen. I just like her,” he said with a small shrug of his shoulder. “She’s smart and she’s interesting and she’s driven – not to mention drop-dead gorgeous, am I right?”

Ryan hummed, not wanting to commit to an answer. Gabe’s date was indeed beautiful – the exact kind of woman he always imagined Gabe falling in love with but Ryan didn’t want to give Gabe the pleasure of knowing he was jealous.

It was a sad state of affairs when even a serial womanizer like Gabe Saporta was now thinking about settling down and going steady with a girl. Everyone was growing up around him – his sister was
married with kids, his brother had been dating the same, beautiful woman for four or five years, *Gabe* was playing it cool in front of a new “potential girlfriend” and what did Ryan have to show for his love life? About eight hundred one-night stands and a black book full of names he couldn’t remember.

“Are you planning on showing your face this afternoon?” Gabe asked him once Erin returned from the bathroom. They stood at the threshold of the door, her hands hooked over his shoulder. They looked good together. Ryan fucking hated them. “No offense, dude but this party kinda blows. We’re probably going to duck out pretty soon anyway. Snoop Dogg’s hosting a club night back in the city and yours truly here is the guest of honor,” he continued, splaying his hand proudly across his chest. “Your boy Franco’s going to be there – we’ll be smoking major weed, bro. I’d invite you as my Plus One, but…” He pointed to Erin as she giggled into his shoulder.

“I understand,” Ryan snapped. *Like he needed to be Gabe Saporta’s Plus One! What a fucking asshole,* he thought as he took another line. He was *Ryan Ross* – he could do whatever the fuck he wanted and if he wanted to turn up at Snoop Dogg’s party and smoke weed with James Franco then he sure as hell could do that – he didn’t need to be on any guest list for that shit.

He flopped down on the mattress and felt his head swell – his day had gone from mildly okay to absolutely fucking awful. Gabe could fuck off back to Manhattan with his new girlfriend for all he cared. He didn’t need *anyone* – not Gabe or his dad or William or any nameless, faceless fame-hungry socialite he could pick up at any club on any day of the week. He cut himself another thick line and pushed up from the dresser, his head soaring.

When he eventually made his way downstairs, Ryan was gripped by an almost debilitating panic that everyone was watching him, silently judging his behavior. He didn’t want to converse with anyone, so he sat astride a barstool next to the champagne fountain and accepted every glass the waiter offered him.

He wanted to get back to Manhattan – his parents’ house in the country was stifling him; he wanted to be able to kick back and relax in his own apartment, maybe smoke some weed, get started on that expensive 1937 Glenfiddich whisky and call Brendon to come sit on his cock.

When he next saw his father, he was still sat at the bar, throwing his sixth glass of champagne down his neck. George stood in front of him, wrestled the empty glass from the clasp of Ryan’s fingers and held eye contact with his son.

“Leave. Just go, Ryan, you’re embarrassing yourself.”

“I’m fine, honestly. I’m just putting the champagne fountain to good use – no one else seems to be into it. Shane would like this. You really should’ve invited him today, he’d love this,” he babbled.

“Just leave, son. No one wants you here when you’re high. William’s waiting for you outside,” his father told him, before turning away and disappearing like an apparition into the crowd of party guests.

Ryan managed to snag a spare bottle of champagne from the hapless young waiter and walked down the steps of the grand entrance towards his car. He’d have felt guilty, if he hadn’t been quite so high on coke. William’s expression was sour and he didn’t say anything when Ryan climbed into the back and popped the cork out of his freebie.

After another quarter bottle, as they drove across Long Island back toward Manhattan, Ryan pulled up Brendon’s contact on his iPhone and pressed *call.*
On a regular night, Brendon and Jon would go out just as soon as it got dark. It was just turning winter in New York and Brendon was alone in the apartment.

He decided not to work that evening and when he had the place to himself, he had a tendency to grow anxious. He lay back on the bed and closed his eyes but he couldn’t shut off his mind – every cop car blazing by outside, every angry word shouted from the apartment below them or above them, would jolt him back to reality with a racing heart. When he was home alone with nothing to occupy his thoughts, he found it hard not to think of Jon stood on his street corner – the same one he’d been hustling since he was sixteen years old and once he allowed himself that small thought, he found it almost impossible to shake that nagging feeling of unease out of the pit of his stomach.

The change in the seasons meant longer nights for the two men and Jon left an hour ago, asking wistfully after the money that Brendon made the previous night.

That was the reason he hadn’t been honest with his friend about how much he earned – because Jon was a fucking irresponsible drug-addict, a junkie - and if he knew about the five grand hidden away at the back of the closet, the cash would be wasted on brown within a month. Brendon reasoned with himself time and time again that the only reason Jon hadn’t OD’d yet was because he never had enough money.

Jon’s parents were alcoholics – and both their parents before that so it was no surprise that he too struggled his whole life with addiction. His father was violent, a gambler who was rarely home and his desperate mother had put a gun in her mouth and shot herself the day before Jon’s thirteenth birthday. The only words Jon ever said to Brendon about it were an impassive; “I never knew a human could be filled with so much blood.”

When he met Pete Wentz a couple of years later, Jon claimed it felt like he finally found a friend – someone who understood him, someone who cared - and he’d have done anything that fool asked. After his mom died, he buried all the grief deep inside him and built an armor that he never let anyone slip off him - not until he met Pete, that is. Jon turned into a very sexually precarious teen – experimenting at a young age because his parents weren’t around to love him.

He stopped going to school and started sneaking out of his father’s house at night - his dad was always passed out by the early evening, too drunk to care and even in rare moments of sobriety, he never paid too much attention to what his young son was doing. Jon started smoking and shoplifting and drinking to impress his older friends. In Jon’s eyes, Pete was this impossibly cool twenty-one year old, handsome and confident and everything Jon wished he was. With his sky-high charisma and access to illegal drugs and booze, it was simply inevitable that he fell for him, Jon explained once – much to Brendon’s dismay because from the very moment they were introduced Brendon had wholeheartedly blamed this Pete Wentz for his friend’s downfall. He despised that slimy prick and his shit-eating grin and the fact Jon was seemingly still under Pete’s spell after all these years really tested Brendon’s patience for the man.

In return for weed and cheap beer - and later for small amounts of coke and heroin, Jon would suck Pete’s dick and allow Pete’s friends to fuck him in the box-room of Pete’s Chicago apartment. They were living together before Jon even turned sixteen and he hadn’t really minded at first – the endless stream of men who would drop by especially to fuck him. After all, the drugs kept him high and he really enjoyed sex. Jon hadn’t known it at the time, but the men who fucked him paid Pete for the privilege – word got around that Pete Wentz had a slutty fifteen year old boy who never said no to
anyone living with him and he earned the man a pretty penny - but Jon never saw a dime of it.

When Jon eventually started getting cocky and insolent, once he found his feet, Pete cut off his drug supply and told Jon he didn’t like boys who had smart mouths. Jon threatened to leave and Pete let him go – only to pick him up again a week later with a bitchy I told you so. You can’t live without me, on his lips. Pete needed Jon, but Jon needed Pete a hell of a lot more and after that episode, Pete started locking him in his bedroom and jamming the windows. Jon wouldn’t leave the house for days, sometimes even weeks at a time.

Men would drop by, get high and then pay to fuck him. When Jon made enough money, he was allowed a hit or two, enough to keep him high until the next pervert started banging on his bedroom door and Jon would lay there, doped up and longing for the part where Pete would slip into bed beside him.

Pete would fuck him, sometimes they would make love and Pete would tell Jon; “I love you, I love you, I love you so much.” When Pete fucked him, Jon felt complete. Nothing hurt. He felt loved. Pete would bite his promises into Jon’s shoulder at night; “We’ll get out of here one day. The two of us. We’ll go to LA or Miami or New York City and you won’t ever have to come back to Chicago. You’re mine, Jon. Anyone hurts you, anyone tries to take you away, I’ll kill ‘em – and then Pete would say it all over again; I love you, I love you, you’re mine, I love you.”

All this at only fifteen years old.

Only once - a long time ago, just after he and Jon had first met - had Brendon attempted to get his friend to see the light, to realize how utterly disgusting that situation was. Pete was in his twenties, hanging around a bunch of fifteen and sixteen year old kids; Brendon sure knew a few colorful names he could use to describe Pete but even six years after cutting his ties with the man, Jon wouldn’t dare utter a bad word against Pete Wentz. It was almost as if Jon had a serious case of Stockholm Syndrome – either that or Pete was some brainwashing mastermind, because Pete’s despicable little games were plain for everyone to see – everyone it seemed, apart from Jon.

When Brendon met him for the first time, he noticed the stupid look of absolute awe on Jon’s face every time he looked at Pete. He noticed how Pete head-fucked him into going along with everything he said – into giving him thirty percent of his cut or working with tricks Jon didn’t like. Brendon hated him. He always prayed that Jon would one day look at him the same way he used to look at Pete.

Six years later and he was still waiting.

It was almost 6PM when his phone rang. He frowned. He didn’t want to work tonight and he didn’t want to talk with any bossy clients. Brendon furrowed his brows and reached across the bedside for his cellphone. He knew he should just cancel the call, silence his ringtone and try and get some much deserved rest - but a suspicion in the back of his mind piqued his interest.

“Hey, sexy. What are you wearing?”

Brendon looked down at his checkered pajama pants with the hole at the crotch and then back out at the room. His heart contracted behind his ribs, his stomach flipped as he tried to place a familiar voice he couldn’t quite put a face to. He stayed quiet long enough that the man on the other end of the line spoke up again.

“Brendon. This is Ryan Ross. I’m assuming you remember me.”

“Ryan Ross,” he mumbled. Of course it was. His stomach somersaulted, he felt like all the air had
been squeezed out of him in one short, hard burst and his heart thumped out of time at the memory of last night – of him on his knees, jerking off after Ryan Ross fucked him.

On the other end of the line, Brendon heard Ryan’s quiet laugh. “Hi,” he chuckled and then, after a long pause, “So, baby – what are you wearing? Are you hard?”

Brendon faltered over his words, wondering how to answer a question like that without feeling stupid – he was an escort, not a phone sex operator. “Umm?”

“I’m kidding. I’m just teasing you. How are you tonight, Brendon?”

Brendon bit his lip. No one had asked him that in months. Jon didn’t count. A simple how are you made his heart want to explode from his chest. “I’m okay. I’m actually pretty good.”

“Did I disturb you?”

“No.”

Ryan paused. “Good. Are you free tonight?”

Brendon considered his answer quickly – a hundred scenarios running through his brain in the split second it took for him to say, “Yes. I am.”

“Well, that’s great news. You made quite an impression on me last night. I’d like to see you again.”

“When?”

“I’m just getting into Manhattan. How about I pick you up at eight? Same rules as before, I’d like you to stay until the morning – two grand up front and I’ll pay you what I deem suitable tomorrow morning.”

Brendon pushed his hand to his head and rubbed at his temple. “You’ll pay me five grand,” he told him. “All of it - up front.” Well, it wasn’t like this guy didn’t have the money...

“Oh, the little bitch can bite. Fine – five grand, all up front, but I want to see you swallow my come.”

Brendon let out a small laugh and felt his face burn up. He didn’t do that with clients and he wasn’t about to start bending the rules for Ryan Ross. Ryan was a pretty face but so what? It shouldn’t make any difference - Brendon felt like some awestruck teenager meeting his favorite hero.

“Come on,” Ryan cajoled when Brendon didn’t answer immediately. “I didn’t think hookers could refuse cash money, player.”

“Boys like me?” Brendon asked, raising one eyebrow with a smirk. “What’s that meant to mean?” He lay back on the bed and scratched idly at his chest, his lips still curled up at the edges.

“It means I didn’t think hookers could refuse cash money, player.”

His smile faltered. He asked for that - he couldn’t rightfully get upset over Ryan’s answer. “Well,” he sighed. “I don’t usually swallow for anyone, Mr. Ross – even the men who pay me lots of money - but if you want to see that then I’m sure we can come to an agreement about the finer details when you pick me up? For five thousand dollars, Ryan, I think we’ve got a deal.”

“Wow, you even talk like a fucking hooker,” Ryan laughed. “It’s as if you’re reading off a script.
What is there, some *Escort 101* you have to memorize before you hit the streets? You know, how to suck incredible dick and talk like a dirty little slut?” The last three words shot from Ryan’s lips like bullets.

Brendon breathed another laugh. The insults he learned to ignore over the years sounded different coming out of Ryan’s mouth. Brendon’s dick stirred at the sound of them. Ryan was smarter than most of his other clients - not that that was any mean feat - but his other tricks never caught on to all the same, practiced lines he gave them.

Observant and smart he may be, but humble he certainly wasn’t. Brendon guessed that made sense though - Ryan was just some spoiled, rich kid who’d never done a day’s work in his life. It must be difficult to be humble when everyone around you thinks the sun shines out of your ass.

Ryan flirted with him down the phone for another couple of minutes before hanging up. Or at least it was probably his idea of flirting – Ryan’s seduction consisted of veiled insults and constant references to his profession.

He thought about the money he’d hidden from Jon at the back of the closet. He’d have ten grand by tomorrow morning – they could move out of Manhattan with that amount of money. Maybe upstate somewhere; somewhere out in the country or maybe down south – Miami or Cuba, somewhere warm...

*Or* they could stay put in their shitty rented room, paying one thousand dollars a month to live in the worst neighborhood in New York, paying off people that Jon borrowed money from and scraping by day-to-day.

He looked around the room, almost in a daze. He suddenly had plans for the evening. His ass needed a rest, his muscles were still aching from the previous night but the guilt he felt when leaving the hotel that morning was subsiding. Brendon would take the physical pain over the internal guilt any day of the week. He pushed his hand through his hair and stood from the bed, looking at his reflection in the mirror.

*Five thousand dollars,* he thought to himself. *That’s how much you’re worth tonight.* He remembered the old saying, “It’s only worth as much as someone’s willing to pay for it” and sighed quietly at the irony.

He locked himself in the bathroom, gave himself an enema, shaved his balls and his crack and scrubbed himself clean. When his cellphone rang again at ten minutes past eight, he was perfecting his look in the mirror. For once he actually felt pretty good about himself – he got a little high off a half-smoked blunt he found in the ashtray and he was feeling languid and relaxed. *Well,* considering he was on his way to fuck one of the most famous celebrities in the world.

“I’m outside, Brendon. Don’t keep me waiting,” Ryan’s curt voice said into the phone – and then the line went dead. Brendon peeked out between the blinds and looked down onto the street to see a sleek, black Mercedes SUV pulled up outside his building, indicators blinking. Brendon hadn’t wanted to give Ryan his address, but the man had been insistent. He pulled his jacket on over his shoulders and scribbled out a quick note to Jon, leaving it on the side table.

Had to go out. Be back later.

*Love u.*

B xxxx

When Brendon exited the building, he faltered on the top step. He was risking a lot for this – Ryan Ross was one of the most famous men in America. What if they were caught? His face would be in
all the newspapers; Jon would probably leave him for being so dishonest, his parents would discover
the secret he’d always sworn he’d take to his grave… He’d do time for solicitation and become a
little jail-bitch. *Fuck…*

He should turn away right now, walk back up to the apartment and refuse to have anything to do
with the man. He was certain that this couldn’t end well, but when he saw the back door of the SUV
open, he walked towards it and didn’t stop until he was sat in the back seat, smiling confidently over
at Ryan Ross as if he hadn’t a care in the world - his poker face, the mask he carved so well.

“Good evening, Mr. Ross,” he grinned, turning in to face him as he brushed their legs together. Ryan
was wearing sunglasses. In the back of a blacked out Mercedes. While it was dark outside. Brendon
had to suppress a grin. “How are you, Ryan?”

“High as a kite, man. What’s up? Having second thoughts up there?” he asked, rubbing his nose and
nodding through the window towards the stairs of his building.

Brendon just smiled. “Not at all,” he lied. “What’s with the glasses, huh? What, are you ashamed of
me?” he teased, brushing Ryan’s hair behind his ear.

“What have I got to be ashamed of? You’re the one that should be ashamed – you’re the hooker.”

Brendon paused, taken aback by the candor of his statement. Last night, Ryan acted like an almost-
perfect gentleman. He’d been generous and charming and Brendon almost felt something akin to
fondness for the man, but this evening he was already beginning to feel uneasy. This poor, little rich
boy with his designer sunglasses and chauffeur-driven SUV had no idea about the real world.

He didn’t know what it was like to lie back, night after night, flat on his back and let men fuck him
for enough money so he could pay his bills. Ryan would never be able to comprehend those feelings
of shame and guilt and self-hate that would paralyze him when he felt these men pull out of him and
tug off their condom. He didn’t know what it was like saying goodbye to Jon every evening and
wondering whether they’d both still be alive the next day to say good morning.

Ryan had his perfect, celebrity lifestyle – he had everything handed to him on a plate - he didn’t
know what it was like to love someone like Jon, someone who was intent on destroying himself,
someone who couldn’t even stand being touched because any kind of intimacy made him completely
shut down. That motherfucker had no idea…

“Well, I’m just making ends meet, Ryan. Not everyone’s got a nice trust fund like you.”

Ryan turned to him and took off his sunglasses. “You got a smart fucking mouth, haven’t you?
Demanding your full fee up front – acting like a little bitch as soon as you get in the car. If I were
you, I’d shut the fuck up because I can kick you to the curb at any time.”

He’d been trying to keep it light-hearted, just testing out the waters to see how far he could push the
man – apparently not very far, it would seem. The dude needed to slow down with the cocaine, that
shit was turning him into a monster. Out of his peripherals, he could see Ryan slowly unzipping his
slacks and pulling out his cock.

“Eyes front. Stop staring at me,” Brendon heard him say. He glanced over at Ryan and followed his
gaze to the rearview mirror, catching his driver’s eye before looking quickly away in
embarrassment.

“Are you fuckin’ kidding me right now?” the man in the front seat spat, eyes cold in the rearview.
“This is actually happening. You’re actually going to do this?”
Ryan kicked his feet into the back of the driver’s seat. “Just watch the road, motherfucker.” He shimmied his pants down to mid thigh and held his cock out for Brendon. “Come on - suck me off,” he urged, sliding his arm around Brendon’s shoulders, pushing him down into his lap.

Brendon pushed against the force. “We should maybe… y’know?” he waved his finger in the driver’s direction, but Ryan’s dick was right there, hard and red and mere inches from his mouth. “Wait?”

“Oh, don’t worry about Shane – he’s my most trusted employee. What happens in this car stays in this car. Right, Shane?”

The driver shook his head. “You’re a fuckin’ asshole,” he muttered under his breath.

Ryan’s arm was still around his shoulders, and this time Brendon went with the pressure, opening his mouth around Ryan’s dick as he slid it between his lips. Ryan’s entire body turned slack against the backseat when Brendon twirled his tongue around the head and he could feel just how much Ryan wanted this. He could feel it in the way the muscles in his thighs quaked and the stretch of his fingers as Ryan gripped his hair. Brendon let Ryan feed his dick down his throat until his lips were brushing against his neat pubic hair. Brendon shifted off the seat and slid to his knees in front of him, slowly bobbing his head.

If there was one thing that Brendon enjoyed about his job, it was giving head to clients with nice dicks. He knew he was good at it – it was kind of like being paid to show off and when he was going down on a trick, he knew he was giving them the best blowjob of their life. It made him feel good about himself. Small victories, he used to think to himself every time he successfully managed to get a client off with his tongue.

It still turned him on to suck a nice, big cock down his throat and there was no one he hated admitting that to more than himself. Brendon pulled off, lapped at the leaking head of Ryan’s dick and nuzzled his balls, taking them both into his mouth. He allowed himself a sneak peak up at Ryan. His eyes were closed, his Adam’s apple bobbing in his throat as he swallowed his moans and after a minute, Ryan wrapped his hand around his cock and started jerking himself off.

Brendon always found it fascinating watching the different ways in which men masturbated – Ryan was slow and steady, he tightened his palm on the down stroke and grazed the pad of his thumb over his slit on the up. He’d remember that one for future reference.

“How, Brendon. Kiss me,” Ryan groaned. God - and that tone… he sounded totally broken, completely desperate. It was as if Ryan’s plea had given way to his true voice - as if he just dropped character for the first time since they met. Maybe Ryan Ross wore a mask too.

The air was hot and Brendon pushed up from the floor of the vehicle and leaned his lips against Ryan’s. Their tongues pressed against each other, slow and unhurriedly – the exact kind of kiss he’d give Jon. Brendon could taste the alcohol on the man’s lips as they made-out and when he felt the telltale flexing of Ryan’s abs under him, he wrapped his fingers around Ryan’s cock and matched his strokes. Ryan’s hand soon fell away and it wasn’t long before Brendon had reduced him to a sticky, heaving mess on the backseat of the car. Ryan’s come was decorating Brendon’s fingers and once he kissed the man through the aftershocks, he pulled away against the cool car window.

Ryan folded his cock away, pulled up his slacks and adjusted his hair. Brendon wasn’t sure what to do with his sticky fingers so he let the come dry on them and watched the lights of the city flashing past the window.

“Hey.” He felt Ryan’s voice, hot and heavy next to his ear, his fingers hooked around his neck,
pulling him against his shoulder. “Giving you money makes me want to come.”

“Well then, come,” Brendon answered as he felt the fingers grip tighter around his neck.
Chapter 10

Last night had been a blur. When Ryan woke up, it was nearing 1PM.

As soon as he arrived at the hotel with Brendon, he remembered ordering the most expensive bottle of whiskey available from room service and as he cracked his eyes open and groaned at the pain in his head and his unsettled stomach, it was pretty obvious that he’d gone hard on the booze last night.

He blinked at the offending bottle on the bedside table – a thirty year old, four hundred dollar bottle of scotch that he bought just because it was the most expensive thing available. Some people worked hard to be able to afford nice bottles of whiskey like that – they saved up and drank it on special occasions for years, but Ryan downed it like it was a thirty buck bottle of Jack Daniels. It was mostly empty and if his hangover was anything to go by, he’d hazard a guess that Brendon hadn’t helped him.

Inside the neck of the bottle there was a rolled up scrap of white paper and Ryan reached out clumsily, squinting against the harsh light of the bedroom to make a grab for it, knocking the bottle off the table side in the process.

“Fuckin’ shit,” he muttered to himself, but he didn’t make any effort to salvage the bottle or stop the remaining whiskey from seeping into the cream hotel carpet. Ryan struggled to focus his eyes on the scribble of letters in front of him.

*Hope your hangover isn’t too painful.*

*Call me again – and maybe we can actually fuck next time?*

*Brendon.*

Ryan groaned and screwed up the note in his fist, throwing it to the floor. Tiny bits of last night were still clear in his mind, but the majority of the evening was foggy.

Well, what he *did* know was that he truly fucked up at his stepmom’s birthday party. No doubt George would be calling him later to discuss his “unacceptable behavior” or his "issues" with drugs. He’d moan about how embarrassed he was, he’d call Ryan a liability again but that fucker cut him off – he even assigned his driver to his asshole of a brother. Maybe he should give his parents a taste of their own medicine, just refuse to talk to either of them and give them both two big middle fingers. That’d teach them for being so damn petty.

After being asked to leave the party, he climbed into the car with a very exasperated William Beckett, who had driven him back to Manhattan in silence. Ryan finished off that whole bottle of champagne before they even left Long Island and combatted his desire to pass out by doing gummers in the backseat. Miraculously, William managed to keep his big mouth closed until they crossed the Queensboro Bridge into the city. Ryan vaguely remembered their conversation.

“You know, I actually agree with your dad this time, Ryan. I think you need to go get cleaned up, check into some rehab center somewhere and learn how to take it easy.”

“Oh, shut the fuck up,” Ryan told him with a tired sigh. “Did my father put you up to this?”

“I’m speaking as your friend, Ryan. I’m concerned. Your dad was really angry that you fucked up at Pamela’s birthday today. He blames *me* when you get high. You can’t just carry on like this, dude – you’re going to wake up dead one morning.”

“Bill, *I really* don’t care,” Ryan bit, staring out the window at the East River, watching the lights of
the city blur in and out of focus.

“Yeah, you don’t care; you’re right – because you’re selfish is what you are, Ryan. You never think about anyone other than yourself.”

Ryan remembered the set of William’s jaw after he said that. “Whatever,” he spat, after a pause. “I could have you fired, William, you realize that, don’t you?”

“Well then, fucking do it, man.” Ryan ignored his gaze in the rearview. “You’re all talk. Truth is you’d be lost without me wiping your ass every day. Go out; maybe work a day in your life. Try getting up in the morning because it’s the only way you’ll make enough money to feed your family - then get back to me, you egotistic prick. I wish your father had sent me to work for Jacob – at least he’s a decent human being.”

“Get off my dick, would you, Bill?” Ryan said, offering him a pitying smile in the mirror. He and William finished the rest of their drive in silence.

When his PA dropped him off outside his apartment, he didn’t even bother saying farewell. William sped off as soon as the door closed and Ryan glared after him with nothing but self-pity clouding his judgment.

His apartment was cold and empty. Ryan took a couple of Vicodin and washed them down with a shot of that 1937 Glenfiddich whiskey. Half an hour later he popped a Xanax and decided to call Shane – Brendon was waiting for him after all, and a good fuck ought to sort him out.

He had to plead with Shane for five minutes before his driver agreed to collect him and go pick up “a friend”. When he arrived, Ryan was several shots down, already pretty buzzed.

“Your dad warned me again about doing you favors – said he’d bug my car if he finds out I’ve been helping you out, so he can track where I’m driving. I have to meet your brother in an hour and drive him to the airport – if we get stuck in traffic, bro…” he trailed off, shaking his head and letting out an exasperated sigh. “You owe me, man. Who is this chick, anyway? Must be important that you can’t just put her in a taxi to come meet you.” Ryan ignored him. He wasn’t going to correct Shane’s faux pas. “Dude, how was the party? Are those champagne pyramids the bomb or what?”

“Be quiet. Don’t talk to me,” Ryan spat – Shane was fucking irritating him. He never knew when to just shut the hell up for five minutes.

“Jesus. Take the dick out your ass, bro. I’m only doing my goddamn job.”

Sometimes Shane had such a smart mouth. That had been another silent drive and another disgruntled driver he had to deal with. By the time he picked up Brendon, he was in a bad mood, especially after Shane’s tantrum on the drive home – nothing another bump of coke couldn’t sort out though.

Once they returned to his suite at the hotel, Ryan stumbled through the door eager to forget the whole day – William was pissed, Shane was fed up and his father was going to be up his ass about turning up to Pamela’s birthday high. He probably wasn’t even in Gabe’s good books either – he’d been kind of a dick towards his new girlfriend.

He’d done the last of the eight ball Shane picked up for him that morning and then he started on the whiskey. Ryan didn’t remember much after that but he vaguely recalled Brendon sitting on the side of the tub in the guest bathroom and rubbing his back as he puked in the toilet. That could’ve been a dream though, he wasn’t sure.
It was one of those archetypal mornings where he woke up and his first thought was: *Oh shit, what did I do last night? How did I embarrass myself?* These kinds of mornings were all too familiar to Ryan these days. He really wanted to impress Brendon last night because he was risking a lot, seeing this dude – just some hooker he picked up in a hotel bar, some down-and-out escort who had been on a date with one of his father’s rich pals only an hour before they fucked.

Prostitutes were hardly the most trustworthy of individuals - after all, they had nothing to lose and Ryan guessed he was being incredibly dimwitted. This was risky business, this - five grand just for one night with this boy? He didn’t even recall paying Brendon last night, but he remembered being a dick in the car back to the hotel.

*Shit,* Ryan thought, dragging his hands down his face and rubbing his chin - nothing quite like living up to that tabloid reputation in front of someone he was trying to impress.

He sat up in bed, feeling the shame grip his heart. His face was sore, his nose hurting from too much coke the previous day. Ryan pushed himself up off the mattress and looked dismally around the hotel bedroom. It was a state – the hotel would probably charge the damages to his father’s card and he couldn’t wait to explain that one, he thought miserably.

Ryan felt like shit. He was still in his pants; his shirt was discarded at the end of the bed along with his jacket. His shoes and his belt were all strewn across the floor. He raked his mind for an indication as to what actually happened between him and Brendon last night. Sex was something that most certainly hadn’t happened – not if his clothed bottom half was anything to go by. As he walked towards the ensuite to wash his face and brush his teeth, the memories of the previous evening started coming back to him.

They weren’t a welcome addition to his hangover.

As he looked back at the bed, a mess of covers piled up in the middle of it, he remembered asking Brendon to lie down on the mattress and finger himself. The sordid memory made his stomach twist with arousal just thinking about it. He remembered blurry, disjointed scenes from the show he’d been given; one of Brendon’s digits quickly turning into two as he fingered his ass open and talked dirty as Ryan attempted to jerk his hopeless, flaccid cock into erection.

He’d known it was useless when Brendon spread his legs above his head and hooked one finger from each hand inside his asshole, because on any regular day, something as obscene and sexy as *that* would’ve given him a huge boner but… *nothing.* It wasn’t often that Ryan couldn’t perform in the bedroom; usually coke gave him the ability to fuck all night, it made him insatiable – a really great lover - but even as he watched Brendon finger-fucking himself, his cock didn’t react. When Brendon realized that his little porno show wasn’t working, he crawled between Ryan’s knees and sucked his dick and *god* - it had felt so good. Brendon was a pro at his job, he knew all the right moves and Ryan got hard watching that boy suck his dick, looking down into those huge, dark eyes but as soon as Brendon grinned and pulled away Ryan’s erection flagged and he silently cursed himself.

“I’m sorry,” he sighed, “this doesn’t usually happen to me.” He really wasn’t doing himself any favors - and he really shouldn’t have got so wasted.

“How about a prostate massage? Sometimes it’s all just mental – a nice milking usually relaxes people.” Brendon stood in front of him naked, that perfect body and full lips taunting his dick. He didn’t want Brendon’s finger up his ass – no, *fuck that.*

So, Brendon suggested they take a shower together and Ryan readily agreed – Brendon had eaten his ass, trailing his tongue from his balls to his taint to his asshole, but despite all the boy’s best
efforts, he still hadn’t been able to get hard enough to fuck him. He kept trying to reason with himself, recalling how tight he’d been the previous night, the way his muscle stretched around the base of his dick, warm and wet and just so fucking divine. He wanted that tight heat again, but it was as if there’d been a short circuit between his brain and his cock – he was too high to get an erection and that, Ryan thought as Brendon talked dirty in his ear, was fucking embarrassing.

Brendon told him he could come in his mouth – he got down on his knees in front of him and sucked his balls between his dirty slut lips and he said; “You can film it if you want – I won’t charge extra. Don’t you want to see me swallow a mouthful of your come?” and fuck, he really had wanted to see that – but his pathetic dick wasn’t about to let it happen. There were few things he’d rather witness than that beautiful man swallow his load and recalling it in the wake of his hangover his dick started to twitch inside his pants. Too late for that now, he told himself, cursing his useless erection as he remembered Brendon’s perfect mouth saying, “Just lay back, close your eyes and I’ll take care of everything. It’s not like you don’t want this, huh?”

Ryan’s recollections of last night were now on a roll. They were rarely this eager to make themselves known after a heavy night of partying and for that, he was usually thankful – no good ever came of regret – he learned that one a long time ago.

Maybe it was something in the way Brendon spoke, maybe in the words he used but as he lay back on the mattress, he soon realized it wasn’t just memories of last night that were knocking at his conscious. He also opened the door to some uncomfortable childhood truths when he’d let them in – and now the floodgates were open...

When faced with his demons, Ryan clothed them and fed them and it was on mornings like this that all his deepest and darkest memories would rear their ugly heads. He could usually self-medicate and block them out with booze and coke, weed and prescription anti-depressants and mostly it worked. Ryan lived in a world where there were few serious consequences to his actions, where he was never responsible of his bad behavior but when he woke up alone, feeling guilty about the night before, his memories plagued him. In the wake of his hangover, Ryan was uninterested in waking up those old ghosts.

When his father or anyone else accused him of being selfish, it really riled him up. George Ross never seemed to understand it, the reason why Ryan buried himself in drink and drugs – he was selfish for doing it, his father claimed. He was selfish because he didn’t think about anyone else, William told him. His father would say, “We raised you well; you had a good childhood – you never wanted for anything and you’re pissing it all away by acting like a spoiled little brat.”

That’s all his father could really wrap his big head around, the fact that he always had stuff – the newest technology, the latest fashions, great vacations and an expensive penthouse on the Upper East Side. To his father, all that shit equaled true happiness. The fact that his dad had never been around when he was a kid and never told Ryan he loved him didn’t matter because hey, he made up for it by buying his son whatever he asked for! He didn’t see the chink in Ryan’s armor and for a decade he ignored the poorly constructed mask that Ryan started wearing when he was still a teenager.

The summer that Ryan was fifteen, his parents had gone on vacation to Italy. Ryan had been so utterly mortified over the fact that his parents arranged for a nanny to look after him while they were away that he’d thrown a tantrum so huge that eventually his father had thrown his hands up and said, “Suit your goddamn self, Ryan. I’ve had it with your shit.”

Success. Ryan had been left alone in the family townhouse in Manhattan and before his parents’ departure he promised them that there’d be no parties, no drinking, definitely no drugs. He crossed
his heart as he assured them he’d have the place immaculate on their return. His father nodded his head, still reasonably naïve and with one final request that Ryan didn’t invite any members of the opposite sex to stay over, his parents left for Italy, happy in the knowledge that their son could be trusted. A friend of his father’s agreed to drop by every so often and keep an eye on him, to make sure he was feeding himself and keeping the place organized.

Within twenty-four hours of George and Pamela’s departure, Ryan had broken every single one of their ground rules. He’d thrown a party – a wild celebration full of coke and acid and speed, a constant fat blunt being passed around the room. There’d been booze and girls and his school friends totally trashed the place.

When his father’s friend arrived the next morning and noted the damage he simply paid for the place to be meticulously scrubbed from top to bottom and not said another word about it.

“Our little secret,” he said, putting his finger to his lips and winking over at Ryan.

Marc Willis always had a soft spot for Ryan – in fact, he’d always been a bit of a sap for the kid. He was kind and generous and although he’d been married for years, he didn’t have any kids of his own. Ryan never really understood it as a youngster. Marc was great with kids – always joking and teasing and running around after them. Ryan grew up wishing his dad was more like Marc – more hands-on… a little more chill.

At fifteen, Ryan was a little precarious. He lost his virginity the previous year to a girl he met at a party and he slept with a small handful of his female classmates in the following months. He identified as bisexual because it made him sound cool and different, but he hadn’t fucked another boy yet – he made out with a few, he’d even gone as far as giving one of them a small grope but he was certainly aware of his sexuality.

While his parents were away, Marc dropped by every single night. He’d bring Ryan pizza and then leave him fifty bucks on the kitchen counter in case Ryan got hungry again later on – and then he’d leave, he didn’t hang around – until one night he did. Only at Ryan’s request. Marc was actually pretty handsome for an older man, cultured and debonair, always wearing the correct, flattering fashions and he was cool. He talked to Ryan as if they were equals – Marc never once talked down to him.

The night that Marc stayed for dinner, he asked Ryan if he had a girlfriend.

“Hell no,” Ryan replied. “I don’t need a girlfriend.”

“What about a boyfriend?” Marc asked him, a half-smile on his handsome face.

Ryan blushed. “No. I don’t need one of those either.”

Over the course of his parents’ absence, Marc and Ryan spent a fair amount of time together. Marc was funny – and he was charming. Ryan even developed a small crush on him but by the end of the two weeks, Marc was asking him some embarrassingly personal questions.

It had all started innocently enough with the girlfriend/boyfriend question but after that Marc started pushing his luck – he started asking Ryan if he fucked anyone before. He asked him if he ever sucked dick and Ryan would hide his blushes and make himself out to be some homosexual Don Juan – and so Marc just kept asking him questions. They’d sit on the couch together at night, watching a movie and out of the blue Marc would say something like; “Have you ever used a dildo inside your ass?” or “When you suck dick, do you ever let them finish on your face?”
“Sometimes,” Ryan would lie – because he never sucked a dick before and having some other dude’s come on his face sounded pretty disgusting actually.

“Have you ever licked another boy’s asshole before, Ryan?” Marc asked him one evening. “Ever had anyone lick yours?”

_Gross, _Ryan thought – _that’s what happens when two dudes fuck each other? They lick each others’ assholes? _Ryan couldn’t imagine anything worse, but he told Marc he had.

“Fuck, I’d loved to have seen that.” It was the first time that Marc voiced his attraction towards him. “Who was it? Did he put his tongue right inside you?”

“He was just some guy. I don’t really remember.”

“You should lick mine,” Marc told him.

“What? No way.” Ryan shook his head at the suggestion in disgust, shifting away from the press of Marc’s shoulder.

“I can eat yours. I bet you’d taste like heaven. Bet you’d love my tongue inside your sweet little ass. I’d have you coming quicker than you ever have before.”

“You’ve got a wife, dude.”

“I know, but she understands that men of my age get certain… urges – and I would absolutely love to fuck you, Ryan.” Marc moved closer towards him, curling around him on his parents’ couch and Ryan had gone tense in his arms but he hadn’t pushed him away. He let Marc kiss him and he let him palm his dick through his pants. Marc unzipped his fly and pushed his hand down the front of his underwear before Ryan eventually pushed him off - and then with a small, tender peck on the nose Marc made his excuses and left. His parents returned to an immaculately clean house the very next morning.

After that Ryan learned pretty quickly that he could get Marc to do absolutely anything he wanted so long as he kept teasing him. He’d learned to use the obvious hard-on the man had for him to his advantage. He used to dress to please him; soft hair over eyelinered eyes and it drove Marc insane. Ryan was soon finding any excuse he could to be alone with his father’s friend and it gave him a sick thrill to know he was capable of turning this man to putty. Marc – an apparently straight, married man in his forties and Ryan had him eating from the palm of his hand.

A few months before he turned sixteen, Ryan turned up at Marc’s apartment at three in the morning. He’d been to a party and had taken ecstasy earlier that evening but the effects were wearing off, not that Ryan let on to that. He claimed he was too high to return to his parents’ place and Marc let him in with a smile.

Marc’s wife travelled a lot and she was out of town on business. Ryan planned the entire thing – from acting way higher than he was, to calling Marc in the middle of the night, at a time when the man wouldn’t turn him away and it had all fallen exactly into place. Marc jumped at the chance to give Ryan a place to sleep for the night and they sat in the living room together and Marc complimented him until Ryan sucked his dick on his white leather couch, in the middle of his SoHo apartment. It was the first dick he ever sucked and it had also been the last – it felt weird having this old man, a man he’d known almost his entire life, a friend of his _father’s _bucketing up into his throat and groaning his name.

“Jesus fucking Christ, Ryan,” Marc swore, one hand covering his mouth, the other pressing the back
of Ryan’s head down as he came down his throat with a guttural moan.

Ryan choked, his eyes bugging as he felt Marc’s dick pulse come into his mouth, warm and salty and totally disgusting. “That really wasn’t cool,” Ryan told him, pulling back quickly from the man’s cock and spitting into his hand. “That’s gross. Seriously. Did you really have to do that?”

“I’d’ve thought a loose-jawed faggot slut such as yourself would be used to the taste of come by now,” Marc smiled as his red dick turned soft.

“Whatever, Marc – you’re just a fucking pedophile.”

And out of nowhere, Marc’s fist left his lap and swung in an arch against Ryan’s face, connecting with his nose and knocking his head back against the cushions of the white leather couch. The pain was unreal – it shook Ryan’s body right to the core - that sudden, blunt force crashing against his nose, the throbbing pressure building up in his head and escaping as stunned tears out of his eyes.

“If you want to play with fire, Ryan, expect to get burned. You deserved that – prick-teasing me like you do and then you get off on calling me a goddamn pedophile?”

Ryan cupped his hand over his nose. He felt warm blood pouring into his palm.

“What the fuck?” he managed to splutter, snot and blood over his fingers, dripping onto his pants. “What the fuck was that for?”

Marc struck him again – a hard slap across the side of his head that made his ears ring. He reeled away in shock as his blood dripped down his lips and into his mouth. “Listen here, you little cock-tease. Think you can get away with that? Back-chatting me like the insolent little fucker you are – your father never disciplined you, but I will, you fucking queer.” Marc had his fist in Ryan’s hair; he was pushing him down onto the couch, his knee pressed hard into the center of his chest as he yanked Ryan’s pants off and threw them across the floor.

“Get the fuck off me, get off. I’ll tell my dad – Marc please. Please don’t do this. Please don’t. Please…”

That night, as Marc Willis raped Ryan, he tried to rationalize his actions with hushed sentiments of, “You’re so handsome, you’re so pretty. You’re my favorite boy, Ryan. Wish I was your daddy,” and when Ryan gave up struggling, Marc pressed his hand over Ryan’s mouth and whispered in his ear; “You’re a virgin, aren’t you? You never fucked a guy before, have you?”

Ryan shook his head with tears in his eyes.

“You never even sucked dick until tonight – all those tall stories. I could tell you were lying – and I’m so glad I’m the first one who gets to fuck you. I wanted you since you were thirteen years old.”

“Please stop.” Ryan’s voice was so small, he couldn’t even be sure he’d spoken. “It hurts so much, Marc, please don’t make me do this anymore.”

“Just lay back and shut the fuck up. It’s not like you don’t want this, huh? I love you, Ryan.”

Ryan hadn’t heard anyone tell him they loved him since – not from anybody who meant it anyway. The memory of Marc’s breath on his cheek, of his dick forcing inside him, tearing his asshole – and then those meaningless words, I love you – all of it made his skin crawl. If he thought about it for too long, Ryan would have a full-blown panic attack. He took drugs for it – Prozac and Xanax and Ativan - he pill-popped anything he could get his hands on, which is a lot when you’re Ryan Ross. It was the only way he could get up in the morning.
Ryan never told his parents about what Marc had done to him when he was fifteen. He always thought it was only the painstakingly shy and self-conscious young boys who were preyed upon by men like Marc; loners who would never have the courage to speak out. George questioned his black eye the next day – Ryan said he got into a scuffle at the party the previous night and his father looked over his newspaper at him and said, “Serves you right for picking fights you can’t finish.”

He sure saw the irony in George’s statement now.

The day after the attack, Marc wired Ryan a quarter of a million dollars. He claimed it was for his sixteenth birthday, something both his parents thought a ridiculous gesture but neither of them questioned. Ryan knew better – *hush money*. On the day he turned sixteen, Marc sent him a card in the mail and inside it was a handwritten anecdote about Bill Murray on the Tube in London, putting his hands over some commuter’s eyes and when she turned around and realized who he was he whispered, “*No one will ever believe you*” before wandering away down the platform. The quote was underlined and Ryan ripped the card in two and threw it in the trashcan.

Marc *ruined* him – he still had to shake that fucker’s hand at formal gatherings. His parents still invited him to dinner parties and neither of them had a clue that the man raped their son a little over a decade ago. He hated Marc for doing what he did but he hated himself more for leading him on. *You reap what you sow,* his dad used to tell him and his siblings when they were kids and yeah, maybe that was true but Ryan’s life snowballed since that night. Marc Willis left him incapable of loving anything - especially himself - and that in turn left him incapable of being loved. Ryan drowned that reality with expensive bottles of whiskey, copious amounts of anti-depressants and the transient love from male escorts.

Through his hangover, Ryan realized why he enjoyed paying men for sex. They were the only ones who expected nothing from him. The only people he couldn’t disappoint.
Chapter 11

After last night, Brendon had enough dirt on Ryan Ross to go to the press and make a hell of a lot of money.

He and Ryan arrived at the hotel and immediately Ryan ordered a bottle of whiskey from the hotel bar, talking the whole time about how expensive it was and what a good quality scotch it was – “Not the best, not by a long shot but still pretty damn good. Did you know there are distilleries over in England – places like Scotland and Ireland that are older even than the United States?” he gabbled while Brendon sat opposite him, waiting for Ryan to finish getting fucked up and wondering why he’d been so keen to meet up in the first place, when he was already too far gone to enjoy his company.

Within an hour, he downed at least half the bottle, clumsily pouring himself shots and knocking them back like a drunk at happy hour. The glass coffee table that Brendon and Ryan snorted coke off the previous evening was now covered with sticky puddles of booze and every time Ryan rocked back on the couch, Brendon would watch him spill whiskey over his jacket and he was either purposefully ignoring it or was so drunk he hadn’t even noticed.

It was sad to watch as a matter of fact. This guy, Ryan Ross, he had the whole world at his feet – he was handsome, he was famous, he was obscenely rich. He was still young enough that his bad behavior was kind of edgy, maybe even a little endearing. Top fashion supermodels and Hollywood it girls were all dying to sleep with him; he had a gaggle of famous friends and a billion-dollar fortune, but at three o’clock in the morning, he was just a man who had no one else to call in his time of need other than a hooker he met in a restaurant the night before. He was someone Brendon felt cosmically connected to, because Brendon recognized that familiar sadness from behind Jon’s brown eyes. Ryan was a boy who was trying – and rather miserably failing - to fill some empty hole with drugs and alcohol.

Brendon hadn’t stopped him from drinking - he wasn’t the guy’s father, but he watched him, listening to the nonsense that spewed out of his mouth as he did line after line until his pupils were huge and his nose was bleeding. When Ryan eventually did stumble towards the bathroom, Brendon followed him and he sat on the edge of the bathtub. Ryan was nothing but sharp bones under his shirt as Brendon rubbed his back as he puked in the toilet. The last thing he needed was to hear on the news the next morning that the infamous Ryan Ross had been found dead of a drug overdose in his hotel bathroom – the cops would come looking for him immediately. He’d be questioned, he’d be arrested, and Brendon pictured yet another scenario that ended with him acting as someone’s bitch in prison.

It would’ve been easy for him to walk away. Ryan was hardly with it and this was surely more hassle than it was worth, they didn’t need the money this bad – but something kept him there for hours. Something kept him in that bathroom, rubbing Ryan’s back over his jacket and something kept him there while Ryan brushed his teeth and took a few shaky sips of water in attempts to sober up. It wasn’t even the money – not really - but something inside him found it impossible to turn around and walk away. He felt like he was involved somehow. Ryan just appeared so broken to him – a far cry from the fame-hungry monster the press made him out to be - and he stayed until it got light outside and Ryan passed out. He’d been patient through the failed attempts at coitus and all the hopeless blowjobs and Brendon couldn’t explain why.

Evidently Brendon was attracted to broken men; he could fantasize about cleaning them up, a white picket fence somewhere out of the City – all the same dreams he had for him and Jon when they first
met. Maybe that was the masochist in him.

It was nearing 8AM by the time Ryan eventually did pass out on his back on top of the bed. Brendon collected his belongings and made his way to the door, but his fingers hovered around the handle and then he allowed the guilt to seep into his brain for too long because he sighed, frustrated at himself and his stupid affinity for troubled souls. He turned, walked quickly back into the bedroom and pushed Ryan’s deadweight of a body onto its side, slipping a pillow behind his back. He made it this far without the guy OD’ing on him, seemed unprofessional to leave him sleeping in a position in which he was liable to choke and die. The prison-bitch scenario flashed again at the back of his mind.

It was only when he straightened up and pulled away that he realized he’d been absentmindedly stroking his hand through Ryan’s soft hair as he tucked him in.

By the time Brendon left the hotel suite – just as penniless as he had been when he left his apartment the previous evening – it started to rain.

Jon would probably bitch at him - that’s if he wasn’t blacked out on smack or had his lips graciously wrapped around Joe Trohman’s dick – the thought shot an ugly jealousy straight into his heart, the kind that made his muscles ache and his anger spike as he pictured it all too clearly for Brendon’s fancy.

*I could go to the press,* he thought as he walked through the grand lobby. He’d tell them all about the five grand Ryan had given him the first night, the other five he promised him the next. The drinking and the drugs, the seemingly endless quest for self-destruction. He *could* have gone to the press, but he knew he wouldn’t. The poor boy needed help, not another scandal in the tabloids about his inability to function on even the simplest of human levels.

He walked for almost two hours in the rain to get back to the apartment. He always loved when it rained back in Las Vegas – rainfall brought a break to the endless heat, it cleared the dry desert air a little and it always smelled so good – so clean and fresh. In New York, the rain was very different – the city got cold and grey - the rainclouds felt oppressive hanging low over the sky-rise buildings, almost like they were pressing down on top of him, trapping him, blocking out the sunlight.

It was a long walk and by the time he arrived home and slipped his key into the lock, he was soaked to the bone. He was looking forward to climbing under the shower and letting the hot water ease his muscles – he hoped Jon hadn’t used it all up. However, when he pushed the door open, Jon was sat on the bed bundled up in the duvet, the material pulled down low over his head like a makeshift hood. It would’ve been comical if Jon’s eyes hadn’t been quite so cold and dark when Brendon entered the room.

“Are you *okay*?” he asked with his eyebrow quirked. Jon certainly didn’t *look* okay. He slipped out of his wet jacket and made a grab for a towel at the foot of the bed to rub his hair dry.

“Oh, I don’t know, man. Why don’t you *tell* me? I mean, what the fuck *is* this? That’s two nights in a row now that you neglected to come home – no call, nothing. I mean, are you *trying* to upset me, Brendon?” he asked, bringing the very last of a burned out blunt to his lips and taking an angry hit before reaching over to the bedside to stub it out. “Because if you are, you’re doing a fine fucking job at it.”

“I left you a note.” Brendon defended himself, turning away from Jon’s glare and kicking off his shoes. Jon stayed silent, so he turned back to look at him. His eyes were still angry. “What?” he barked, splaying his hands. He’d love for Jon to just give him a break right around now.
“No. You didn’t. You didn’t leave a note.”

“I did.” Brendon glowered, marching towards him. He couldn’t do anything right by Jon these days. On top of the bedside table lay that damn glossy magazine they’d not thrown out yet, Ryan Ross’s face printed on the front cover, all heavy-lidded eyes and sex-messy hair and lips almost parted. Brendon threw the magazine down on the floor and kicked it under the bed.

Underneath it was the note. He picked it up and pushed it into Jon’s chest. “Maybe if you hadn’t got so high last night, you’d’ve seen it,” he bit, petulantly pushing his tongue inside his bottom lip as Jon’s hands unfolded the paper. Brendon watched his eyes blinking over the words. “So don’t start a fight with me for leaving without saying nothing.”

He pulled his t-shirt over his head and unbuckled his belt, keeping his eyes trained on Jon as he watched his friend’s whole body sag against the mattress in defeat. Jon’s dark eyes blinked up at the ceiling and he sighed.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “I got rolled on last night. Fuckers jumped me as I was walking home at the end of the night – two hundred and twenty bucks, man. There was like, three of four of them, I couldn’t fight them off. They took my phone, so I couldn’t even call you.” Jon finished with a heavy sigh, dragging his hand across his eyes and wiping away slow, wet tears. “And I didn’t even get high last night, so maybe you shouldn’t be so quick to jump to conclusions. I’m trying real hard here, Brendon – maybe just give me a goddamn fucking break, dude.” Jon pulled the comforter up and let it fall softly over his face. Brendon’s nose tickled with emotion – with guilt or sympathy or remorse, he didn’t know. “I just wish you’d’ve been here when I got home, that’s all,” he said from under the covers.

“You okay?”

“Not really, Jon, no.”

“I mean, did they hurt you? Did you know who they were?”

Under the cover he watched Jon’s shoulder pull up in a shrug. “No, and even if I did, what difference would it make? One of your fancy customers called you last night, did they?” Jon finished with a heavy sigh, dragging his hand across his eyes and wiping away slow, wet tears. “And I didn’t even get high last night, so maybe you shouldn’t be so quick to jump to conclusions. I’m trying real hard here, Brendon – maybe just give me a goddamn fucking break, dude.” Jon pulled the comforter up and let it fall softly over his face. Brendon’s nose tickled with emotion – with guilt or sympathy or remorse, he didn’t know. “I just wish you’d’ve been here when I got home, that’s all,” he said from under the covers.

“Fuck, Jon. Are you okay?”

“Not really, Brendon, no.”

“I mean, did they hurt you? Did you know who they were?”

Under the cover he watched Jon’s shoulder pull up in a shrug. “No, and even if I did, what difference would it make? One of your fancy customers called you last night, did they?” Jon threw the comforter back and his eyes were so sad. Brendon would’ve preferred them to be angry – that sure beat staring into someone’s soul and seeing nothing but pain. “Well, while you were being paid ridiculous amounts of money to suck rich dick, I was getting the shit kicked out of me.” He pulled his shirt up and Brendon tried hard to keep his face neutral, but he knew his initial shock gave him away.

Jon was black and blue and purple and ugly yellow, his ribs covered in angry bruises – some of them old, most of them not. He pulled his shirt back down and curled up on himself. “Shit like this never used to happen when I was working for Pete,” he mumbled. Brendon rolled his eyes at that name. “We had drivers and shit – someone to watch our backs - a proper like, agency. I was earning more, I was working less and I-”

“Jon, please don’t start. You know how I feel about him.”

Jon ignored Brendon’s interjection and carried on, sitting up on the bed. “And I left him, because you wanted me to – I chose you over him - and now look at us. Four guys, Brendon – they jumped me not even two blocks from our front door. They must’ve been following me, man. They could’ve had guns – or knives. They could’ve killed me - and I go out, every single night and I have to fuck guys I hate, in shitty motels and then I get fucking mugged. Nothing to show for it at the end of the night apart from these bruises and you can’t be fucking bothered to even tell me where you’re
at and then you want to stand there and tell me off for getting high or smoking with Joe. Well, fuck that. That’s what I have to do to get me out of bed in the morning, Brendon. That’s the reality of the situation we’re in – it’s not all fancy hotel rooms and fucking perverts paying one grand for a goddamn sleepover, man.” Jon’s anger suddenly turned to malice. “I wouldn’t be in this situation if it wasn’t for you.”

“No, you’re right, you wouldn’t – you’d probably be dead. Hanging around with Pete and all his cronies, him keeping you high so you don’t leave him. He fucking used you, Jon. You were sixteen and he was, what – twenty-two? And you don’t find that weird? He never cared about you.”

“What, and you do?” Jon asked, voice hard, swinging his legs out of bed and pushing towards Brendon. Don’t even fucking go there, dude, Brendon warned his boyfriend silently, because I care. Don’t ever tell me that I don’t care. “You can’t even let me know where you’re going – and then you arrive back home at almost eleven in the morning without even an apology and you walked through that door and looked at me as if you had no idea why I was pissed at you.”

“I left a note. It’s not my fault that you didn’t see the goddamn note, Jon.” Brendon’s voice stayed low and firm, but his blood was boiling. Jon’s bruises all but forgotten, he asked, “So, did you see Joe last night?”

Jon’s eyes ignited. “That’s all you care about isn’t it? Jesus, Brendon, you’re suffocating me here. I went out – I worked. I had a guy spit on me after he fucked me and then I got jumped – and robbed… and you’re worried if I talked to a guy I had nothing to do with since I broke up with Pete.” Jon shook his head and breathed a laugh in disbelief.

Brendon paused – it was all white noise until he heard Pete’s name. “I hate him. I hate the thought of him fucking you.”

The only picture in his head was one of Pete fucking Jon roughly from behind and Jon begging for more and then the image turned into something a lot uglier – Jon and Pete curled around each other after climax, fingers linked, noses brushing, two dopey, big smiles on their faces. The image in his head drove him completely insane with red-hot anger – just the thought of Jon being fucked by anyone ripped his heart out every single time.

“I don’t get what your issue with Joe is, he’s-”

“I was talking about Pete, but while we’re on the topic of Joe, well…” Brendon held his hand out in front of him and counted his reasons out on his fingers. “One - he’s got a boner for you and he always has and he’s fucking obvious about it. Two – he’s a shrewd Jew, Jon. We lent him that money, what, three years ago and he never paid us back - that was almost three hundred bucks that we didn’t have at the time. Three – he talks way too loud. Four – you smoke heroin with him, Jon, you-”

Jon cut him off, throwing his hands up with an exasperated sigh. “You hate him because he’s a part of my past. You hate him because you’re jealous of every single guy I so much as look at so god forbid I should actually talk to someone who’s not you or paying for the privilege.”

Jon was right. Brendon did hate Joe for those reasons. He knew how Jon made his money and he didn’t get jealous of Jon’s tricks – not most of the time anyway, but he sure hated having the reality shoved down his throat. He’d give anything just to make Jon come, to feel him come apart beneath him or inside him; Brendon didn’t care about the technicalities of it, he just wanted to watch him shake to climax – it was his favorite fantasy, the one thing that never failed to get him off. Suddenly he was completely overcome by lust for the man. He took one step forward, closing the distance between them and pulled Jon into him by his shoulders.
“Let me show you how much I care about you,” he mumbled before pressing forward purposefully with his lips. Jon tensed and then he struggled, but only for a brief moment before relaxing into the kiss – as soon as Brendon felt the tension drain out of Jon’s bones, he pushed his knee between his thighs and walked him back towards the bed.

Jon pushed against it but he didn’t break the kiss. Brendon’s hands slid into Jon’s hair, soft and dark with a slight wave – just like Ryan’s. He pushed Jon down onto the mattress and fell on top of him.

Jon heaved, screwing his face up in pain. His ribs. Poor Jon. He quickly rolled off and pressed his nose into the crook of his friend’s neck, inhaling him - cheap cologne and pot and the very faintest undertones of sex. “I want to make love to you. I want it so bad.” His voice was almost a whine. He pushed his hand down the elastic waistband of Jon’s pajama pants and squeezed his soft dick.

“Bren… baby…” Jon’s eyes were closed and his brow was furrowed. “I can’t…” He pulled at Brendon’s wrist and he reluctantly removed his hand from Jon’s pants. “I’m sorry – I just can’t do that with you.”

“Why not?” He hugged his knees and stared at Jon like a spoiled child.

“Fuck, you really need to ask me? Because I don’t want to be one of them; I can’t be just another notch on your bedpost, Brendon – another name in your black book – because if we fuck, what makes me any different from them, huh? I fucking love you,” he said, rolling away from him off the bed. “I wish you could trust me when I say that. I wish you didn’t need a dick in your ass to believe that you mean everything to me.” Jon stepped into his pants, pulling them up over his hips.

“Where’re you going?”

“Out.”

“Jon,” Brendon sighed. “Don’t. Please. Come to bed.” He made his voice softer. He was tired. He wanted to sleep and he knew he wouldn’t be able to do that without Jon in his arms. Brendon loved Jon so much that the thought of ever being without him nauseated him.

“I’ve been in bed since three o’clock this morning, Brendon. Waiting for you.”

“I’m sorry,” he shrugged and Jon’s muscles loosened, the anger draining immediately out of his body with just one apology - so he repeated the word. “I’m so sorry. I really mean it. I’m sorry for everything – for leaving last night, for the note. I should’ve called – I shouldn’t even have gone,” he admitted, because he shouldn’t have. It had been a complete waste of his time. He hadn’t even been paid. “I’m sorry for saying that shit about Joe and getting angry about Pete and I’m sorry you got jumped and for hurting your ribs and just everything.”

He meant everything from the bottom of his heart. Apart from when he apologized about Pete – he hadn’t meant that one. Even the name left an unpleasant taste in his mouth. It was as if he couldn’t even say it without feeling it dry out his tongue.

Jon sat down on the bed and scrubbed a hand over his face. He looked just about as hopeless as ever. No wonder he got jumped – Jon was easy pickings these days. Jon looked over at him and blinked his eyes slowly. Brendon could see the tears collected in his eyes, decorating his dark lashes.

“I need you here, man. I’m not the strong one, I can’t look after you. I’m not that person anymore and I’m weak and I’m broken…” His voice started to fray. “I need you to get us out of this situation. Manhattan’s killing me, man. I don’t know how much more I can take. It feels like I’m dying, baby. Sometimes I go to sleep at night and I don’t want to wake up in the morning. It hurts so much.” If his
voice had been fraying before, it completely unraveled by now. Jon broke off into choking sobs and
Brendon rolled into him and pulled Jon down on the mattress. He hushed him until his emotions
subsided and when his friend reached into the bedside drawer for his drugs, Brendon even held the
lighter under the rectangle of aluminum foil and listened to the bubbling of heroin as Jon inhaled the
smoke through an old toilet roll tube.

So, that was it - his go-ahead. Jon wanted out. Brendon just needed to find a way in the dark.

* * *

Later that afternoon, William knocked on the door to Ryan’s hotel suite and looked around the room
reproachfully. William wasn’t one to hold a grudge, but Ryan was. Their argument in the car on the
way back to Manhattan yesterday was still fresh in Ryan’s mind. He wanted to apologize, but
William spoke first.

“You got a nice apartment only a few blocks from here, why are you staying in a hotel?” he asked,
sitting down on the couch with a sigh. Ryan didn’t want to tell him it was so he could fuck – or not
fuck, as it turned out – a hooker. “You look like shit,” he added, after looking Ryan up and down.

“Thanks.” Ryan rolled his eyes and took a sip from his water bottle – he filled it with vodka not long
after waking up and had been nursing it all afternoon.

“Rough one last night, was it? Good to see you’re keeping hydrated.” William noted, nodding over
at him. “You’re going to need it. Your dad and Pamela want to see you – to discuss your behavior at
the party yesterday. Your dad’s really pissed, Ryan.”

“Whatever, man. I don’t care.” And Ryan really didn’t care anymore. In fact, he was slowly losing
the will to live – all that reflecting back on Marc earlier disheartened him.

William raised his eyebrow. “You’re really hard to have any sympathy for; you know that, don’t
you? I’m just going to come out and say it because you’ve been grinding my gears now for weeks –
why do you always act like a petulant little kid? You’re twenty-six, Ryan and you act like a twelve
year old.”

Ryan rubbed his face. He’d not had any coke since he finished the last of his supply last night. He
took a big sip out of his bottle and held the vodka in his mouth until it started to burn – then he
swallowed. “I’m sorry,” he said. “For being a dick in the car yesterday, for fucking up my mom’s
party, for fucking breathing, Bill. I’m sorry.”

The apology was hard to get out, but he felt better once he said it. William nodded his head, looked a
little taken aback even and then he reached out his hand and rubbed Ryan’s shoulder.

“People only nag at you because they care, man.”

And that was enough to push the tears slowly out of Ryan’s eyes. Ryan held his shit together pretty
well on most occasions, but whenever anyone did show him any sympathy, he found it difficult to
shield his emotions. He quickly wiped his eyes with the sleeve of his shirt and sniffed.

“Sorry,” he said again – but he was apologizing about his tears this time. “I feel like a horrible
person.” He upset everyone he cared about last night – his parents and Bill and Gabe and Shane –
Brendon too. Not that he particularly cared about that guy, but he was cute and he had been an
asshole to someone who was just trying to give him an orgasm…

William’s hand lingered on Ryan’s shoulder for a moment before giving it a reassuring squeeze and
pulling away. “You’re okay,” he said – and for a short while Ryan chose to believe him. Before the
moment swelled with too much emotion, William decided to change the subject. “What happened here last night, huh? Did you have a party or something?” He took another look around the room – at the alcohol stained carpet and the sticky coffee table.

“Sort of.” At this point, any lie was better than the truth.

“What was it, a pity party?” William elbowed Ryan’s arm and smirked. “With guest of honor, Ryan Ross?”

“Maybe,” Ryan said, breaking into a guilty smile. William knew him too well and despite everything, he had the patience of a saint. Ryan sure wouldn’t want his job.

“Well, I’m here to collect you – your father and Pamela are waiting. They said if I didn’t manage to get you to their place within the hour then they were going to show up here, and if your father sees the state of this place-” William took another, skeptical glance around the hotel suite, “well, that’ll be yet another issue. So my advice would be to come with me and get this over with as quickly as possible. Drink more water,” William advised pushing himself up from the couch.

When William wasn’t looking, Ryan poured the rest of the vodka into the sink and took a water bottle from the refrigerator. He had to be sober for the berating his father would give him as soon as he arrived at his parents’ place. His argument that he wasn’t an alcoholic drug-addict would hold no ground if he turned up high. For the first time in a long while, he followed William’s lead from the hotel to the car with very little fuss.

His parents owned an ornately decorated penthouse in Gramercy Park – it was all Persian rugs and grand chandeliers, expensive antiques and gold-trimmed wood. Ryan despised his parents’ taste in décor. All their houses looked exactly the same – they looked like show homes; impractical furnishings, overly elaborate interiors and never a thing out of place. His parents’ place was hardly livable; it was too supercilious, too stuffy for Ryan to ever feel at home there. Sitting on his parents’ velvet bench sofa, it felt kind of how he imagined a job interview might feel – absolutely fucking terrifying, but Ryan was winging it – he was good at pretending he was absolutely everything apart from the man he was when he woke up in the morning. He perched on the edge of the sofa, crossed his ankles and pushed his hands into his lap.

“Ryan,” his father started, his voice breaking the awkward silence of the room. Ryan knew what was coming – his dad would complain about the party yesterday, he’d question his drinking habits and call him a drug-addict and remind him that he was still cut off until he decided to seek help for his problems and blah, blah, blah. “Pamela and I have been talking. We think you should check yourself into rehab.”

His parents were nothing short of predictable.

Ryan’s brown eyes looked up to meet his father’s gaze and then flicked across the couch at Pamela. They were both expecting Ryan to jump up and storm off in annoyance. Pamela was even biting her lip in anticipation, flicking anxiously though a handful of pamphlets she was holding.

“We’re concerned, honey,” she said – and poor Pamela, she did look concerned.

He didn’t want them to be concerned. Them being concerned meant that they cared and them caring meant that his resistance in the long run was futile. He’d have preferred them to be angry and irate. At least that way his desire to storm off could be justified but looking at his stepmother’s face, he felt like the world’s biggest asshole.

“Look,” he said. “I’m sorry about yesterday – about the party-”
“It’s not about the party, son. You’re letting your lifestyle control you. Ryan… we just want to help, we’re worried about you,” George told him – and he did look worried, the poor old bastard. He looked desperate too. He looked like a man who was at the end of his tether, like a father who was worried he’d get a phone call one day to inform him that his youngest son was dead at twenty-six from a drug overdose.

“I don’t need help.”

“Ryan, there’s a few brochures here for you to look through – all the suitable rehabilitation centers are very nice – like hotels, almost. You’d get your own room. There’s a place in Malibu that only admits twelve patients at a time, you’d get exceptional care,” Pamela told him, with the caution of a mother trying to convince her son into attending some lame-ass holiday camp. She slid a bunch of glossy brochures across the coffee table towards him. Ryan clicked his tongue and ignored them, looking everywhere but at the pamphlets in front of him.

“Ryan,” his father sighed, leaning forward forwards to pick up the first brochure. “We both think that one of these places could really help you out.” George was treading carefully, but Ryan could already see the strain on his face. “We’d fund your treatment, naturally and-”

“Look,” he tried again, pushing his fingers into the bridge of his nose. “I’ve said I’m sorry about the party – I drank a bit too much the night before and I lost track of time. I hardly slept – I was overtired, that’s all.”

“You weren’t ‘overtired’, son. I asked you to get sobered up and Jacob told me he saw you disappearing upstairs with Gabriel – and you definitely weren’t sober when I asked you to leave, so…” George splayed his hands as if to say ‘try and argue with that, motherfucker.’

Goddamn Jacob, that narc son of a bitch. Ryan would take great pleasure in wiping that smug fucking smirk off his face – what a square, suck-up little prick.

“And last night I spent the evening looking up times and locations of NA and AA meetings in Manhattan – here’s just a few,” Pamela said, placing a handwritten list cautiously on top of the rehab brochures. “Your father and I would be happy if you just agreed to attend a few AA meetings, maybe a Narcotics Anonymous one too, if you feel up to it-”

“Now, darling, that’s not we agreed,” George interjected, patting his wife’s knee.

“But it’s better than nothing,” his stepmom snapped at his dad. “Honey.” She looked back at him, eyes brimming with tears. “I love you like my own – I’ve watched you grow up into such a handsome boy, but you’re a nightmare when you’re high. There’s so much more to life, you know? And you got so much to offer the world. You deserve to be happy and I know this isn’t making you happy.” The tears slipped slowly down her cheeks and she dabbed away a black streak of mascara. “What part of we’re worried about you don’t you understand? You’re my little boy, Ryan - and we love you. I don’t want to watch you killing yourself.”

And, well… how the fuck could he argue with a crying woman?

Ryan looked over at his stepmom and tried to ignore her tears and the way she tried to sniff back her emotions. He tried not to let it affect him, but it was hopeless. He felt the guilt explode through his body. Making someone cry on their birthday was a shitty thing to do and the sudden realization that his selfish actions weren’t only affecting him but the woman who selflessly acted as his mother for twenty-four years settled uneasily in the pit of his stomach. It wouldn’t hurt to just humor them, would it? Maybe attend a few NA meetings – hello, my name’s Ryan Ross and I’m a good-for-nothing alcoholic, drug-addict who’s so scared of being hurt that I make it impossible for anyone to
He leaned forward to pick up the brochure of top of the pile, if only to appease his parents long enough that they’d get off his case.

Addiction Ends Here, it said on the front cover – the pages were filled with beautiful, smiling men and women, all looking clean and healthy, pictured in group-sessions or lazing on vast green lawns or playing tennis or sat on leather couches, talking to handsome therapists. None of them looked like drug-addicts; none of them looked like they had a care in the world, in fact. Ryan had a feeling that the reality of rehab would be very different from the glossy falsehood they told in their brochures.

“I’ll look into it,” he said. “If that’ll make you happy, but baby-steps at first, you know?” He picked up the handwritten sheet of addresses and folded them into the inside pocket of his jacket. “I’ll go to meetings – and I’ll try and stay out of trouble.”

His parents reassured and babbling about suitable rehab centers, Ryan left twenty minutes later, the glossy brochures tucked under his arm and a promise that he’d do some research on his lips. Once in the safety of his car, he dumped them on the backseat and text Shane.

Can u pick something up for me? I’ll make it worth your while $$$$  

Shane’s reply beeped through almost immediately. Naw bro. Sorry. Your father’s orders.  

Pussy. Fuck you, Ryan text back with a sigh, dropping his phone into his lap.

He let his head rest on the back of the seat as he watched the tourists trudge through the rain, snapping pictures of Central Park with the clouds hanging low over the adjacent buildings; it had been raining all day and it didn’t look like it was going to let up any time soon. Ryan had nothing planned for his evening and when that happened, he tended to get a little antsy; he could call Gabe and see if he wanted to hang out, ask if there were any good parties happening in Manhattan tonight. He could blow up Shane’s cellphone until the guy just gave in and went to pick something up for him… He could call Brendon again, perhaps apologize for his behavior the previous night and see if he was interested in meeting up again. He had left that note that told Ryan to call him and Brendon probably knew where to get drugs.

Man, that dude Brendon was perfect. As William drove through the gridlocked streets of Manhattan, Ryan fantasized about him and his tight asshole. He wanted to take him out somewhere fancy, fuck him up and watch him finger-fuck himself again.

He seemed a complex character, this Brendon. He must’ve had something about him to have made such an imprint inside Ryan’s skull because it wasn’t very often he was this consumed by thoughts of his conquests. Ryan wanted to know more about the boy – he wanted to fuck him into the mattress or up against a wall as Brendon told him his life story. It was probably even worse than his.

Ever since he was young, Ryan had a desperate need for control – after the incident with Marc, he never let anyone get close enough to hurt him and his fantasies centered on some pretty sadistic desires.

He had such a pretty face, a dazzling white smile – and those eyes. Ryan felt his cock harden thinking about it. That awkward young man he screwed on the couch on the first night had been everything Ryan dreamed about for so fucking long.

He closed his eyes and pressed his hand against his crotch, imagining it was Brendon touching him, imagining the boy’s lithe fingers stroking up and down his dick – shit, he wanted to fuck him again
so much. He wanted to push his dick down Brendon’s throat until he was choking and spluttering, but in his fantasy, he was asking for more, Brendon’s cock was painfully hard, leaking pre-come and he was begging. Begging to be fucked harder, begging to hurt and be hurt and suffer and be suffered and the more Ryan gave him, the tighter he became, the louder his moans grew. Brendon fucking wanted it – he wanted him.

“Ryan. We’re home.” Ryan’s eyes snapped open at the sound of William’s voice and he glared down at his crotch – last night his hopeless cock let him down and now he let himself get so carried away with his fantasies that he was sporting a rock hard erection in the backseat of his car.

As soon as he pushed his way into his apartment, he hobbled to his bedroom, dropped his pants and flopped down on the mattress, wrapping his hand around his dick.

It only took him a minute, because the image of Brendon on his hands and knees, back arched and body buzzing with the high of cocaine, was still vivid in his mind.
Chapter 12

Brendon and Jon were struggling to make ends meet. In fact, these days they were struggling to make most things meet – opinions, eyes, minds.

It had been one month since Brendon had last seen Ryan Ross and during that time, he followed his brief stint in rehab with a distinct amount of curiosity. The five grand he’d been paid on the night he met Ryan had been squandered on paying bills and settling debts – the rest he sent to his parents in hope that they wouldn’t bother him for a few more months and even though he lied to Jon about the amount he sent, his friend stormed out the house one afternoon and hadn’t returned until the following morning.

“Where did you go last night?” Brendon asked when Jon came home, trying to ignore his drawn-out appearance and junk-dead eyes.

“Out,” had been Jon’s impassive answer as he shrugged off his jacket.

“Did you work?”

“Nope.”

“Did you meet up with Joe?”

“Yup.” Jon conversed with him in one-word increments these days – he pulled away every time Brendon touched him and it was slowly driving him crazy.

It had been one month since Brendon promised Jon that they’d both get out of the game – they just needed to be frugal, they needed to save money and cut back on weed and stop smoking smack and they’d be able to save some cash and move the hell out of New York City. Brendon didn’t know where they’d go but surely anywhere was better than where they currently were.

Brendon sent almost four thousand dollars to his parents in Las Vegas but he told Jon he’d sent five hundred – and even that forced Jon out of the house and into the stupid, tattooed arms of that asshole Joe Trohman.

“Your parents don’t even know you’re gay, dude – they’re fucking homophobes,” Jon shouted at him during one argument. “Why do you continue to help them out?”

“Oh, I don’t know – maybe because I actually love my family and find it difficult to sit back and let my dad die when I actually earn enough to help him get better. Why do you continue to help them?”

“Because smoking heroin with Joe is a damn sight cheaper than prescription anti-depressants. Maybe you should pass on the memo to your mom and dad that our job doesn’t come with medical benefits. You’re a hypocrite, Brendon.”

“I am not,” he tried to defend himself, but it sounded weak coming from his mouth – and not-so-deep down, he knew that Jon was right; he was a hypocrite. He lied to Jon about the money, he kept a client as important as Ryan Ross a secret from him and he’d as good as broken his promise that they’d leave the city – because their escape route, that five grand he earned for sucking Ryan’s beautiful dick had been sent to Las Vegas, so that his mom and dad could pay their bills.
“How the hell are we going to get out of this apartment when you blindly write checks to your parents every month? What would they say, huh – if they knew how you earned that money? Filthy lucre – the way you describe them, they’d be fucking devastated.” Jon jabbed his finger into Brendon’s chest and then he turned away, sat down on the bed and opened the top drawer of the side table.

Brendon watched as Jon sparked a lighter underneath a dirty rectangle of foil and inhaled the fumes through a hastily made aluminum tube. For the first time since he met Jon Walker, he really, really wished they’d not got quite so involved. Brendon should’ve known he’d be trouble, with his handsome smile and his dark eyes. Men like that always were. Loving Jon was becoming more hassle than it was worth.

He would always give the same answer when Jon asked why he continued to help his parents out – because they were simple religious folks; they didn’t earn enough money to cover the sky-high medical costs his father’s treatment was costing. Jon wasn’t the only person he conveniently concealed the truth from. Brendon’s gullible family thought he was working a service job that earned him a lot of tips – which wasn’t too far from the truth, but his parents most likely imagined their son waiting tables at TGIF’s or Bubba Gump or some other touristy hotspot in Times Square. They were naïve enough, or maybe they were just desperate enough not to question him and that was the most important part.

Although he’d never come out to his parents, there were a few occasions where Brendon thought it impossible that they didn’t suspect something. They knew about his roommate, Jon – but they rarely asked questions about him. Jon Walker was a huge mystery to Brendon’s family and he intended to keep it that way. The less his parents knew about his life in New York, about his heroin-addicted, hooker boyfriend the better.

Before Brendon moved to Manhattan, his outlook on life had been a lot different. He led a reasonably sheltered childhood; the youngest of five children, born to a Mormon family in the outer suburbs of Las Vegas, he had very few opportunities during his adolescence to understand his true sexuality. His early teenage years were a constant battle between his head, his heart and his dick, wondering why he couldn’t see the allure of his female classmates when they all started developing tits and hips. His classmates would tease him and Brendon would use his religion as an excuse as to why he hadn’t started dating – I’m not allowed, he’d tell his non-Mormon friends, not until I’m sixteen. It sucks, but them’s the rules, he’d shrug and his classmates would all call him a square and a pussy and a bible-thumper, but at least none of them accused him of being gay – he was just the weird religious kid; the majority of the time they left him alone.

He just wasn’t attracted to girls when he was in school, he wasn’t attracted to the women on the TV either or pop-stars or the women he’d seen over his older brother’s shoulder, legs spread wide and pink, wet cunts pulled open on the screen of his laptop. He thought it made him a freak; he was filled with self-hate and doubt and confusion and he couldn’t figure it out – he just wanted to be normal.

He was fourteen when it clicked. His older sister just started courting a traveling missionary from Utah who she met through their church and Brendon thought he was the most handsome man he’d ever seen. When he looked at him all that self-hate and confusion and doubt began to disappear.

His name was Dallon and he was tall – way taller than Brendon had been at the time. Dallon, with his beautiful blue eyes and messy dark hair. Brendon hadn’t recognized that twisting in his stomach or the flutter in his heart every time he clapped eyes on the man as lust until he woke up one morning with a hard dick and come on his stomach, fuzzy images of his sister’s boyfriend disappearing behind his eyelids.
Dallon really took a shine to Brendon and everyone in the Urie family loved him; his sister was completely besotted – but then so was Brendon. So much so that he found it difficult to rationalize his attraction towards him. His already confused teenage hormones were raging and it was shortly after being introduced to Dallon that Brendon realized that he wasn’t a freak – he was just gay. He accepted that as the most monumental realization of his life and if his religious parents hadn’t been quite so against the idea of homosexuality, he’d have breathed a huge sigh of relief.

At fourteen, Brendon would turn up at Dallon’s dorm unannounced and ask to hang out and Dallon was always too polite to turn him away. They’d make small talk about church; they’d play computer games together, or jam on the old guitars Dallon had in the corner of his room and after a few hours his sister would turn up after work and he’d have to leave.

One evening, she grabbed his arm on his way out the door and spat; “What are you even doing bothering him every day? He doesn’t want to hang out with you – you’re just a kid. Back off, why don’t you?” and Brendon returned home sullenly, an ache in his heart and his sister’s spiteful words reverberating around his head.

He always assumed Dallon enjoyed his company – whenever they watched a movie together, Dallon would sit so close to him that the touch of his knee against his, or the slow rise and fall of his breathing was all Brendon could ever concentrate on. He sat through hours and hours of movies which he had no recollection of, simply because he spent the entire time wondering if Dallon really meant to brush his knee like that or really did need to sit with a pillow covering his lap because his "hands were cold". They hung out for months without his sister’s knowledge; Brendon didn’t know why it needed to be a secret, but Dallon always asked him to keep it one, so he always had. 

Dallon and his sister had been dating for a year and a half; Brendon was almost sixteen the day Dallon asked him if he had a girlfriend.

“Well, I’m not allowed to date until I’m sixteen, anyway, so…” he remembered shrugging, concentrating hard on the way Dallon’s shoulder was pressed against his own on top of his dorm bunk, his eyes fixed on, but not paying attention to the small TV playing game shows on mute in the background.

“Have you got your eye on anyone yet?” he asked and his hand moved to pick at a loose thread at the knee of Brendon’s pants. Brendon’s entire body tensed when he felt the back of Dallon’s fingers brush his thigh. “No girls in school? No one from church?” Dallon’s long fingers moved from the hole in the knee of his pants and up to brush Brendon’s hair back out of his eyes. Dallon said; “You’re really handsome, Brendon. You’re going to be a heartbreaker.”

Brendon shrugged again and then he let out a shaky sigh. “Can I tell you something?” he asked, with one nervous glance towards his sister’s boyfriend – the man he was totally in love with at fifteen.

“Sure. Anything.”

“I think I’m gay,” he said. Just like that. Dallon didn’t even bat an eyelid, but he did ask him if he was sure about that. “I don’t like girls. I never have. I don’t want to court anyone; I don’t want to get married. I want to leave the church, move someplace else. You’re not going to tell my dad, are you?”

“No. I won’t tell anyone. Your secret’s safe with me.” Dallon didn’t take his eyes off Brendon.

“And you don’t hate me? You don’t think I’m disgusting; that it’s a sin?”

“Brendon, I couldn’t ever think you’re anything less than perfect,” he replied and before Brendon
could open his mouth to argue that he wasn’t perfect and far from it, Dallon hooked his finger under Brendon’s chin, lifted his face towards his, leant forward and kissed him on the lips.

Brendon felt the kiss with his entire body, his muscles melting against Dallon’s shoulder as he felt the stirring of an erection inside his pants and his heart race and his head pump – Brendon’s first kiss was like something straight out of the movies; he almost recalled a mini orchestra playing outside the window. It felt like the strings had finally been pulled from around his shoulders – everything made sense to him. It was perfect and Dallon was everything – filling his nose and his lungs and the pores of his skin. It was eternally and blissfully suffocating.

A few weeks later, Brendon turned up at Dallon’s door at midnight – he attempted to tell his parents he wanted to leave the church after his sixteenth birthday and move to New York – he had all these grand plans of city living, some far-fetched romanticized idea of what Manhattan may have to offer. His parents completely shut him down and his mother started crying, so he’d stolen his sister’s car and driven across town to visit her boyfriend.

Dallon let him in without even a second thought and Brendon connected their lips this time, heated and sloppy as he pushed the man back into the room and against his bed. By the time Dallon’s ass hit the mattress, he was already pulling Brendon’s pants open and soon they were gone, down around his ankles with his cock hard and leaking, bobbing in front of Dallon’s face.

“Fuck,” the older man swallowed. “You’re so handsome, Brendon – god, this is so wrong…” and then his mouth closed around the head of Brendon’s dick and Brendon watched, bug-eyed and frozen in place as Dallon proceeded to suck his cock.

He never paid too much attention to the specifics of gay sex before that moment. Sure, for a full eighteen months Brendon imagined being intimate with Dallon as he lay in bed – his sister’s boyfriend there next to him, their naked bodies entwined but right up until the moment where Dallon snaked his hand around his ass and parted his cheeks with a dry finger, his fantasies never involved penetration.

He was a clueless, fifteen year old virgin, still struggling to come to terms with his sexuality - which is why he let out a sharp cry of protest when Dallon’s long finger, pressed against his asshole.

Dallon drew back from his cock and hushed him. “It’s okay,” he said, pulling Brendon down on top of the mattress and rolling next to him in his single bed. “We don’t have to do anything else.”

And so they hadn’t. They slept there together in their boxers until his sister woke them both up by pounding on the door at 7AM.

“Mom and dad are worried sick – and you stole my car; you are so grounded,” she fumed at him before smiling sweetly up at Dallon. “Was he any trouble?”

“Not at all, threw a sleeping bag out on the floor, didn’t hear a peep out of him all night.”

Brendon was sixteen the first time Dallon fucked him.

“You love me, don’t you, Brendon?” Brendon had been too agog to even form words – Dallon’s dick was inside him – up his ass and it felt… weird. The pain that had made it almost unbearable at first had given way to a warm pressure at the base of his dick and it wasn’t unpleasant – it was actually okay. Dallon was slow and gentle and he soothed Brendon into submission each time he cried out at the sharp intrusion.

When it was over, Dallon wiped the come out of Brendon’s ass and rolled over next to him,
spooning their bodies. He said, “That’s the first time I’ve ever done that. I think your dad wants me to ask him for your sister’s hand in marriage, but I don’t know if I want to. I think I’m gay too, but the Book says it’s immoral, it says it’s an illness.”

“Way to ruin the mood,” Brendon laughed, pushing his elbow into Dallon’s ribs.

“Sorry,” Dallon smiled – and then, “I love you.”

Brendon’s heart never burned brighter than it had that day.

They fucked for a year; Dallon would call him his angel. He’d tell him he loved him as Brendon went down on him and that maybe one day he’d break up with his sister and they could leave Vegas together and head west to LA or San Francisco and they could live together as a couple – a real, legitimate couple. They planned their future home together, a cabin on the shores of a blue lake, a penthouse apartment in Manhattan – a huge white mansion nestled on the shores of a bay… They’d drive fast cars and have beautiful friends and they’d drink out of one of those fancy champagne waterfalls. Well, as soon as Dallon thought of a way to leave the church. Brendon always loved Dallon the most when he indulged him those fantasies.

He grew to hate his sister. Over the two and a half years she’d been dating Dallon, he’d grown jealous over the small things – the fact that she could hold his hand in front of the family, the fact that they were always taking pictures together to post on MySpace or Live Journal, the fact that at night he would lie awake and have to listen to her stupid giggle as Dallon joked with her down the phone.

He used to spitefully tell her, “You’re twenty – most girls from church who’ve been courting for as long as you are married by now. What’s wrong with you? Maybe he doesn’t love you.”

Dallon would cross his heart and swear on his mother’s life that he hadn’t taken Brendon’s sister’s virginity and Brendon would huff at the end of his bed and say, "Well then, why don’t you just break up with her? Then we can be together and-"  

“Maybe when you’re eighteen, Brendon,” had always been Dallon’s abrupt answer.

The very next weekend, sat around the table in the dining room with his whole family present, his father clinked his fork on his water glass, gave his family one kind, sweeping glance and announced, “I think we have someone sat around this table who’d like to make an announcement.”

Brendon’s heart dropped like a stone right into his bowels as his sister gripped Dallon’s arm, her smile blazing through him like fire and thrust her left hand into the middle of the table, a sparkling engagement ring on her finger.

“Dallon asked me to marry him – and I said yes,” she beamed and his eyes locked with Dallon’s from across the table as his siblings erupted into screeches of excitement and celebration.

“Why did you do that?” Brendon hissed before Dallon left his family home that evening. “You told me you didn’t want to get married. I thought you were going to break up with her? I finish school next year. You told me you loved me.”

“I’m sorry,” he mumbled, all the time looking cautiously behind Brendon’s shoulder back up at the Urie house. “This can’t get out – what happened between us, Brendon; it’s over. If anyone finds out about this, I’ll deny it – and they’ll believe me over you. Everyone will know you’re a fag and everyone will hate you.”

“I can’t believe you’re doing this. This isn’t fair,” he’d cried. “I thought we were going to leave here,
“I was humoring you, Brendon. Get real that could never happen. I’m going to marry your sister and I’m going to live with her – not you. I’m not gay. That’s just the way it is. Don’t mess this up for me, okay?”

“You’re an asshole, Dallon. I hate you so much.” Brendon could feel the emotions pricking inside his face, his nose tickling as Dallon simply shrugged him off. Brendon turned away with tears in his eyes, his heart broken for the very first time by a man who was set to become his brother-in-law.

He’d been young – too young to really understand love and he truly believed all of Dallon’s sweet nothings, whispered into his ear as they came down from their orgasms together on the narrow bunk in his dorm room. He believed them because Dallon meant them. He still had no doubt about that. Stupid really, to trust the word of a closeted homosexual who was meant to be dating your sister, Brendon realized a few months too late.

Dallon barely even looked at him during the months following his engagement, but at his bachelor party – a stated affair at a local restaurant - he cornered him in the bathroom while he was taking a piss and tried to kiss him, crowding him up against the wall.

“What the heck, Dallon? Get off of me,” he’d spat, pushing Dallon away roughly. “You made your choice. You don’t get to do that anymore.”

Brendon hadn’t shoved him very hard, but Dallon stumbled back dramatically, sagging against the bathroom wall. “I’m sorry, Brendon. I’ve made a huge mistake,” he sighed – and he looked truly sorry. He actually looked pretty pathetic slumped there, his eyes wet. “This isn’t me. I spent my entire life trying to be the man everyone wants me to be, but it doesn’t make me happy. In bed with you in my arms is when I’m happy. I feel complete when I’m with you and I’m so sorry for hurting you, angel.” Hearing Dallon’s pet name stung like a slap to the face.

“You lied to me. You only had to wait another year until I finished school and we could have left. We could’ve gone anywhere – and you proposed to her,” he seethed at Dallon. “It’s too late for that now.”

“Bren… Please.” Dallon rushed him, pulling him in by his cheeks. “Maybe just one more time, before I get married – come on…” Dallon’s lips pressed against his and opened dryly. His breath tasted stale and Brendon pulled away from the kiss.

“I’m serious, Dallon. What’s your problem?”

“My problem is that I love you, Brendon. I’ll wait for you to finish school, I’ll break it all off with your sister, I swear and we can work it out.” Dallon looked just about as desperate for forgiveness as he possibly could. “I’m losing sleep, I can’t stop thinking about you. I’ll go out there right now and call off the whole damn engagement. I’ll do it for you. I love you and I’ll treat you well and-”

Brendon had cut him off quickly. “Don’t bother, man,” he sighed. “I’m not interested in you anymore. You broke my heart. You don’t get a second chance after that.” He pushed past him and let the restroom door swing to a close behind him.

Sometimes, Brendon would lie awake cursing the day he walked away from Dallon and his promises. He’d wonder how his life would’ve been if he stayed, if he’d just taken Dallon at his word and moved to California with him. It was just one of the many things that kept Brendon Urie awake at night.
The year that Brendon turned eighteen, Dallon married his sister – looking like some lanky Frankenstein in his oversized suit. He just finished school and his parents had been nagging him for months about either getting a job or going to college. He already decided he needed out of Las Vegas; the city was slowly suffocating him and his sister’s wedding had been the final nail in the coffin.

Two weeks after the wedding, Brendon told his parents he was going to move to New York City. He wanted to be a writer or a musician – the scene was stale in Las Vegas, he needed more than faux canals and glittering casinos. They both laughed at him and wished him luck. None of his family had ever been further east than Salt Lake City and they didn’t have any faith in Brendon to do anything different with his life. They wanted him to find a girl, settle down with a wife and have a couple of kids – that’s what they thought he needed to make him happy and when he packed his bags and neglected to arrive home after his curfew one night, they called him up and begged him to just come home.

Brendon was already at a truck stop in Moab, eastern Utah when he got their phone call, the tangy taste of come in his mouth after he agreed to suck a trucker’s dick in exchange for a ride to Kansas City.
“They’re friends of Erin’s from California. It’s uh-” Gabe looked down at the flyer he held in his hands and scanned his eyes across it, passing the joint back to Ryan.

“A tour de force, says Time Out New York.”

“A tour de shit, is what it’s going to be,” Ryan told him. “And you’re still trying to impress this Erin chick? Wow.”

“She’s my girlfriend, bro, so watch your goddamn mouth. FYI, Ryan, when you’re in a relationship with someone, you tend to support each other and take a mutual interest in each other’s shit. She asked me to come along tonight and she mentioned inviting you – god knows why. So just pretend like you’re enjoying yourself. Please. For my sake.” Gabe pouted at him and then broke into a wide grin.

Ryan rolled his eyes and killed the joint, throwing it out the window of the car. Shane was working for him again and he and Gabe were on their way to some lame drag show in Chelsea which a bunch of Erin’s pals from San Francisco were touring up the East Coast. Ryan hadn’t read the reviews but Gabe assured him they’d been good. He was only a little high and he felt good. All things considered.

After the conversation with his parents the previous month, Ryan - much to everyone’s surprise – checked himself into a rehabilitation center in Arizona. He stuck it out for three long, tiresome weeks before he packed his bags and flew back to Manhattan. He felt rejuvenated and his head was a little clearer; three weeks without booze, drugs or sex can do that to a man but his heart wasn’t in it. His therapist told him that unless he was willing to change for himself then his recovery, in the long run, would be futile. So he left.

His therapist also told him he was suffering from love avoidance – some fancy new buzzword created so the emotionally retarded didn’t have to feel quite so bad about themselves. Apparently, the reason for his drug use was that he acted in extremes to escape getting hurt, to avoid commitment and emotional attachment. Ryan nodded in slow agreement because it kind of made sense - if he really wanted to simplify it that much, get down to the bare bones of his addiction. His therapist said that love avoidance was often the effect of past relationship trauma. He asked Ryan if he ever suffered any.

“Nope,” he replied, his arms crossed over his chest, shaking his head in denial. He made it ten years without spilling his biggest secret; he certainly wasn’t going to tell some old, overpaid, bespectacled shrink after a few hours of forced therapy sessions.

His three weeks in Arizona were just about as good as he expected them to be. It pleased his parents, which was the only reason he’d gone in the first place – just to get them the hell off his case for five goddamn minutes - but he found it difficult to gel with the other patients and living a life of sobriety was easier said than done. Three weeks without alcohol and drugs was the longest Ryan had been sober since he was fifteen and he didn’t know how to function when he wasn’t high. In rehab, his days were a lot more difficult – he had to abide by rules and timeframes and interact with losers he had absolutely no interest in. He hated being told what to do; his emotions felt too raw, like open wounds that someone kept insisting they scrub salt into.

He began to question all his selfish drug-induced decisions over the past decade. It felt like someone had taken the blinkers from his eyes and showed him the world for the first time, because suddenly
he was aware of the people around him, of the way they held themselves or the tone of their voice and the way they frowned when he spied off lie after guarded lie. He observed silently and kept his emotions on lockdown. When anyone asked him a question, he thought about it carefully before feeding them some elaborate answer and he didn’t like it. It gave him a fucking headache. Ryan didn’t like the regret that his memories dredged up, so he left and when he did finally check himself out after three fruitless weeks, he was keen to mute his guilty thoughts with a fat line of coke or a bottle of expensive scotch.

He hated it there, at that stupid rehabilitation center. He couldn’t deal with his patronizing therapist or the lousy group sessions he was forced to take part in. “You have no special privileges here, Ryan. You’re expected to join in, just like everyone else,” his doctor would tell him as he moped on a lawn chair and refused to partake. They expected him to sit there in a circle, with disgusting Arizona tweaking and hopeless heroin addicts and talk about himself and all his fuck-ups.

By the end of his stay, he was tired of all that fake friendship and pseudo-religious bullshit those people spewed from their rotten mouths, mantras like, “God, give me the serenity to change some shit that I can’t and give me the strength to figure out how I’m going to deal with myself now that I have to wake up and look at myself all the time and I don’t get to disappear anymore.”

They didn’t really say that, but Ryan never really listened.

He’d been back in Manhattan for a week. Ryan Ross - Fresh Out of Rehab, all the tabloids screamed. They called him troubled. They called him drug-reliant. They called him a liability. He always had a somewhat strained relationship with the press – they loved writing about him because his name sold papers and Ryan loved taunting them because for the most part, at least while he was younger, he enjoyed the attention but nowadays dealing with the press was becoming slightly trickier. So far he managed to stay out of trouble. He’d taken it easy the first few days after he left Arizona. He spent a lot of time at home alone, ignoring phone calls and smoking weed. He enjoyed the high; after three clean weeks, the buzz he got from weed alone was intense – a happy, relaxed body high without the headache that followed too much cocaine.

On his fourth day of freedom, he’d taken a couple of bumps of coke with Gabe – nothing too drastic, just enough to balance his equilibrium. It was difficult to stay clean in the company he kept and he almost felt guilty about it because after all, three and a half weeks was a long time sober for someone like him but as a couple bumps turned into a few lines and as a few lines turned into a coke bender, the guilt subsided and Ryan, for all his efforts, was back at square one.

His parents were disappointed in him. They wanted him to stay for the full three-month program but neither of them had yet suggested that he go back. They told him he looked healthier – even Jacob slapped his back and told him he looked good but his family was still acting cautious around him. They handled Ryan like he was a ticking time bomb, liable to self-destruct at any minute.

Ryan agreed to stay clean and attend weekly NA and AA meetings in return for full access to his trust fund and the renewed employment of his driver and George, the foolish bastard readily agreed. The first thing Ryan had done was send Shane off to his dealer to pick up an eight ball. He offered Shane five hundred bucks.

“I swear – if your dad finds out…”

“Fine. One thousand dollars – and all you have to do is pick up some drugs and keep your big goddamn mouth closed.”

Shane rolled his eyes, but accepted the offer graciously before leaving Ryan’s apartment and returning an hour later with three and a half grams of coke and a pound of weed. So far, Ryan had
done an exceptional job at hiding his renewed usage from both the press and his family.

The worst thing about going to rehab was that he hadn’t got laid in over a month – he was definitely looking for something to fuck tonight. Man, woman, Ryan didn’t care but in his sobriety, Brendon had been on his mind a lot – it was almost as if he couldn’t quite shake the boy from his memory - that perfect body and tight ass and handsome face... He’d been debating calling the dude up since he left Arizona but every single time his thumb hovered over the call button on his cellphone, he chickened out. It had been a month – Brendon probably moved on and all but forgot about him.

When they arrived at the venue, Ryan looked around skeptically – it was nothing but a small gay club, plastered with posters advertising tonight’s drag show and other upcoming events. His presence would probably skyrocket this lousy place to instant popularity amongst Manhattan’s gay elite. It looked busy, teeming with older gentlemen, talking and laughing loudly around the bar. He felt his chest rising and falling rapidly as he tried to control his breathing. He wasn’t comfortable here, this wasn’t his scene – he didn’t know anyone. He tugged Gabe’s arm like a nervous child and pulled him into the shadows at the back of the bar.

“I’m not sure I want to be here,” he told him. He hadn’t had a line in hours – apart from the joint they shared in the car, Ryan was resolutely sober.

“I promised Erin,” Gabe explained. “I’m not going to stand her up, Ryan – if you want to leave, you can leave but I’m staying. Look, here she is now.”

Ryan swore under his breath as he spotted Erin approaching, gliding over the floor in her heels like an angel. She kissed Gabe’s mouth, lingering on his lips for only a second before she turned and pecked Ryan’s cheek.

“Ryan, you look fabulous - it’s so wonderful to see you again,” she gushed at him. “How are you feeling?” Erin rubbed at his shoulder sympathetically, as if he was dying man who everyone knew wouldn’t make it to Christmas. That was another thing people kept asking him since he checked himself out of rehab, how he was feeling - as if they all suddenly cared.

Ryan forced a smile and nodded. “Great,” he replied. “A lot better - and you look wonderful, by the way. I love this dress, it’s beautiful on you,” he said, brushing his hand across the silk sleeve of its arm. “Did you design it yourself?”

“I did,” she reddened and then, “Oh, Ryan, you’re making me blush.”

He kind of had that effect on people – especially women like Erin.

“I’m really looking forward to the show tonight – Time Out New York called it a tour de force,” he told her. Erin’s cheeks were still red and he noticed Gabe glaring daggers at him from behind her shoulder, but hey, he was only human – and Erin really was fucking beautiful. A little harmless flirtation never hurt anyone. He could probably fuck Erin in a heartbeat if he really wanted to.

After an hour, Ryan was beginning to regret not staying at home. He was finishing off his third glass of champagne when he scanned his eyes across the room to check out the talent – the place seemed completely void of it. Standing around the bar and chatting in small groups were a bunch of older, fashionable Manhattan gays – silk scarves draped around their wrinkly necks and thick-framed spectacles on their noses. All of them were a far cry from Ryan’s usual type. It had been a month though and he was kind of getting desperate.

Perhaps if he got drunk enough he could... No. He straightened up in his chair and pulled out his cellphone – his contacts were filled with hundreds of people who’d be eager to relieve him of his
frustrations, beautiful, flat-chested women and handsome young boys. He was Ryan Ross – it wouldn’t be hard for him to pick up a date - but it seemed almost impossible for him to find someone that would truly satisfy him.

He thought about Brendon again. He really wanted to call him. Their last meeting had been such a letdown, such a huge embarrassment for him that he felt the need to prove himself as the exceptional lover he knew he was.

Their first meeting had been incredible and it had solidified that fact that Ryan simply had to keep in contact with this man. He wanted to break him down, fuck him into the mattress and push his head into the pillow. He wanted to bend him over double and pull his hair and he wanted Brendon to beg. Ryan was sure that this Brendon character knew a lot of seedy clubs; he fantasized about it as he sat there – fucking the boy in some grimy toilet cubical or up against the wall of a back alley.

Brendon was dirty – after all, he was a hooker and although he looked all perfect and pure and innocent, Ryan knew better. He was a filthy slut, a needy little whore – that much was obvious. He just needed someone to loosen him up a little bit. He needed to let go, he thought – learn how to fucking enjoy himself.

He knew where this guy lived – or at least Shane would probably remember. He thought back to their last meeting; when he picked him up from outside those shitty apartments. He remembered the blowjob – that perfect fucking blowjob, none of the sloppy, lazy mouth-action that Gabe gave him when they were drunk enough. Brendon had been concentrated; he sucked on his cock like it was the last thing he was ever going to do, like it was his one source of life and Ryan liked that. Sucking dick was Brendon’s goddamn job, he may not have liked it but he certainly put a lot of effort into it.

His finger hovered over Brendon’s contact – he should call him because it would certainly take his mind off the drugs he shouldn’t be taking - a nice tight ass to fuck and a good orgasm would do him good – especially after a whole goddamn month of abstinence.

He grabbed another glass of champagne from a passing waiter and sipped it slowly. Maybe after his fourth glass he’d pluck up the confidence to call the boy. Jesus, he just wanted a damn fuck, how hard could it be?

After his sixth glass, Ryan was feeling the effects of the alcohol – the expensive champagne had made him a little dizzy. Gabe and Erin disappeared to the restrooms together fifteen minutes ago – either to take coke or fuck, probably both. Ryan would’ve settled for a threesome tonight – he let the fantasy roll through his head, him and Gabe fucking Erin together. Him inside her ass while his friend screwed her pussy or maybe both of them inside her cunt together - that always got him off - but there was no way that Gabe would go for it; he seemed quite taken with this new girlfriend of his. Ryan sighed despondently and looked back at his iPhone. Brendon’s contact was still on the screen.

When the waiter came back around and offered him another glass of champagne, Ryan accepted without any remorse. Maybe after his seventh glass he’d call Brendon.

Yes. Definitely after the seventh glass…

* * *

Brendon twirled around on the barstool and sighed. He’d been sat there in the club for just over an hour and not one man made any effort to even talk to him. This place was usually his best bet on a slow night; the club drew a certain clientele – rich, gay New Yorkers in their fifties and rich, gay New Yorkers in their fifties were Brendon’s specialty. Usually he could sit at the bar for fifteen minutes and get picked up – they’d take him back to a hotel or their expensive Manhattan apartment
and they’d pay good money to fuck him. Guys with more money than sense… Brendon liked those
types.

He frequented the club several times a week because he could usually get away with sitting at the bar
for hours without security asking him to leave. It was also warm, which was always a plus during the
cold, winter months. It sure beat standing around on a street corner, approaching cars and trying to
wangle more than ten bucks out of some dirty trick after a blowjob. That was Jon’s forte.

Tonight though, the bar was holding some drag show and none of the patrons seemed to be that
interested in the lonely hooker at the bar. He scraped enough money together for a beer and had been
nursing it for an hour. He never made any money when the club hosted show nights. Men arrived
with friends or lovers; none of them were looking to get lucky with an escort but nine times out of
ten, if he sat at the bar for long enough and looked lonely enough, someone would approach him and
at the very least offer to buy him a drink.

He looked at his cellphone – it was almost 10PM. He should just leave. The show was about to
begin and once it did, no one would even be looking at him. He propped his chin in his hand and let
out another heavy sigh. All he really wanted to do was go home, climb into bed and fall asleep – he
really didn’t want to resort to cocking his hip on a street corner. That was also Jon’s job – Brendon
stopped humiliating himself like that almost a year ago.

He thought about Jon – the man he’d always sworn he was in love with. They’d been arguing a lot
more, Brendon hadn’t been sleeping – Jon would keep him awake at night, tossing and turning and
sweating under the covers. He’d not smoked any junk for two weeks and it had made him restless.
Brendon started to understand the term *kicking the habit* - all night long, Jon’s limbs would jerk on
top of their mattress, his teeth would chatter and sometimes his whole body would shake so much
that the bed frame rattled against the wall.

Brendon would lay awake, staring up at the mildew-rotten ceiling, thinking. He’d think about his
family, about how ashamed they’d all be if they could see the mess he was in right now. Even
Dallon would probably be relieved that he escaped into a life of heterosexual, Mormon bliss by
marrying his sister.

Two weeks ago, Brendon threatened to leave unless Jon stopped smoking the brown. He walked in
on him during a heroin coma. His stupid, lifeless limbs and chalk-white face, for five long,
insufferable seconds, led Brendon to believe his boyfriend was dead and it had been a big kick to the
guts.

“I’m going to fucking leave you, Jon. I swear to god. I can’t stand seeing you like this – you’re
killing yourself. You’re pathetic,” he spat through his tears, jabbing his finger into Jon’s chest and
watching his eyes try and focus up at him blearily. “I’m going to do it. You’re going to wake up one
morning and I’ll be gone, just you wait.”

Jon cried, real, desperate tears as he blocked their front door and begged him to stay. “I’ll quit. I’ll get
clean. I’ll do anything you want me to – please don’t leave me. I’m nothing without you,
Brendon, please.”

Brendon only made the threat to gauge Jon’s reaction; he never had any intention of leaving because
where the hell could he go? A lot of the time Jon was so strung-out that he wouldn’t have known if
Brendon was lying beside him in bed or not. He wanted some compassion from the man. He wanted
Jon to make him feel *indispensable* and watching him plead on his knees not to walk out their front
door was satisfying enough. He agreed to stay – but only if Jon made an effort to quit smoking.

Jon made a big effort – he eased off the hard stuff, but he was smoking a ton of weed – courtesy of
Joe Trohman, much to Brendon’s irritation. He asked him to quit smoking heroin in the vain hope that they wouldn’t have to deal with that fucker anymore, that Jon wouldn’t have an excuse to hang out with him but he was still on the scene, slinging drugs for Pete Wentz. Brendon snapped at Jon one evening, “So, how do you pay Joe for his drugs, do you suck his dick, or what?”

“Give me a fucking break, Brendon, jeez,” Jon sighed, pulling the bedcovers over his head and turning to face the wall. “Joe sells me weed – for cash. That’s it – not that you’ll ever believe me about that though. You got it into your head that we’re having some sort of ridiculous affair. Tell me, Brendon – what do I have to do to convince you that I’ve always been one hundred percent faithful to you?”

Brendon swallowed. “Nothing,” he mumbled, thinking back to that night with Ryan Ross; the night Ryan kissed him and made him come – the night they slept together in the same bed… “I believe you. It’s just-”

“It’s just what, Bren?” Jon glared over his shoulder at him. “Trust me, if I wanted to leave you, I would – but I don’t. Look,” he said, splaying his hands in front of his chest. “Nine days and no junk. You’ve not even congratulated me.”

“Congratulations.” After a pause and under his breath he added; “Nine days, wow, big achievement, Jon.”

This evening, before he left for work, he started another argument with the man. His sleepless nights gave way to irritated mornings and despite all Jon’s best efforts, Brendon couldn’t help himself nagging at him. Nothing was good enough for him – not even Jon being two weeks clean. He thought about everything in too much detail, he let memories of the past threaten their future and Jon had snapped at him, “Why don’t you just leave me? You seem to hate me enough.”

“Maybe I will,” he’d bitten back. “At least then you’ll be free to run to Joe or back to Pete and you can beg him to take you back and when you got his dick in your mouth, don’t forget I’m the only person who was stupid enough to ever love you.”

Jon backhanded him for that comment and Brendon stormed out the door, his cheek red and stinging. Jon called after him; he shouted his apology from the top of the stairwell but Brendon hadn’t turned back.

Sat in the bar, Brendon’s mind was currently occupied with the image of Jon – the man he loved, despite everything they’d been through – lying on the backseat of a clapped-out, old Toyota, back arched, fingers stretched out in pleasure… His eyes were closed, his mouth open, fingernails digging into the shoulders of the faceless man above him. In his thoughts Jon was groaning, asking for more – Jon was hard and it was eating Brendon up inside.

His train of thought was promptly interrupted by his cellphone ringing in his pants pocket. Maybe it was Jon, calling to apologize for hitting him, asking him to come home. The caller ID was blocked. Perhaps he was calling from a payphone; maybe some client had been kind enough to let him borrow their cellphone.

“Hello?”

“Brendon?”

He tried to place the voice. “Yes.”

“Hey, you. Nice jacket. Look to your right. Hi.”
Brendon slowly raised his eyes and scanned them across the club.

*Ryan Ross.* His heart contracted as their eyes met from across the room.
A grimy club bathroom was certainly not Brendon’s ideal place to fuck, not since he’d grown used to fancy hotel suites with soft, clean beds but it would suffice for whatever Ryan had in mind. Brendon had done it in smaller spaces before now and all that was putting him off was the cleanliness of the place. He scanned the small bathroom cubical dubiously as he felt Ryan push in behind him and lock the door.

Ryan asked Brendon to show him the dirtiest, grungiest dive bar he knew and so Brendon brought him here – one of his local haunts back when he was working the streets. It was some dark, backstreet gay bar where men went to pick up hookers and score cheap drugs – the owners and bar staff mostly turned a blind eye to it and Brendon would never fail to find someone who was willing to pay him – usually a quick handjob for ten bucks at the back of the club, maybe a blowjob in the restrooms which, needless to say, were not the cleanest he’d ever seen but Ryan wanted dirt and grime. Well, he certainly had it here.

“On your knees,” Ryan ordered, unzipping his pants and leaning back on the graffiti-covered cubical wall. Brendon paused briefly, looking down at the colorful mixture of dirt and urine under his boots but he sank to his knees in front of Ryan and took his cock in his mouth all the same. He could feel the piss seeping through the knees of his pants – he’d only just done his laundry, these pants were clean on tonight, he thought, shifting his position slightly, only resulting in becoming more sodden than he already was.

At least Ryan didn’t smell bad, he tried to console himself. If he tried really hard, he could remove himself almost entirely from his current situation – the piss-stained floor and empty, discarded Ziplocs of coke, the dirty, balled up toilet paper and droning thump of the music reverberating through the walls. Brendon sucked at the head of Ryan’s cock and then slid the shaft down his throat.

“Fuck, it’s been a month since I got laid,” Ryan told him with a sigh, his long fingers carding softly through Brendon’s hair. It was almost tender. “God, you’re so damn good at this. Earn that tip, baby.” Brendon pulled away with a pop and Ryan pulled his dick up against his stomach. He didn’t need to be told how to give a good blowjob, so Brendon sucked Ryan’s balls into his mouth and looked up at him with searching eyes. “You’re so fucking hot,” Ryan breathed, closing his eyes and resting his head back on the wall. Brendon’s dick twitched at the comment.

He was willing his erection down when the sudden harsh tug of Ryan’s fist in his hair pulled at his scalp. He cried out quietly; he hadn’t been expecting it so when Ryan bucked his hips so that his dick hit the back of his throat, Brendon tried to ease off in a panic.

“You like it rough, you dirty bitch? Do you enjoy this; being treated like a slut?”

Brendon held Ryan’s hips against the cubical wall, holding them there with all his strength. Ryan may have been an inch or two taller than him, but Brendon figured he was probably stronger. He flashed Ryan a warning glare and reattached his mouth around his cock. Sometimes his tricks just needed to be reminded who was in charge – they might have been paying him a very favorable sum of money, but he had the power to say no. Brendon sucked Ryan off without protest for a few more minutes, his scalp burning every time Ryan pulled at his hair.

“Get up, turn around and bend over,” he was ordered a few moments later.

Brendon scrambled to his feet and caught the man’s eye, Ryan’s fingers pulled at the buckle of his
belt, making quick work of unzipping Brendon’s pants and pulling them down over his ass. Brendon turned in his arms and bent at the waist, pushing himself against Ryan, feeling his hard cock between his ass cheeks.

He bit his lip. Ryan pressed up behind him and his hand reached around to jerk his dick a few times. Brendon felt his heart rate spike as Ryan’s palm closed around him. He kept having to remind himself that this was Ryan Ross - Ryan Ross, son of a billionaire, international playboy. His tricks never usually paid attention to his cock and the bathroom suddenly felt a lot smaller. His knees were soaking, his scalp still burning. He could feel Ryan’s hot breath on his neck. Brendon really didn’t want to have to suffer the humiliation of letting Ryan know that he was enjoying this - the depravity, the dirt, Ryan's long, slim fingers around his dick.

“I want to watch you fuck yourself.”

Brendon closed his eyes and bit back a silent sigh of frustration. He spat on his index and middle finger and reached them behind him. Ryan pulled his ass cheeks apart and Brendon slid his middle finger slowly inside his asshole. Bathroom sex was meant to be quick and easy, not some long, drawn-out practice of some rich boy’s fantasies, Brendon thought(,) as he heard Ryan sigh in appreciation at the scene in front of him.

“Hey. Listen.” When Brendon spoke, his voice was dry. He cleared his throat and attempted his protest again. “Maybe we can book into a hotel? We’d have so much more time then and we can do all this properly.”

He hated being asked to finger-fuck himself. He hated being watched. Ryan’s hand smoothed softly around his ass and then between his cheeks, pushing one finger inside him next to his own. He let his hand fall away and Ryan’s long finger curled up against his prostate. Brendon’s entire body tensed up in protest. After a short moment, Ryan withdrew his finger and Brendon felt the head of his dick pushing against his hole.

“Use a goddamn condom, man,” he spat back at Ryan, pulling away towards the toilet. “I don’t do bareback.”

“I don’t have one,” Ryan said – and he pushed forward deliberately, the head of his dick slipping inside Brendon’s ass.

“I’m serious, dude.” Brendon pulled away and straightened up. “You don’t fuck me without a rubber. I don’t care who you are or what you’re paying me; you use a fucking condom.” When Brendon looked over his shoulder at him, Ryan looked animalistic. Ravenous. He looked like he’d never even seen anyone naked before, let alone managed to cajole them into sex in some disgusting toilet cubical.

“You’re cute when you’re angry,” Ryan grinned. Brendon felt the sudden desire to punch that smile off his face, but Ryan was moving against him, sliding his hands around his hips and pulling their bodies flush. Ryan’s lips moved forward, his dick hard against Brendon’s ass, his mouth open and searching for attention. Brendon kissed him, letting his tongue slip slowly inside Ryan’s mouth.

“Here,” he said softly, pulling away from Ryan’s wet lips. He pushed his hand into the pocket of his leather jacket and rooted around for a condom – Brendon always had them on him because his tricks were liable to conveniently forget. He tore open the square of foil and slid the condom down onto Ryan’s dick with one hand. Then he arched his back, bent over the toilet seat and wiggled his ass.

“I want to feel your dick in me, Ryan,” he said - just another well-practiced line, delivered to yet another rough client. He steeled himself in so much armor over the past few years that he’d grown to
view sex as nothing more than a tool for making money – a series of predictable steps that rarely had an effect on his own arousal but worked well for his partner at the time. It was pragmatic, monotonous and it certainly didn’t do anything for him but usually his tricks were satisfied with his blowjob/from behind combo.

Ryan, however, shifted things a little. It was as if he’d just come along and turned everything a few degrees out of sync and Brendon didn’t know how to deal with these new feelings. He’d long forgotten the intense pleasure that came with sex.

“You want me to fuck you, huh? Want me to fuck your hot little ass? You want me to make you come, whore?”

Brendon nodded as Ryan rutted up against him. “I want it,” he sighed, terrified at how much he truly meant his statement.

“Well then, fucking beg me,” Ryan told him – and Brendon could feel the head of his dick slipping inside him, he could feel that slow, burning drag of his cock entering his ass.

“Please fuck me, Ryan Ross – you’re the only man who can make me come.”

Brendon heard Ryan’s satisfied sigh and suddenly he was crying out his name as Ryan pushed into him. One quick, hard thrust was all it took before he could feel his hips against his ass and he groaned, loud and hoarse – and embarrassingly undignified. He bit his lip in an attempt to stop the moans pouring from his mouth but Ryan was fucking him in strong, fluid strokes, his fingernails digging hard into his hips and he kept catching his prostate. Brendon could feel his nerve endings like electric under his skin. Brendon felt awake for the first time since Dallon.

He knew the drill in this place. Soon, someone would be knocking on the cubical door and asking them both to get the fuck out. He’d been caught out in that way so many times before. This place was more than aware of how their patrons would use their toilets for a sly, drug-induced fuck. They usually gave ten, maybe fifteen minutes before security would start knocking angrily on the door, threatening to call the cops.

Ryan’s hand slipped around his body and made a haphazard grab for his dick. Brendon was hard. “Come on, baby. Come for me.”

Brendon moaned again, his bones shivering at Ryan’s words. Baby. He could feel the heat under his skin; he could feel it bubbling, sinking down from his crotch to his toes. His thighs were burning, his asshole stretched to accommodate Ryan’s dick and he opened his eyes and counted the seconds silently in his head, reading over the scrawls of graffiti on the cubical wall to distract himself. He just needed to let go…

Ryan was pounding into him, relentless, heavy strokes; the head of his dick hitting his prostate with every thrust. Ryan’s long fingers jerked him off quickly, his palm tight around the shaft of his dick. Perhaps he too, was aware of the unwritten rules of toilet-sex etiquette – don’t take liberties.

“Fuck, it’s been a month. I’m gonna fucking come, baby. I’m gonna…” Ryan’s words got lost in a series of hot groans and then Brendon didn’t know what force had overtaken his body, but suddenly his sweaty hand was linked with Ryan’s, silently instructing him to pay attention to the aching head of his cock. Ryan’s fingers ran around it and then Brendon’s back was arching and his legs were bending beneath him and he could feel the unfamiliar warmth of orgasm washing over him, from his toes up his spine and into his jaw, an incoherent groan escaping his lips.

“Oh, shit. Ryan.”
His come decorated Ryan’s fingers and he tried to breathe through his orgasm. Ryan was still going, pumping away and chasing his own arousal. Ryan Ross made him come. Again. Before he even reached his own orgasm this time, Brendon moaned for a few more seconds and as the afterglow quickly faded and his surroundings came back to him, he tried to steel his mind from what he just let happen. His muscles were still shaking, the relentless pressure against his prostate becoming uncomfortable as Ryan fucked him.

He felt Ryan’s orgasm - the tightening of his fingers on his hips, the spasm of his body behind him and then his groan – he felt it against his shoulder. When Ryan came he pulled Brendon roughly down to the floor with him, Brendon’s knees slammed hard against the piss-covered bathroom floor.

“Shit,” Ryan breathed with a small laugh, pulling out Brendon’s ass and tugging off the condom. Brendon stood immediately and pulled his pants up, his guilty heart beating wildly in his chest. “You’re amazing.”

Brendon closed his eyes as he buckled his belt and he shrugged. Ryan’s sticky fingers ran up the back of his thigh, up around his ass. Brendon tensed, the shiver running all the way up his spine. He turned around and looked down at Ryan Ross, bare knees against the dirty tiled floor, hair stuck to his forehead with sweat. How the mighty fall, he thought to himself.

Ryan grinned up at him, a huge, dazzling white smile on his handsome face. He reached up and rubbed Brendon’s dick through his pants. “You’re the best fuck I’ve ever had and I’ll bet I’m yours too, huh?”
Chapter 15

Ryan was kneeling on the bathroom floor with his pants still around his ankles when there was an angry knock on the door. He hadn’t heard anyone enter the restroom, but then he hadn’t really been listening. That orgasm, after almost a month without sex, had been something else.

Brendon’s dark eyes fixed on him from above and he pulled the corner of his bottom lip into his mouth with his teeth.

“Oops,” he whispered. “Busted.”

Ryan’s stomach surged up into the center of his chest. He knew he was doing it on purpose. Brendon couldn’t not know how fucking hot he was. He was playing up to the character he thought everyone expected of him, but Ryan was no dummy, he knew better than that. Brendon had to be aware of the effect he had on him – all this ridiculous faux-innocence and lip biting and guilty orgasms. The dude was probably raised Catholic or some shit, but Ryan knew Brendon enjoyed being a slut. He wanted to shake him, kiss him, lick him, completely consume him. He wanted to work his way up from the tips of his toes to the longest strands of his dark hair. He wanted to own him, make him entirely his.

He’d been fantasizing about him for the past month, about feeling Brendon’s tongue in his every orifice – and he supposed, vice versa. He’d pay good money to force cocaine up Brendon’s asshole with his tongue and hear him moan. *Fuck,* Ryan was getting hard again already. If it hadn’t have been for the second loud knock interrupting his train of thought, he’d have pulled Brendon back onto his hands and knees on the grimy floor of the toilet stall and he’d have pushed his mouth between his ass cheeks. He never wanted to rim anyone as much as he suddenly wanted to rim the beautiful hooker in front of him.

Brendon ran his hand through his hair and looked down at him with one raised eyebrow. “Are you going to want company tonight?” he asked, his voice barely a whisper above the music still shaking through the walls.

“Yeah,” he answered with a smile. “Five grand.”

Brendon’s mouth quirked up at the edge and then Ryan watched as his fingers closed around the lock and drew it back suddenly, flinging the door open and leaving him on the floor, pants around his ankles, his cock still semi-hard between his legs.

Ryan’s eyes met with the stranger who was stood above him, a tall, solid man dressed all in black. He must have looked a total state to the guy – cowering in some shitty toilet stall with his pants down. His face was probably still flushed from orgasm, he could feel his hair sticking to his forehead with sweat and he quickly scrambled to his feet, yanking his pants up as the stranger pushed into the cubical against him.

“You realize solicitation is illegal, don’t you? I should call the fuckin’ cops,” the man threatened, grabbing Ryan’s wrist and dragging him roughly out of the stall. “Boys like you,” he spat, “you sucking dick for cash, you’re fucking disgusting.”

“Hey!” Ryan yelled, outraged by the fact that he’d been mistaken for the hooker. He attempted to buckle his belt without looking, his eyebrows furrowed as he glared at the man. “Who the fuck do you think you are? Get the fuck out of here. Don’t you know who I am?” he spat, cringing silently at his clichéd statement. In an attempt to recover from his embarrassment, he pointed over to Brendon
stood beside him against the sink. “He’s the dick sucker!”

The man’s eyes slowly looked over at the boy he not long ago claimed was the best fuck he ever had; he’d just totally thrown that beautiful, flawless young man under the bus. The doorman’s voice softened sarcastically. “Oh, Brendon Fucking Urie. Sorry - didn’t recognize you without your mouth stuffed full of cock. You still owe me money, motherfucker.”

Well, that plan sure backfired. He hadn’t expected the two men to know each other – and how they knew each other was obvious. This dude was probably one of Brendon’s tricks. The image of Brendon with his lips wrapped around that man’s dick pushed into his head and he was torn between being turned on and being absolutely fucking furious that Brendon got him into this less than ideal situation.

Ryan saw Brendon’s glare harden as he folded his arms tightly across his chest and balled his fists up. “Yeah, that’s funny; I didn’t recognize you with your pants on,” he quipped.

The man snorted and fixed his eyes back on Ryan, jerking his thumb in Brendon’s direction. “Smart-assed fucker, ain’t he?” Ryan swallowed silently in reply. “Hey, Brendon - your boyfriend was in here earlier, left with some tatted-up motherfucker who he looked pretty into. If you catch my drift?” The man’s eyebrows waggled and he elbowed Ryan roughly in the arm as if they had some kind of bond, some kind of in-joke.

Boyfriend? The word spun around Ryan’s head. The guy was probably using it figuratively. Perhaps Brendon had a friend, some hooker pal who looked out for him, but surely not a boyfriend?

How come someone like Brendon could hold down a relationship and he couldn’t? He was handsome and famous and fucking rich and Brendon was a penniless nobody. He sure as fuck was handsome though, but fucking other men for a living must have unquestioningly got in the way of something as serious as having a boyfriend. Ryan fretted - maybe he was in love with this dude, maybe this boyfriend of his was who Brendon thought about to make himself come when Ryan fucked him. His whole body was inadvertently clenched.

He could see Brendon desperately grappling for a snarky comeback but he failed, miserably and finally settled on narrowing his eyes and mumbling out a pathetic, “Fuck you, Zack. Whatever.”

Ryan looked back at the man, watching him sneer and gloat; he was looking at Brendon with such disdain - with real, true disgust. Ryan had never seen such hatred behind someone’s eyes before. Suddenly, for the first time in his life, Ryan felt out of his depth.

He was the son of a billionaire; he didn’t belong in situations like this! Wherever he went, there were always people bowing to his every whim, pandering to his needs; whether it was William or Shane, or at parties or in bed, or hell, even at home with his parents, people were always there to make sure he was happy and comfortable – but watching this mini-drama unfold in front of him wasn’t making him either happy or comfortable. It was making his heart pound. It was making his stomach sink into his bowels. The warm, fuzzy afterglows of sex had long but disappeared.

“Fuck me?” Zack scoffed. “Hey, I recall your boyfriend saying that about…” he looked at his watch for dramatic effect and pouted, “an hour ago. I paid him ten bucks for a blowjob in that very cubical,” he said, pointing at the bathroom stall they just vacated.

Ryan was sober. He shared a joint in the car with Gabe hours ago and so when Brendon lunged for the man with his fist, he couldn’t ignore that look of anger that rippled across his face. It was like watching someone’s heart break in slow motion. Ryan jumped back in shock of the sudden, violent outburst but Zack, obviously a pro at dodging angry punches, grabbed Brendon’s fist and roughly
twisted it behind his back, pushing him hard against the tiled bathroom wall. Brendon’s arm was caught awkwardly and, by the looks of it, painfully between their bodies and Ryan shifted on the spot, glancing towards the door for an escape route.

He could see the muscles tightening in Brendon’s neck; he could see the veins at his temples and the tension in his jaw and he didn’t know what to do – if they were anywhere else but this shitty dive bar restroom, he’d have someone beside him to diffuse the situation. Where the fuck were William or Shane or fucking Gabe when he needed them?

The man behind Brendon thrust his hips forward against his ass. Brendon’s useless knees looked just about ready to give way beneath him. His eyes were wet, he was breathing out spit with each heaving breath.

“Yeah, he loved it when I spat in his mouth,” the man sneered, his lips pressing against Brendon’s ear. Ryan froze, not so much at the words, but at Brendon’s reaction – eyes wide, furiously blinking back tears. Ryan looked at his feet and bit his lip. He didn’t need this – what he thought was going to be a quick, easy fuck was descending into a terrifying guilt-trip.

The man’s big hands were creeping up Brendon’s neck and fistng at his crown. He pressed Brendon’s body hard against the wall with the weight of his own and yanked his head backward. His knuckles were white in Brendon’s hair. Ryan remembered how only ten minutes ago they’d been locked in their perfect little world of orgasm together - it had been his hand pulling at the boy’s hair. Brendon certainly hadn’t looked like he was in this much pain when he’d done it, but then again maybe he had. Ryan wasn’t sure; his eyes had been closed, but in his imagination he hadn’t looked like this – panicked eyes and contorted lips.

Ryan watched Brendon’s jugular, running down the length of his exposed neck. It was almost like the man was offering Brendon up to him, Ryan’s sacrifice, his gateway to heaven. He wanted it to be his hands in Brendon’s hair again. He wanted the boy’s skin under his lips and to suck bruising kisses onto him. He wanted to mark his territory… Ryan swallowed his fantasy and blinked back his true surroundings.

“I’ve heard that loverboy Jon, ain’t got no limits. I heard he lets men fuck him bareback for fifty bucks; he don’t even charge extra if they come in his ass. Word around here is that your boo, Jon, is the man you talk to when you want some real filthy come whore, because he don’t say no to anything…” Ryan’s heart was in his throat. The taller man took a breath and opened his mouth as if to launch into another verbal attack when Brendon spoke before him.

“Say one more word about him and I’ll rip your fucking dick off,” he spat, his voice sounding nasal – almost as if he was trying to stop himself from crying. Brendon’s free hand swung back in a fist and caught the man between his legs. For a split second, Ryan thought Brendon was going to get away with it. Zack doubled over, the hand that was still holding Brendon’s arm behind his back falling away to grab his crotch. His eyes were screwed up, his face red as his breath left him in one quick, sudden burst.

Brendon tried to push back from the wall, using his newly free arm as leverage, but Zack still had a strong hold on his hair and before Ryan could even get his head and his body and his voice in corresponding working order, the man slamming Brendon’s skull against the wall and then yanked him back a good six foot across the bathroom. He fell roughly against the opposite wall, where his body collided with a thud into the dirty tiled surface. Brendon slid to the floor.

“Fuck. Stop. Please,” Ryan breathed out, touching the man’s arm as he crossed the floor with wide strides and stepped up against Brendon’s slumped form. One thick arm pushed Ryan back with little effort and he gripped at the edge of the cracked sink, his palms sweaty and hot against the cold
porcelain.

Brendon wasn’t unconscious and Ryan had yet to see any blood seeping from his head but the fall seemed to have knocked the breath out of him. Brendon sank against the wall, his head dropped forward as he wheezed out air. Ryan could run now, no one would even know he was here and he could go home and push the night to the back of his mind with the help of a bottle of expensive scotch.

He could go out and find another pretty boy with dark hair and big eyes, another man who knew how to get a dick down his throat as perfectly as Brendon did, another man with an ass so tight it felt like absolute heaven to fuck. Brendon wasn’t the only handsome escort in Manhattan, of that Ryan was certain, but he was involved now. He couldn’t just walk away because if he read in the obituaries section of the newspaper a few days from now, that an unidentified male escort had been found dead outside some back alley dive bar, he’d never forgive himself.

“Back the fuck off, dude,” Ryan said, with about as much assertion as he could manage. “We were just leaving. Come on, Brendon, get up.” In that one order, he reminded himself of William.

“Shut the fuck up, asshole. I should call the cops on the both of you, you fucking perverts.” He turned back to Brendon, stepping up against the soles of his boots. “Yeah, your pathetic little boyfriend, Brendon – I’ve not fucked him in a while, but he moaned for me like the bitch he is, dirt cheap too and a fantastic fuck. You can tell he really loves dick. I tag-teamed him once with one of the old barmen. He was fuckin’ gagging for it the whole time – took us both in his ass, like a fuckin’ pro.”

Brendon spluttered out a sound of protest but he couldn’t formulate any words; his chest was still heaving as he sat there but Ryan was sober enough to notice the tension in his jaw, the submissive hunch of his shoulders, the one, lone tear running slowly down Brendon’s cheek.

He bit the inside of his mouth and attempted another objection. “Dude, leave him the fuck alone.” Ryan shoved against the larger man, but he didn’t sway even an inch. The doorman glared at him for long enough that Ryan backed down, scared of the consequences, slinking into the corner of the bathroom.

When Zack turned his attention back to Brendon, he squatted down and pulled the boy towards him by the collar of his leather jacket. “You two motherfuckers owe me money. Tell your darling boyfriend that if I see his ass in here again, I’ll make sure he crawls outta here with two broken legs. Should’ve known it’d be a mistake fronting that fucker that gram of brown the other week – asshole still owes me. And he’s always full of excuses, Jon is, ain’t he? You should see him work this club on a weekend, Brendon - back and forth to the bathroom with different tricks like a fuckin' bulimic.”

Brendon still seemed to be having trouble even breathing. Ryan now wasn’t sure whether he was winded or about to have a panic attack. Why wasn’t he fighting back? Why was he just sitting there, taking all this man’s abuse?

“You shut the fuck up, man. Stop saying that shit,” Ryan said, folding his arms over his chest and pushing his hips forward, squaring up to the man. “Lay one more finger on him and I’ll call the fucking cops on you.”

“And you’ll both be arrested for solicitation. Good; call the goddamn cops, maybe it'll get this one off the street for a couple of nights,” he scorned, nodding down at Brendon.

“To be considered solicitation, money has to have exchanged hands, of which, none has. I’ll have
you know I have an extremely powerful lawyer and if you say one more word, you’re sure going to know his name.”

“I know who you are,” Zack said slowly - it wasn’t a sudden realization, it was a warning. “Ryan Ross – your nice rich daddy paying for you to fuck this slut, is he? We have fucking cameras, man. I’ll go to the press, sell my story about you fucking a rent boy in my club. I’ll bet you got drugs on you too; the press will love that story. What d’you think, Bren?” the man shouted down to him. “You want your trick, Ryan Ross to call the cops on me? D’you want to get sent to prison? You’d be the prettiest bitch in there, wouldn’t you?”

Brendon stayed silent and at the same time that Ryan attempted another protest, Zack swung his thick-soled boot hard between Brendon’s legs. His body doubled over in pain as Ryan covered his mouth with both hands. Brendon’s breaths escaped his chest in long wheezes as he clutched himself and curled up on the floor.

“Answer me when I’m fucking talking to you,” the man shouted. His foot pressed against Brendon’s nose. Ryan could hear the blood pumping though his skull. “Do you want Ryan to call the cops for you?”

“No,” Brendon heaved, his eyes screwed closed, his dark hair limp with sweat and hanging in his face.

“Well, tell him.”

“Don’t call the cops.” Brendon’s voice sounded like it was coming from a different entity.

“That’s my good boy; yeah, you’d fucking love me to fuck your ass, wouldn’t you?”

Ryan’s whole mind drained of color – all he could see were shapes and figures, all he could hear was white noise, fizzing through his brain. Zack was tall and he was terrifying and he spoke like Marc and then that’s all Ryan could feel, was Marc, Marc, Marc – completely consuming him, rendering him dumb with a slow, creeping sense of panic.

“You better shift your fuckin’ ass from this club, else I’ll kick your pretty little face so fucking hard that you won’t be able to work for the rest of your miserable fucking life. I’ll give you five, four…” The man started his menacing countdown.

Ryan didn’t know who Zack had been talking to, but by the time he heard the number three, he felt the shiver run down his spine, Marc’s ugly leering face hanging like an apparition in the back of his head.

“Leave him. How much do you need?” He shook his head clear; the panic was still clinging to his shoulders, refusing to keep his voice even or his hands steady. “How much does he owe you? I’ll pay you.”

Ryan made a grab for his wallet from the inside pocket of his jacket and pulled it out. He counted out his cash in hundred dollar bills. “One, two, three hundred and… twenty five dollars. Take it. Just don’t hurt him.” He held the cash out at arm’s length in front of him. He noticed the bills shaking in his hand as he did. His muscles were fluttering with adrenaline. The man looked at the money and paused, chewing the inside of his mouth in consideration.

“You’re a fucking billionaire, you can do better than that.”

“It’s all I got, take it or leave it – and anyway, what d’you want me to do, write a check? It’s not the fucking nineties, bro.” He nervously glanced over at Brendon, still curled up in pain on the restroom
floor and laughed uneasily at himself.

The man snatched the money from Ryan’s hand and counted it through, shoving the bills quickly into his back pocket.

“How much would you pay me to keep my mouth closed – about this?” he smiled, waving his finger between the two men. “About you, fucking a hooker with daddy’s fortune?”

“Ten grand,” Ryan said, quickly, without even thinking.

“Fifty,” the man bit back.

“Done. I’ll have a check delivered to you tomorrow morning – but you never fuck with Brendon again and you leave his friend alone too. If I find out you’ve so much as looked at him again – at either of them – you’re going to have hell to pay,” he warned darkly. It was an empty threat, but so long as this Zack dude believed him…

Zack spat on the floor beside Brendon and looked back up at Ryan. “I want my money tomorrow. Or else.” Ryan nodded quickly. The man turned back to Brendon, still slumped on the floor, holding his balls. “You’re lucky this time, Urie. If Ryan here doesn't deliver, maybe I’ll see your Jon down a dark alley and have to remind him why he shouldn’t mess with me. I’m a man of my word,” he claimed and his boot swung hard into Brendon's chest, as a warning. "Don't fuck with me, I won't be happy."

Brendon groaned, swallowing air with a gasp and rolling over onto his chest on the wet bathroom floor. Ryan pushed past the man, glaring at him as he disappeared from the bathroom as silently as he’d entered it. He looped his hands under Brendon’s armpits in an attempt to haul him off the floor, but his body was a dead weight. Fifty grand! He cursed himself - fifty thousand dollars to save Brendon’s ass?

Expect, he hadn’t bribed the man to save Brendon’s ass, he’d done it to save his own.

“Come on, man,” he pleaded quietly. “Let’s get out of here. Please get up.”

This was the last time he was ever going to trust Brendon's judgment on where to come for a quick fuck. When he spotted him from across the room during the drag show, he never envisioned the night ending with him peeling the man off of the floor of some disgusting club bathroom. Well… not under these circumstances, at least.

It took a moment. Brendon’s shaking legs slid uselessly against the tiles for a few seconds trying to get a grip but eventually he pushed himself to his feet with very little help from Ryan. He was rubbing his chest and breathing heavily; there was a bruise already forming at his hairline. Ryan tried to touch it, but Brendon pulled away, pushing out of the stuffy bathroom and letting the door swing close behind him.

Motherfucker better thank me, Ryan thought as he followed him from the restroom and out of the club. Dude would have got his ass beat if it hadn’t have been for me.

“Brendon!” Ryan called. “Wait up.” He was already halfway down the block, the collar of his jacket turned up against the winter wind. He jogged along the sidewalk to catch up with the man and pulled at his shoulder when he got close enough. He’d been ready to make some bitchy remark about him not appreciating what he’d done for him back in the bathroom, for not appreciating the fifty grand he’d just been blackmailed out of but Brendon’s eyes were glassy with tears, his forehead furrowed with deep worry lines. His mouth pulled into a tight line. Brendon looked just about ready to break.
Ryan's anger quickly seeped away. He nodded back towards the club. “What an asshole,” he noted with an awkward chuckle and then, because it felt like the right thing to do, he asked, “Are you okay?”

Brendon forced a smile, but it was more of a grimace. “Fine. I’m fine.”

Ryan knew what that word fine meant and he was sober enough to realize that the man in front of him was far from fine. He pouted skeptically at him and then reached out to rub his arm. He wished Brendon hadn’t tensed when he touched him.

Brendon had a boyfriend. He owed scary dudes money he couldn’t afford to pay back – the man actually had a life outside of sucking rich men’s dicks... He never thought about it before – not during their first meeting or his time in rehab or when he saw the man looking perfect and beautiful and serene from across the club. Brendon wasn’t just a hooker anymore. He was a human; he had a past and maybe even a bright future - if he could get out the game that was. Ryan wanted to know everything about this man, what got him off, what kept him awake at night, what he whispered into his boyfriend’s ear right before they fell asleep. He had to bite his lip to stop the questions from pouring out.

He wouldn’t let this boy walk away from him, not tonight – not without a fight.

Brendon was looking distinctly paler than usual and Ryan found it almost worrying. That dude said some pretty fucked up shit back there but a part of him found it oddly endearing – Brendon looked exposed, bare and unprotected. He was always wound so tight; Ryan always got the impression that the man’s whole existence was just an act, carefully rehearsed words and actions. Ryan knew how that felt, to spend the entirety of his time pretending he was anything but fragile. They were cut from the same cloth, perhaps they had more in common with each other than Ryan first suspected. Brendon’s eyes weren’t lying to him anymore though and Ryan actually found it captivating. Now that they were out of any immediate danger, it was that feeling that was currently overriding all others.

“Did you still want to come back to a hotel with me? I mean, I can get some coke – or I’ve got a fuck-load of really quality weed. I’d smoke you out, maybe it’d loosen you up some… We could watch some porn, have a few drinks, I don’t mind. I had no plans for this evening anyway; my schedule is totally free,” he rambled, looking past Brendon’s shoulder and laughing awkwardly at their current situation – at just how fucked up things could have got back there. He sure as hell was thankful to be free from that godforsaken bathroom.

“Brendon?” he prompted, when the man didn’t respond. “Are you hungry? I know this nice Italian place not far from here – the owner is a friend of my father’s - they got a private dining room, so it’s not like anyone would spot us.”

Brendon didn’t even react. He was pressing lightly at the ugly bump forming on his head. Ryan stepped towards him, irritated that not so much as a thank you had left Brendon’s perfect lips. He hooked his finger under his chin, pulling his face up to watch his eyes. Brendon blinked, one tear fell over his bottom lashes and he pulled away quickly to wipe his face.

“I should go home,” he sighed. He sounded like he wanted to cry but instead he sniffed hard and then laughed at himself. “There are things I need to see to, there’s – I’m sorry… about tonight, about everything, but I should really leave.” Brendon pushed by him and continued down the deserted sidewalk.

He wasn’t going to let that happen – there was no way in fucking hell he was going to let a hooker whose ass he just saved from a beating walk away from him. “Brendon!” he shouted again,
following him down the block. “Don’t you want me to pay you?”

Brendon stuck his arm out at a passing cab. It drove right by him. He dropped his arm in frustration. “Keep your money, Ryan. I don’t think we should see each other again. I’m sorry but you’re…” he gave up, shrugging his shoulders when words failed him.

“I’m what?” he pressed, folding his arms across his chest. “Come on, spit it out. Say it.”

“You’re a liability, Ryan. I’m sorry.”

Liability! There was that fucking word again – he never expected to be called a liability by a prostitute! That was just… Ryan scoffed in annoyance. “I was the one who saved your ass in there tonight, a thank you would be nice – fucking fifty grand to stop that motherfucker going to the press, to stop him from kicking your face in. I saved your apparent boyfriend’s ass too, don’t forget.”

Brendon muttered his thanks, standing on the edge of the curb. Another taxi drove by without stopping. Maybe Ryan needed to take a different approach. His naturally defensive one didn’t seem to be working too well.

“Listen,” he sighed, softer, quieter, scuffing towards Brendon on the sidewalk. He took a deep breath and didn’t stop until their toes were against each other. He looked down into Brendon’s dark eyes. “I’m sorry you had to go through that. What that dude said wasn’t nice and I’m sorry he hurt you. I was scared. I didn’t know what to do. I’m a pussy, I can’t look after myself, let alone someone else but I have money – and as they say, ‘Money talks, bullshit walks.’ I like you, Brendon. When I’m alone, I think too much. I take drugs so I don’t have to think about shit and I know we’re from two different worlds. I don’t know anything about your private life, if you have a boyfriend or whatever but what I do know is that I want to pay you because you’re the only person I feel even marginally okay with. Don’t make me go home alone tonight. Please.”

They were close now. Ryan wound his arms around Brendon as he spoke and their breaths were fogging between them in the cold Manhattan night.

“I really like you,” he repeated – and it had truly been that simple. Brendon’s lips pushed hurriedly forward against Ryan’s, his mouth open and wet and inviting and they were kissing again, in plain view, on a quiet backstreet. They must have looked like two lovers stood together on the sidewalk under the orange glow of the streetlamp.

The make out was slow and unhurried; Ryan could feel Brendon’s hands at his waist, sliding inside his jacket and up his ribs. Brendon was warm and comforting and grounding, like an axis the he couldn’t help being drawn to. When Ryan pulled away, Brendon’s forehead dropped against his shoulder. Ryan’s fingers smoothed the back of the man’s hair down.

“It’s okay to feel things sometimes,” Ryan told him, turning his head to catch Brendon’s temple with his lips. He pressed a gentle kiss there. “If you stay with me tonight, I’ll buy you dinner.”

“I should go home. I should really go home,” he said, face still buried in the shoulder of Ryan’s jacket. “This is crazy, Ryan. What are we even doing? You’re you and I’m… well, I’m me.”

Brendon pulled back, dark, stormy eyes fixing on him seriously.

“And it’s you that I want - only you. Nothing more, nothing less. Come home with me. Please.” He really shouldn’t have to use the word please with a hooker. “I can make you feel good, you know I can.”

Brendon dropped his eyes to the toes of his boots and pulled back from Ryan’s grip. “I should
“definitely go home,” he repeated again, half under his breath this time. “My boyfriend is probably waiting up for me, he doesn’t like it if I stay out all night, he’s-”

“Ten grand,” he offered, cutting him off before Brendon could get any further with his sentence. He didn’t need to know about Brendon’s boyfriend. He didn’t need to picture the two of them together, falling asleep in each other’s arms, warm and familiar and content. “I’ll pay you ten thousand dollars if you come home with me.”

Brendon’s dark eyes shot up and he held Ryan’s gaze with a searching look before speaking. “Seriously?” he asked with an arched brow.

“The offer you can’t refuse, huh? If you leave me here, if you go back to your own bed tonight, all I have is my straight-as-an-arrow, asshole driver for company, a couple of lines of coke and a fat blunt to mellow out the high. My dad will get pissed. He’ll probably ground me.”

Brendon’s sad face lit up with a defeated smile. “And I guess all I’ve got to go home to is a bottle of mouthwash and a freezing cold shower – and most likely an empty bed. Ten grand,” he breathed.

“Really?”

“Truly,” Ryan clarified and then, because he was no fool, “Half now, half the next time I see you.”

“Ah, so that’s the catch?” Brendon grinned. “I thought it was too good to be true.”

“That’s the catch - you got to see me again,” Ryan laughed, pulling the boy into his chest. His insides burned with warmth as Brendon’s arms wrapped tightly around him.
Ten grand, what a fucking idiot!

Ryan was a bigger fool than Brendon first suspected because ten grand was an obscene amount of money for one night’s work. His head was thumping, his brain throbbing inside his skull and sex was the very last thing on his mind right now. All he wanted to do was go home and sleep off his appalling headache. Oh – and question Jon about what that security guy Zack said about him leaving with some tatted-up motherfucker.

There were only two tatted-up motherfuckers that Brendon knew. One was Joe and the other Pete, neither of whom did Brendon want Jon hanging out with. The jealousy had long since settled in the pit of his stomach and it was now almost impossible to concentrate on anything else – even the promised fee of ten grand, even the fact that one of America’s most elite playboys seemed to have taken a shine to him. Brendon wanted out; these secret rendezvous with Ryan Ross were going to get him into trouble, he just knew it. He was going to lose everything to someone who'd never known what it was like to have nothing to begin with.

They’d taken a car to a quiet, upscale Italian restaurant and were currently sat alone in its intimate private dining room. The lighting was low, and candles burned in ornate candelabras on top of white, linen tablecloths. It was everything Brendon expected a high-class Manhattan restaurant to be – pretentious and unfortunately for him - romantic. Quiet jazz music played in the background and there was very little going on around them to distract him, so he had to look at Ryan, and his long fingers and doe eyes were making Brendon feel guilty.

His pants smelled like piss and his hair was greasy and flat. He felt like shit. Brendon would have preferred to go straight back to a hotel to shower off. He had no interest in fine dining and haute cuisine. He’d have been happy with a slice of pizza and a supersized soda; maybe a little weed to ease the pain in his head or a line of coke to ease the one in his heart.

As he sat there, uncomfortable and self-conscious, all he could do was think of Jon. He was sure that his boyfriend would be full of excuses when questioned about what Zack told him. “Jesus, Brendon,” he’d huff, “you’re going to trust Zack’s word over mine?” and then he’d storm around their apartment with a scowl on his face and Brendon would sit on the edge of the bed and sulk, as he tried to forget Zack’s claims – about Jon having no hard limits, about him taking two men at once, the bareback fucking and Zack spitting in his mouth…

It was that one image that kept bothering him, of Jon on his knees in the same toilet cubical that Brendon let Ryan fuck him in, Zack pulling his head up roughly, hacking up spit onto Jon’s waiting tongue and then the worst bit – Jon’s eyes flickering closed in ecstasy before he went down on the man’s cock. Zack’s words were burning in his brain and every time he thought about them, his stomach twisted in protest and his chest tightened. The image was making him feel physically sick; it was making his breathing uneven.

Zack Hall had always been an asshole and he always had some smartass remark to make when he and Brendon crossed paths. Zack took great delight in winding Brendon up about Jon, but he never physically attacked him before.

He’d been aware of *Zack from the Club* for a few years now – he was one of Jon’s regular tricks and so Brendon tried his best to avoid him. Zack sold Jon drugs and he knew how to use his brutal words to rile Brendon up – in insulting Jon, in verbalizing the uncomfortable truth of what Jon had to do to earn his money, he succeeded in making Brendon’s blood boil through his veins. Zack’s mouth
always caused a much bigger impact than his fists ever would. Brendon would rather take one hundred beatings from the man than to hear one more disparaging word about Jon spill from his ugly mouth.

Brendon always had an over-active imagination when it came to picturing Jon with his tricks, and he was more than aware of the negative impact it had on their relationship. In Brendon’s head, he couldn’t ignore the nagging feeling that Jon loved pleasuring other men – all those stories he told him about his precarious teenage years, happily fucking half of Chicago’s gay population while Pete Wentz reaped the benefits.

The thought was enough to drive Brendon to distraction and he hoped, he was fucking praying that everything Zack said back in the club had been a bunch of lies to get under his skin – he hoped Jon still used protection, he prayed the man at least had some hard limits. Jon had given up on himself years ago, but Brendon sure hadn’t.

He could picture it all so clearly. Zack and Jon – his Jon – wrapped together after sex, all Zack’s words tumbling loudly through his head. The thought was enough to make Brendon seriously lose his appetite; the dawning understanding that Zack knew what it was like to fuck his boyfriend and yet he still didn’t.

Brendon scanned his eyes over the sparse menu to distract himself – his mind was still racing, his thoughts clouded with images of Jon with that tatted-up motherfucker. He hoped it wasn’t Joe, but he rather it be Joe than Pete. He wished he hadn’t taken Ryan to that fucking club, he wished he’d never even seen him tonight; he should’ve just gone home when he had the chance. He should’ve been in bed with Jon, not gallivanting around the city, eating out at a five-star restaurant with some billionaire brat.

The restaurant was serving foods that Brendon never even heard of before, things like fermented broccolini and tilefish and foglie di noce… his mind boggled at the words, unable to make his choice.

“You look a little confused,” Ryan pointed out lightly.

Brendon sucked in a breath. “I am. Panda Express is about as adventurous as I get. What the hell is foglie di noce?” he asked, fluffing up the pronunciation.

“Foglie di noce are just walnut leaves,” Ryan explained with a perfect accent – or perfect at least to Brendon’s untrained ear. “Don’t let the pretentious menu put you off, the food here is phenomenal. Anything catching your eye yet?”

Brendon shrugged. He felt out of his depth. He was a penniless male escort, he lived in the bad area of Manhattan; he didn’t belong here…

“Why don’t you order for me?” Brendon said, closing his menu and sliding it across the table towards Ryan. “I trust your judgment.”

He should have been enjoying the ambiance of the restaurant, the fancy menu and the smart, attentive waiters because this sure as hell wasn’t going to be a regular occurrence for him, but as he sat there, the only thing on Brendon’s mind was the image of Jon cuddling up to Joe on their bed, probably smoking smack with the fucker, bitching about what a drag Brendon was. His heart rate was beginning to pick up; his chest was starting to tighten. He was about to have a full on panic attack in the middle of this fancy restaurant…

Ryan Ross was acting like absolutely nothing happened back in the club and if Brendon was to be honest, it was kind of irritating. How could he just sit there and be so completely oblivious? Get yourself the fuck together, man, he cajoled himself. The dude’s your trick, not your friend, he’s paying to fuck you, not care about you.

Brendon took a tense sip of his water and attempted to gather his senses.

“I’m fine,” Brendon lied. Changing the subject, he said, “I’m stoked about this meal; this place is something else.”

In the short silence that followed, he pictured Jon on his hands and knees for Joe, Joe fucking his ass as he groaned and jerked off. Classic Jon, Brendon thought, giving it up for everyone except me.

“I’ve been coming here since I was young,” Ryan said in idle conversation. “My dad likes it here because it’s got the private dining area, which means we don’t have to sit with the regular folks – not that the people who come here are regular folks, not by a long shot. Not that there’s anything wrong with regular folks, I mean, no offense,” he rambled, digging himself an awkward grave. “It’s just - my dad’s kind of weird like that. He rents this whole restaurant about once or twice a year for his birthday or just before Christmas or whatever. Last time I was here, I was with Gabe Saporta,” Ryan informed him, name-dropping his famous best friend. “We fucked a waitress in the bathroom together.”

Brendon’s skin prickled with heat – Zack’s fucking words wouldn’t leave his head. He kept imagining it over and over and over again; Jon being fucked by two guys at once. He felt the bile rise up his throat. He totally just lost his appetite.

“Would you like to share a bottle of wine?” Ryan asked, burying his nose studiously in the wine menu. Brendon briefly scanned over it himself not long after they sat down, but the entire damn thing was in Italian and there wasn’t a bottle of wine available for under a hundred bucks. Ryan had been brought up in a totally different world. Brendon wasn’t comfortable in it.

“Sure,” he shrugged.

“They’ve got a really nice Italian red on the menu; it’s called Giacomo Conterno Barolo Monfortino. Have you ever heard of it?”

The dude was from a completely different planet but he made him come. Again. They fucked in some disgusting dive bar restroom and Ryan still brought him to orgasm. Maybe it was just because he was famous. Maybe it was because he was attracted to him. Maybe it was because they were actually sexually compatible… He never considered something like that with a trick before. Brendon started to worry. He shouldn’t be enjoying sex with a client as much as he enjoyed sex with Ryan Ross. It was probably nothing, but… It was definitely nothing. It meant nothing. Brendon would keep repeating those words until they meant something, but the dawning realization that maybe, just maybe it did, only added to the sickness in his stomach.

“I’m used to the boxed stuff. You know, five liters for ten bucks? That’s the shit you have to drink when you’re me,” he smiled. Ryan wrinkled his nose in distaste. “Wine out of a bottle? Now, that’s living!” Brendon nudged his boot against Ryan’s under the table.

“You’re cute,” Ryan smiled, without looking at him. “You make me forget that I haven’t had a line since this morning.”

Once the waiter brought the wine and poured their glasses, Ryan peered at him through the low lighting of the dining room and put his chin in his hand. “This is my mom’s favorite wine; my
stepmom, I mean. She and my dad go to Italy several times a year and she’ll always bring back a case of this stuff. I remember when I was about fourteen, I stole a bottle and got drunk on my own down on the jetty of the house we have up on Long Island – she was so pissed at me, she grounded me for two weeks.” Ryan forced a laugh at the memory. Brendon watched the candlelight flickering in his eyes, noticed the angle of his jaw and his soft hair falling across his eyes. He was devastatingly handsome when he smiled. In the candlelight, he looked almost like an angel. Brendon took a long sip of his wine – one bottle alone would’ve paid his rent for a month and he’d still have change for an ounce of weed.

“I don’t know shit about good wine, I just order the most expensive thing on the menu and hope for the best,” Ryan sighed. He sat up in his chair and steepled his fingers. “So, tell me a bit about yourself, Brendon. I mean, we met each other a few times now and it still feels like I’m sleeping with a stranger. The only thing I know about you is that you were born in Las Vegas.”

“But don’t you want to keep it that way?” Brendon asked, looking over his glass at Ryan. “Isn’t that what men enjoy about fucking a whore, the stranger aspect, the anonymity?”

“I just find you fascinating is all. I want to know more about you.”

Brendon bit the inside of his lip and paused. It was a rare occurrence that his tricks wanted to know anything other than his hourly rate. They never asked about his personal life. Brendon was always being forced to listen to other peoples’ life stories but he never got the chance to tell them his – all about his hopeless, heroin-addicted boyfriend and his shitty life as a Manhattan escort or about his guileless parents, his dying father and his bankrupt mother and his older sister who unwittingly married his first love.

In Brendon’s opinion, the less his clients knew about him – and certainly, the less Ryan Ross knew about him, the better.

“Well, what do you want to know?” he asked, glancing up at Ryan and flashing him a practiced smile.

Ryan pretended to consider Brendon’s question for a moment and then took a breath. “How old were you when you first fucked a guy for money?”

He asked the question with such apathy and such a steady voice that Brendon raised his eyebrows in surprise. He’d been expecting a barrage of questions about his childhood, about how he ended up in Manhattan, maybe a few nosy queries about how he met Jon but Ryan had gone straight for the jugular. He was not pulling any punches. Brendon blinked over at him and wet his lips.

“Well,” he started, clearing his throat. “When I was eighteen, I decided I needed to leave Las Vegas. My parents didn’t want me to come to New York; they were pretty protective, very religious and after I finished school they wanted me to go to college. My siblings were all very academic but I never got on in school-”

“Why, what was wrong with you? Were you bullied?” Ryan interrupted, taking another slow sip of his wine.

“No,” Brendon answered, a little defensively. “I was just – I mean, I was smart, I just never knew what I wanted to do with my life.”

Ryan nodded in understanding. Brendon continued, “I was desperate to leave, growing up in the desert kind of sucks. I’d always known I was gay and my parents would’ve had a hard time accepting that so I saved up some money and I hitchhiked all the way here. All sorts of people would
pick me up; mostly truckers, some of them would ask for a blowjob as gratuity and I would usually oblige. I just wanted to get to New York. I had all these grand plans about what the city would be like, all these ridiculous romanticized ideas but the reality was very different.”

Ryan toed at his boot with his own - a sly game of footsie under the table.

“I was living in this old, converted hotel in Chinatown – I was paying eight hundred dollars a month in rent for a tiny bedroom with a communal bathroom. I think it was some kind of flophouse - not too dissimilar to where I live now; there were a lot of prostitutes, a lot of sketchy drug dealers, the cops were always answering calls there. I would go out at night and stand on a street corner and men would drive by and pick me up because I was still young and I would suck them off before they went home to their wives or back to their mom’s house. Some of them would ask to fuck me, but…” Brendon let his words fall flat, shaking his head. “Then I met someone. He was a hustler too and he knew a lot of people. I fell for him. I thought we could live together and help each other out and then move away, get out of the game and start afresh. I didn’t see it as a lifetime career. I thought it was just a quick-fix solution to being broke. The first time I fucked a guy for money I was twenty. He was a lot older than me. He was married – we did it in the back of his Toyota Corolla, underneath an overpass in Brooklyn. I got seventy bucks for it.”

Brendon watched Ryan swallow nervously. His Adam’s apple bobbed in his slender throat. Brendon wanted to suck his neck. He wanted to bury his face into the crook of Ryan’s shoulder and feel a soft mattress underneath his muscles. He wanted Ryan to fuck him until he came again – anything to prove to himself that he was still alive, anything to take his mind off Jon…

“This guy you met? The guy you fell for; is that the boyfriend the dude in the club was talking about?”

“Yes,” he said stiffly. “He is.”

“What’s his name?”

Brendon clamped up, his shoulders automatically pulling up and tensing. He really didn’t want to talk about Jon. His life with Jon was the one small part of him that didn’t belong to anyone else. What they had was secret. It was theirs. He wasn’t about to sell that out to some nosy trust fund kid.

“I don’t think that’s any of your business,” Brendon told him.

Ryan pouted. “That’s a shame, he sounds like my kind of guy; he enjoys double penetration, he likes having someone spit in his mouth – no hard limits. He sounds pretty kinky. You’ll have to give him my number.”

“Fuck off,” Brendon laughed, his nerves rattling though his entire body. What he actually wanted to do was push his chair back and throw his wine right in Ryan’s smug face – that would sure wipe that shit-eating smirk off of it. Instead, he chewed the inside of his lip and tried to ignore his racing heart.

“What’s his name?” Ryan pressed.

“I prefer not to talk about him, if you don’t mind, Ryan.”

“Well, I do mind, Brendon. I’m your client and I don’t have to pay you shit unless you do as I ask. So I’ll ask you again.” He leaned forward across the table. “What’s his name?”

Brendon squared his jaw and held resolute eye contact with the man opposite him. Ryan didn’t look away. “His name’s Jon. He’s twenty-eight. He’s about my height, he’s got dark hair, about the same
texture as yours. He’s got these incredible eyes and he’s just so handsome. When I met him, I thought he was so cool – he knew all this shit I had no idea about, he was funny and kind and he could make me laugh.” Brendon paused, thinking back to how taken with Jon he’d been when he was younger. “He’s from Chicago but he moved to New York when he was sixteen. He came from a pretty bad family; his dad was an alcoholic, his mom shot herself when he was thirteen. He doesn’t talk about it, but he found her body and I think it fucked him up. He started taking drugs and drinking not long after that. He was only about fifteen when he starting hooking – he’s been doing it half his life and it drives me crazy to think about him sleeping with other men, because I love him so much. He’s a heroin addict, Ryan...” Brendon's eyes threatened to leak tears. He sucked it up and sighed, "And sometimes I hate the way he makes me feel because sometimes he's so indifferent to me, you know? But I’m sleeping with you tonight in hopes we can both leave New York. I love him – more than you could ever imagine.”

Ryan’s brown eyes widened and his eyebrows rose. Brendon started talking about Jon in the vain hope it may make Ryan jealous, but he ended up having to rub both his hands over his face to wipe away his tears.

After a long second, Ryan shifted in his seat. Brendon waited for the demeaning reply he’d grown used to hearing from tricks like Ryan. “I’m sorry,” Ryan said instead. “Sounds like he’s had a pretty tough life. Fuck, I think I’d be a heroin addict too if my mom killed herself and I had to fuck random dudes when I had a boyfriend like you at home.” Ryan finished his wine and topped up his glass, almost to the top. The last few drops he dribbled into Brendon’s glass. “How long have the two of you been together?”

“Six years – almost six and a half.”

Ryan looked almost shell-shocked. He muttered in surprise under his breath and Brendon watched his long fingers fiddle with the edge of the white tablecloth. He remembered when those fingers had been inside him, brushing against his prostate and bringing him close to orgasm. He remembered when they’d been wrapped around the head of his dick, covered in his come.

“You must really love each other. I can’t seem to make a relationship last longer than twenty-five minutes, let alone six and a half years – and what with the two of you being...” he trailed off and blew out a frustrated sigh. “Well, you know? If you were my boyfriend, I wouldn't want you being fucked by anyone else.”

“Well, beggars can’t be choosers,” Brendon replied with a smile, choosing to deliberately ignore Ryan’s hypothetical ‘if you were my boyfriend’ because there was no way in hell that was ever going to happen.

Ryan was cute, but he was spoiled. He was a man who was used to getting his own way – that’s probably why he didn’t know how to interact with people. It wasn’t his fault, not really; he’d just never grown up having to work for anything but Brendon guessed that having everything you ever wanted handed to you on a silver platter probably wasn’t all it was cracked up to be either.

When their appetizers arrived, Brendon’s appetite suddenly returned with a vengeance. The food was a work of art and it smelled delicious. He hadn’t eaten a proper meal in days and unfortunately for him, the focus in this particular restaurant was on quality over quantity. He could’ve murdered a pizza or a big steak or a supersized Big Mac meal but nonetheless, he unashamedly tucked into what was in front of him. If he had been alone, he’d have licked the plate clean.

“You know, I could have anyone I want,” Ryan spoke as he finished his food. Brendon’s plate had been empty for five minutes – he’d been hungrier than he thought. “Man, woman, it doesn’t matter to me. I can click my fingers and have most of America falling at my feet. I’ve fucked some of the most
beautiful A-Listers in the world and I think you’re the only person I’ve ever met who acts like he
doesn’t want me.”

I don’t want you, I don’t want you, I don’t, I don’t, I don’t. Brendon repeated the mantra to himself
silently, over and over again in hopes that if he kept telling himself he wasn’t attracted to Ryan Ross,
he may just start believing it – but he did want Ryan. He wanted Ryan and his long fingers and his
perfect dick and his eagerness to make him come. He wanted Ryan and his money.

“It turns me on,” he continued, “the fact that you’d rather be at home with your boyfriend right now
than sitting with me enjoying this nice meal,” he said, glancing around the dining room. “I’m not
used to boys saying no to me, but paying you money makes my dick hard. Fucking a hooker gets me
off. You’re my biggest fantasy, sat right in front of me, Brendon.” Ryan took a sip of his wine and
smiled at him. “I want you to tell me what you’re going to do to me when we get to the hotel.”

Brendon felt his lips pull up into a half-smile. He could have Ryan eating out the palm of his hand if
he wanted. Ryan was so resolute in believing that he was the one in charge, but the one with all the
power, Brendon realized, was himself. It was a strange new feeling. It made his stomach tighten in
anticipation.

Brendon pushed his chair back and rose from his seat. When he leaned down to whisper in Ryan’s
ear, he caught a whiff of expensive cologne and the stale smell of pot on his hair. He was reminded
of Jon. Brendon’s hand rubbed at Ryan’s shoulder and he breathed against his cheek. He had the
sudden, terrifying urge to turn the man’s face up to meet his and kiss him, but he didn’t. He spoke
softly into Ryan’s ear.

“We’ll finish this meal and you’ll take me to some fancy hotel room and I promise you, Ryan – you
can do anything you want with me. I’ll give you the best blowjob of your entire life – better than any
of the beautiful A-Listers you’ve fucked. I’ll lick your asshole. I’ll bury my face between your ass
until you can’t stand it anymore. I’ll suck on your balls and I’ll ride your dick and you can fuck me
until you’re spent – and then tomorrow morning we can wake up and do it all over again. You can
pretend I’m your fantasy for one night, Ryan, because that’s how this deal works.”

He heard Ryan’s slow intake of breath. He felt his muscles tense under his hand. “God, you’re going
to fuck me up, Brendon. I can already tell,” Ryan breathed, taking Brendon’s face between his hands
and pulling their lips together.

Brendon slowly gave into the kiss, all thoughts of Jon quickly forgotten.
Chapter 17

Ten fucking grand, Brendon must’ve thought he was an idiot – a desperate fucking idiot, with nothing better to do than blow his money on coke and hookers.

Ryan’s usual suite at his favorite hotel was booked up. Elton John was in Manhattan and his people reserved the entire top floor for the next week. Ryan found it difficult to contain his irritation at the news and so had done something he’d never done with a one-night stand before, much less a man he was paying to sleep with him – he’d taken Brendon back to his penthouse on the Upper East Side and nervously invited him inside.

“Who’s the dude?” Shane asked him, nodding over at Brendon stood by the elevator.

“He’s just a friend. We met in AA. He’s actually my sponsor.” The lie rolled off Ryan’s tongue with ease. “We’re just hanging out, that’s all. There’s nothing wrong with hanging out now, is there?”

“Like fuck is he your sponsor, man. That’s the dude I picked up in the car before you went to rehab, isn’t it? Ryan…” Shane looked at him with a very serious look on his face, “is that guy a fucking hustler, because if your father finds out about this-”

“Screw my fucking father!” Ryan seethed, throwing his hands up. “You don’t have to tell him shit. Is it really that difficult for you just to keep your mouth closed around him?”

Shane shook his head in a daze and shrugged, staring at Brendon beyond Ryan’s shoulder. “So, what’s up? Are you gay now or what?” he asked, without making eye contact.

“Why? You gonna be all homophobic about it?”

“No. It’s just…” Shane wrinkled his nose by way of explanation. Then he tried to defend himself. “It’s fucking weird is all I’m sayin’, bro. You get some super hot chicks, I just don’t understand why you’d want to do it with a dude - plus, if your dad finds out you’re involved with guys like that again, he’s going to be hella pissed.”

Ryan huffed. “Go and rat me out to my dad then, see if I care. You can’t prove anything – I’m sober, aren’t I? Just know that you’ll be a little narc asshole if you go running to George Ross about what you’ve seen tonight and nobody likes a narc asshole. Goodnight, Shane. I won’t be needing you for anything else tonight.”

Ryan turned and joined Brendon at the elevator door, pressing the button and ushering him inside. Much to his disappointment, they didn’t join together in a rushed kiss, like in the movies as soon as the doors closed. They both stood facing forward, watching the numbers flash as they ascended up the building.

The elevator only took forty-three seconds to reach Ryan’s floor but each second felt like a minute stood in silence next to Brendon. He had his hands pushed into the pockets of his leather jacket, he was rolling back on his heels and looking at his toes and Ryan could feel the tension between them – and it didn’t feel sexual. Ryan was irritated.

He wasn’t used to having guests in his house; much less guests who were poor and he felt uncomfortable showing Brendon around. He’d seen where Brendon lived – in some scummy flophouse in the bad area of town, but at the back of his mind he couldn’t help thinking that despite Brendon’s shithole apartment, he still had something that Ryan didn’t.
He had someone to fall asleep next to every night. He had someone who he admitted to being in love with. Ryan was jealous – he may have lived in a multi-million dollar apartment overlooking Central Park, he may have filled it with designer furnishings and priceless works of art but he never had anyone to share it with. He was twenty-six, he never had a meaningful relationship in his life. Ryan sure saw who the poorer of the two was now.

Ryan’s penthouse was his little haven; he enjoyed the tranquility it offered in times of stress and when Brendon asked for a guided tour, Ryan reluctantly showed him around the space, with a guilt inside his stomach that he couldn’t explain.

Brendon looked around Ryan’s apartment with wide eyes. The man had been highly complimentary of the minimalist interiors and expensive furnishings, but when they passed by the bedroom, Ryan jerked his thumb towards the door without slowing down.

“Bedroom’s through there,” he said, leading Brendon back into the open plan living area. It was past midnight and through the floor-to-ceiling windows, Manhattan was ablaze with lights; winter fog settled low over Central Park and the result was a misty glow through the wall of glass.

“It’s a wonderful view,” Brendon said, nodding over at the window.

"When the fog lifts," Ryan shrugged. It was okay. He’d gotten used to it over the years.

He felt tense and he wasn’t sure if it was the lack of drugs in his system or the presence of a practical stranger in his home. Ryan spent the latter half of his life getting high; he couldn’t remember the last time he fucked someone sober and disregarding the fact that Brendon was merely a hooker and despite the fact that he really didn’t need to impress him, Ryan felt that familiar sense of panic creeping up his spine. He shouldn’t have sent Shane away, he shouldn’t have been such an asshole to him; he should’ve asked him to go pick him up an eight ball, because he didn’t know how to interact with people when he was sober.

Ryan was fresh out of coke and beginning to grow restless. Those three weeks in Arizona had obviously been a huge waste of his fucking time because he was desperate for a hit of something. He had weed – pretty good weed too; the high from the joint he shared with Gabe earlier that evening lasted for hours, but Ryan wanted something stronger: coke or speed or Ketamine or crystal; he’d settle for a bump of anything right now – just something to take the edge off his nerves, something that made the fact that Brendon the Hooker was in his apartment watching him in all his paranoid, anxious glory less of a reality, more of a dream.

How did people deal with life without the help of drugs? His brother was so good at it, he made it all look so easy but Ryan was a complete disaster. Even menial tasks like going for lunch with his family, even the simplest of human interactions filled him with an unyielding sense of fear. He invited a hooker back to his apartment, he agreed to pay him ten grand - he’d been blackmailed out of fifty just so some lowlife security guard wouldn’t go and spill the beans to the press. What the fuck am I getting myself into? he thought, rubbing his hands over his face to relieve the pressure in his head.

He had to have some drugs around here somewhere, he thought, scanning his eyes desperately around his apartment. If only he could get Brendon to disappear for five minutes he’d be able to have a root around his apartment without looking like a desperate junkie. Then he’d be able to get high and then he’d be able to fuck his hooker without feeling guilty.

“Do you, umm… Did you want to take a shower?” Ryan suggested, thinking on his feet. Of course he would - the dude needed one. Hell, they both probably needed one after fucking in that club. Ryan stood there feeling uncomfortable – it was like one of those dreams where you walk into a
room totally naked. He felt embarrassed, he felt tongue-tied, all hot and bothered and antsy. He felt like Brendon was watching and silently judging him. He shouldn’t feel this awkward in his own goddamn apartment! This was his castle; Ryan was king, Brendon merely a jester employed to pander to his needs - and he couldn’t even string a simple sentence together in front of him.

Brendon turned from the window and smiled. “Sure. Thanks.”

Brendon was beautiful – he was sexy and he was smart and he was funny. He was everything that Ryan could ever have wanted in a sexual partner; he was selfless, he was a man whose job it was solely to please him. He had an awesome body and a sweet ass and a pair of full, pouting lips that Ryan had the constant desire to bite down on when they kissed – and of course, it helped that they looked simply divine wrapped around his dick. Ryan was desperate to fuck him again – just not sober.

Being sober meant he thought too much and when he thought too much, memories of his past would cloud his vision, memories of Marc and his ugly face as he told him he loved him; and when that happened it took all his strength not to freak out on whoever he was with at the time.

He could usually blame his little outbursts on the drugs once he sobered up a little. Sometimes Gabe would eye him suspiciously or his father would drop his head into his hands and groan. No one knew what Marc Willis had done to him when he was fifteen; Ryan had been harboring that secret alone for over ten long years but it was nothing a little cocaine couldn’t sort out. Coke certainly numbed his feelings – and his head and his heart and his empathy for others. Drugs turned him into a zombie. It was the only way he could deal with the world.

“You can use my en-suite. Help yourself to any of my shit that’s in there. Companies are always sending me stuff. It’s weird,” he said with a forced laugh, “the richer you are, the more crap they give you for free.”

Brendon flashed him a wry smile.

_Fuck, he needed a hit so bad…_ He led the way towards his bedroom and pushed open the door. The bed was unmade. _Goddamn maid, slacking off again…_

“This is a very nice place you have, Ryan,” Brendon complimented quietly. Ryan shrugged again. It was okay – his brother’s apartment was bigger and his sister’s place was around a quarter of a million dollars more expensive, but then his siblings always surpassed him in every single possible way, so it was hardly surprising.

When he pushed open the door to his bathroom and switched on the light, Brendon looked around as if in awe and took a quiet intake of breath. The en-suite was actually Ryan’s favorite room in the house – he’d had it completely gutted only a year ago and the contractors had done an excellent job. The bathroom had under floor heating and a huge walk-in shower with a programmable thermostat and double showerhead. He splashed out on a huge sunken tub – something that could probably fit four or five people inside, something that had lights and powerful jets - something that he’d never used before, much less used when he had company.

Brendon started to undress, unzipping his pants and tugging off his shirt, dropping it to the floor. Ryan loved his body - those perfect, tight muscles and flawless skin. Ryan always thought himself too skinny, too gangly. Girls complained that his hipbones gave them bruises after he fucked them, but Brendon was just right, he was beautiful, stood completely naked in the middle of his bathroom. Ryan dragged his eyes over the young man in front of him and drank him in.

“Are you going to join me?” Brendon asked, slowly jerking his own dick a few times before
standing there with one hand on his hip. The man was faultless. Ryan had never lusted after anyone this much before – not even when he was a foolish teenager.

Even Brendon’s dick turned him on and he’d never really experienced that with a guy before. Women were more physically appealing to him; they had soft curves and warm folds and Ryan enjoyed watching a naked woman lounge around next to him. Men were harder, a little rougher around the edges; they had angles and hair and ugly dicks but not Brendon. Brendon’s cock was nice – a little smaller than his, but thicker, a sexy cut dick that Ryan wanted to reach out of touch. His balls and ass were shaved, soft and smooth, only a small amount of dark, neatly trimmed pubic hair at the base of his dick - and not to mention his ass was nothing short of incredible – round and full and- Jesus, Ryan wanted to fuck it. He wanted to pull his ass cheeks apart and see his little hole grip around the head of his dick. He wanted to pound him until he cried, until the sun came up. He couldn’t wait to see Brendon coming apart underneath him again, back arched and toes curled into the mattress... Or watch him ride his dick until he eyes rolled back in his head and he bucked his orgasm all over Ryan’s chest. Ryan’s cock started to get hard inside his pants at the mere thought.

*Fuck! He needed that hit...*

“Ryan?” The sound of his name quickly snapped him out of his daydream.

“Yes?” He forced his eyes up toward Brendon’s.

“Don’t you want to help me get cleaned up?” Brendon asked with a soft laugh. “I’m pretty dirty,” he added trying to keep a straight face but failing. Jesus. The dude wanted Ryan to fuck him in the shower, the slut. *His* slut. For tonight.

“In a minute. You go on ahead. I’ll be with you in five. Prep yourself for me,” he advised.

“Don’t you wanna watch?” Brendon smiled, walking away from him towards the shower. He bent at the waist and looked back at Ryan over his shoulder. “I can take four fingers,” he said, pulling his ass cheeks apart. “Sometimes all five, at a push.”

“Fucking hell,” Ryan breathed under his breath. Brendon was pushing a finger inside himself; he could see it fucking his hole, slipping slowly in and out. His dick was soon fully erect, his pants tight across his hard-on as Brendon slid another finger into his ass.

“Why don’t you come and fuck me, sexy? I can’t wait to feel your big cock inside my little, tight ass. *God,* Ryan, I’m getting hard just thinking about it.”

*What a fucking slut,* Ryan thought. No man had ever given him a show like this before. No man even talked to him like that before. His dick was leaking through his pants, his head swimming. *He needed that fucking hit,* right now or else he’d explode.

“I want you to make sure you’re clean for me,” he said, walking slowly over to Brendon and tugging at his wrist. His fingers slipped away. Ryan found himself wanting to taste them, wanting to drop to his knees behind the man and pull his cheeks apart as he buried his tongue inside his ass but he just dropped Brendon’s wrist and gave him a slight push towards the shower. “Don’t prep yourself anymore. I don’t want you too stretched out.” With that he turned and left the boy fiddling with the temperature controls.

Ryan shut the door to the en-suite behind him and leaned up against it. He was sweating, his muscles were vibrating in anticipation – he had a beautiful, naked man asking him to shower with him, fingering himself right in front of Ryan’s very eyes, begging him to fuck him and all Ryan could
concentrate on was finding some drugs that would help him go through with it.

There were only three places he might’ve stored some leftover, emergency coke in his apartment. He had an old cigar box where he kept his weed and the drugs he didn’t take on a daily basis – tabs of acid, E, sometimes a little crank; he knew there wasn’t any coke in there, but he looked anyway. The heady smell of good quality bud hit him and he pulled it deep into his lungs. A couple of pre-rolled joints and a small amount of hash wrapped in waxed paper rolled around in the bottom of the box, but there was no cocaine. Ryan grabbed the joints and slapped the box closed, sliding it back into its slot on the bookcase.

He hurried to the kitchen. He had a Ming vase that he received as a birthday present from his sister one year. She’d given him two, but he smashed one and now the set was almost worthless. He used the remaining vase to hide his drugs from greedy friends like Gabe who saw no problem in helping himself to Ryan’s stash when he was visiting. The vase was empty save for a couple of busted lighters and a Ziploc of dried out weed.

Ryan bit the inside of his cheek and drummed his fingers on the kitchen countertop. From the bathroom he could hear the quiet sound of the shower running and he pictured Brendon stood underneath the hot stream of water, wet and covered in suds.

There was only one more place he could check – and he better find some, because if he didn’t, he was going to have to call Shane and apologize and ask him if he could do a pick up… He walked back to his bedroom, trying to keep a cap on his anxiety. Brendon would be waiting for him, back arched and ass out, just waiting to be fucked. He was getting another boner.

Ryan dropped to his knees in front of his nightstand and pulled the top drawer open – there had to be some coke in here somewhere, he thought. It was almost impossible that he’d have an apartment totally void of illegal drugs. There was nothing in the top drawer; Ryan threw old magazines and photographs across his floor in a panic, his hands shaking, his mouth dry. He yanked the second drawer from the nightstand and dumped it upside down on his bed – old condom wrappers fluttered to his mattress, used batteries rolled to the floor. Nothing.

When Ryan got to the final drawer he was sweating – a small, metal lockbox sat at the very back with the key still in its lock. Ryan’s hands were shaking as they clasped at the box and fiddled it open and there inside – praise the Lord! – was a whole eight ball of coke, wrapped tightly in a small square of plastic. His heart immediately slowed, his stomach surging with excitement straight into the center of his chest. He dropped his head onto the mattress as he gripped his drugs in his hand and tried to steady his breathing. Ryan felt relieved tears forming in his eyes.

Tonight was just about to get a whole lot better…

Ryan’s head swelled with the intensity of the drugs. He sure was glad he had the genius idea to store some emergency coke for safekeeping. He knew it would save his ass one day – and they said he didn’t make good decisions while he was high!

He took two lines, one up each nostril and drew back from his bedside blearily. After a few seconds, he was aware that the shower was still running. Brendon would be lathered with suds by now; the soap would be sliding between the cleft of his perfect ass cheeks and down the shaft of his dick and he would smell so good, he’d be clean and open and willing, wet hair hanging in his eyes as he stood under the hot jets of water. The image was driving Ryan crazy and his boner was already straining inside his pants again. There was no way he could resist that boy, showering in his en-suite.

Ryan walked over to the bathroom and listened against the door. His head was beginning to spin with images of Brendon on his knees for him, his mouth open and full of come. He wondered if
Brendon would let him fuck him bareback for ten grand? He wanted to come in his ass and watch it trickle out of him – that was always his favorite part in gay porno and ten thousand dollars was an awful lot of money. Not to him, but to someone like Brendon. He sighed against the door and closed his eyes. *He’s here because you’re paying him,* he reminded himself, *that’s the only reason.*

He returned to the nightstand and snorted another line. It burned his nose but at least it numbed his anxiety. With the image of Brendon in the shower and a smile pulling at his lips, he pushed the door open and strode confidently into the bathroom. He had a newfound spring in his step, in fact, he felt like a million fucking bucks! He stripped from his clothes and kicked them into the corner. On the far side of the bathroom, Brendon was stood facing the wall. Ryan wanted to fuck him until he cried, until he couldn’t even walk and then send him back to his boyfriend, stinking like sex, having been fucked by someone who knew how to pleasure a man.

Ryan wondered what kind of sex Brendon and this dude Jon shared. He bet they both knew how to fuck; they probably got up to some kinky shit, maybe they even *made love.* Perhaps he could pay them both for a threesome? He’d like to see Brendon getting fucked by another dude. He’d love to feel his dick sliding against someone else’s inside of Brendon’s tight little hole. Double penetration had always been one of his biggest kinks when he fucked chicks, but he never tried it anally before. He pictured the scene briefly as he wandered towards the shower. *Holy shit,* the thought was enough to make his balls tighten.

He could see the suds running down Brendon’s neck and between his shoulder blades. He wanted to kiss him, mark him with bruises so that people would ask how he got them. The boy was flawless – a filthy, dirty whore and completely irresistible. Ryan’s heart was in his throat watching him. He could feel the sweat beginning to form at his hairline – that hot, wet body was almost too much for him. He stepped under the second showerhead. His dick was half hard and Brendon turned to him with a small smile and flicked his eyes down to his boner.

“Hey.” Ryan’s voice was dry when he spoke. He watched the soap sliding down the shaft of Brendon’s cut cock, running off the head.

“Hey yourself,” Brendon grinned, immediately closing the distance between them and pushing their bodies flush. The high from the cocaine set Ryan’s nerve endings on fire – he wanted, no, he needed as much of Brendon’s skin against him as possible. Ryan’s hands wrapped around his hips, slipping down to grab his ass. *Fuck,* it felt good in his palms – a meaty, round ass he could really grip onto.

Brendon’s lips pressed against his, his tongue pushing slowly inside his mouth as his hands slipped up into Ryan’s hair. Brendon was goddamn fucking *amazing* – how had he managed to last so long without calling the man after he got out of rehab? Ryan pulled back from the kiss and tried to catch Brendon’s gaze. He wanted to tell him he was beautiful, but Brendon wouldn’t look at him. Instead he moved to his neck, sucking on the sensitive skin there – not hard enough to leave a mark, but hard enough that he could feel it. Ryan sucked in a breath, letting his head fall back as water ran over his chest and Brendon’s shoulders. Brendon’s lips moved lower, over his collarbone and down his chest, wet, feather light kisses around both his nipples and down to his navel.

Ryan’s stomach somersaulted as he watched Brendon slide to his knees and take his dick in his hand. Brendon lapped at the head and Ryan saw the thread of precome between Brendon’s lips and his cock when he pulled back. When Brendon’s dark eyes flicked up to meet his, his lips pulled into a soft smile before sliding down his dick. Ryan groaned and dropped his head back with his eyes closed. He was going to fucking come if Brendon kept pulling moves like that.

The man teased him for a long time, alternating between hollowing his cheeks around Ryan’s
cockhead, sucking until Ryan thought he was going to explode and deep-throating his shaft like a pro. Brendon was nothing if not thorough while giving head. After a few minutes, there wasn’t even an inch of his dick and balls which hadn’t been inside Brendon’s mouth, that hadn’t been covered by his tongue.

_Brendon Urie had a mouth to die for._

Ryan let out a groan, his hand resting on the top of Brendon’s head as he worked. When he looked down, Brendon was still eyeing him, mouth stretched around the shaft of his dick, lips and hair wet as he blinked up at him through the water.

“You want me to fuck your mouth, baby?” Ryan asked, the first words he’d spoken since he first entered the bathroom. Brendon pulled back and rolled his eyes with a smile.

“I already told you, you can do whatever you want. You can be rough, if that turns you on. I’m a big boy, Ryan. I can take it. You won’t break me.”

“Damn, I wouldn’t be so sure about that,” he breathed, holding Brendon’s chin in one hand and the back of his head with the other and pushing him all the way down his cock. Brendon just _fucking took_ it, all the time making these delicious gagging sounds while Ryan fucked his face. Brendon’s mouth worked him like a fucking vacuum.

Ryan knew his groans sounded desperate but he didn’t care. For the first time in over a month, he felt completely _alive_ and with Brendon on the floor in front of him, nothing mattered – everything was fading to grey and with that beautiful boy between his legs, he could forget the whole sorry evening – the fact that he had to get high, the fact that Brendon had some pathetic junkie boyfriend, even the fact that he somehow let himself be blackmailed out of fifty fucking grand this evening. He could forget it all - so long as Brendon didn’t leave his apartment, the dude should’ve been in bed with his boyfriend, but here he was, sucking his cock on the floor of his shower. Ryan was in _heaven._

Ryan pulled the boy to his feet, taking the chance to kiss his lips and press their cocks together. Much to his delight, Brendon was hard and Ryan turned him around and pressed him against the wall by his shoulders, watching as Brendon arched his back and stuck his waiting ass into his crotch. Ryan slid his erection between the boy’s cheeks – they were wet and slick and Ryan wanted his asshole around his dick _so_ bad. It took a lot of willpower to pull back but he pressed a chaste kiss between Brendon’s shoulder blades and slapped his ass.

“Stay right here,” he said, speaking the words into Brendon’s ear. “I’ll go get a condom.”

When Ryan returned, Brendon was in the exact same position he left him in – both hands holding himself up on the shower wall, his legs spread and his perfect ass sticking out and ready for his cock. _Goddamn_, he’d never seen an ass like that on a man before. He quickly ripped open the condom wrapper and rolled the rubber down his dick.

Brendon’s ass was tight and hot and when Ryan fucked him, he moaned. Ryan gripped his hips and pressed his mouth into his shoulder – the height difference just about worked and Brendon was either really good at faking his pleasure or Ryan was doing something right because he moaned like a whore on every in-stroke, his mouth wet and jaw slack, his dick rock hard between his legs.

“Jesus.” Brendon huffed out a groan, “you turn me on _so_ much. I want to be your fucking whore, Ryan.”

_I want to be your fucking whore_… Christ. Ryan’s whole body ignited at Brendon’s words. His senses felt like they were on fire as he chased his orgasm, slipping his hand around Brendon’s hips
and jerking his erection. Brendon’s words may have been an act, but his hard dick certainly wasn’t. Ryan held him close; Brendon’s back flush against his chest as he kissed his shoulder, his lips sliding anywhere he could reach over Brendon’s slick skin. Ryan’s balls tightened, his head surged with the intensity of his imminent orgasm and Brendon was still moaning, turning his head and reaching back with one hand to pull Ryan’s mouth against his.

Brendon came with a grunt of his name, his breath hot against Ryan’s cheek, his body quivering as his come hit the shower wall and dripped slowly down to the floor. Ryan pulled out, watching Brendon’s asshole grip thin air as he tugged off the condom and held the boy in position with a hand at the small of his back.

Ryan jerked the orgasm out of his dick, hitting right on target across Brendon’s puckered pink asshole and he rubbed his finger through the sticky mess, feeling it turn to slime under the water. He finally marked his territory – like a dog pissing on a wall. Now Brendon belonged to him.

Ryan took a breath to clear his head and blinked the vision back into his eyes. Without another word he left the bathroom, leaving Brendon behind in the shower. Ryan dried off and smoked a joint on top of his mattress, Brendon’s last words to him spinning around his head.

*I want to be your fucking whore.*

Ryan smiled. He was going to hold him to that.
Chapter 18

Brendon hadn’t meant to say that. *I want to be your fucking whore?* What in the *hell* was he thinking?

Last night passed by in a blur. Ryan fucked him into submission, he reignited that fire inside his belly and Brendon couldn’t stand it. He’d gone *years* without enjoying sex - the consistent grind of others using his body to pleasure themselves, of strangers filling him with their pain and hate - but Ryan just *did* something to him that he couldn’t explain.

It was as if he couldn’t quite control how his body reacted around him – and he evidently couldn’t control the words that came out of his mouth when Ryan’s dick was in his ass either, because *I want to be you fucking whore* was possibly the most shameful thing he ever said to a client.

After Ryan returned to the bathroom, looking high; after he fucked him, he left without so much as another word, grabbing a towel and disappearing off into his bedroom. Brendon sagged against the wall of the shower for a full thirty seconds before moving to wash the come out from between his ass cheeks and drying off.

He wandered back into Ryan’s bedroom to see him sprawled out naked on the mattress, smoking a joint. Brendon sat down next to him and slid his hand up his thigh.

“That was *awesome,*” he smiled and Ryan pulled him down for a kiss that made Brendon’s heart swell with desire and need and *want.*

They fucked again almost immediately; Brendon quickly falling into position on his hands and knees on Ryan’s plush mattress and Ryan sinking into him from behind, with no prep but enough lube that the sex was sinfully wet and easy and smooth.

Brendon hadn’t meant to moan and he hadn’t meant to arch his back or push desperately back onto Ryan’s cock as soon as the man stilled his hips.

“Oh, god,” he whined. “No one has ever made me come as hard as you can. This is how a *real* man fucks, baby. I love your cock; I’m going to lick it clean when you’re done with me.” The words left his mouth in a stream of consciousness, all breathed out in short succession, running together into a groan.

“You want more, huh? You want it harder? *Take* it, baby.” Ryan thrust forward and Brendon saw stars behind his eyelids, he could feel Ryan’s dick pushing into his belly button from the inside and moaned his name.

“*Ryan,* *fuck* – I love the sound it makes when you fuck me. Can you hear that?” The sound was slick and wet and *so* fucking hot. When they flipped positions, Brendon really *hadn’t* meant to dig his fingers quite so hard into Ryan’s shoulders and he *certainly* hadn’t meant to curl his toes and, when his orgasm was over, he had *not* meant to wrap his legs pathetically around Ryan’s middle in an attempt to ride himself out.

He just hadn’t been able to help himself. It was just one of those things… an orgasm that started in his toes and travelled up his spine into his jaw, making his mouth hang open and his whole body melt into the soft mattress beneath him.

When Brendon had taken Ryan’s dick for the fourth – or *was it the fifth?* – time that night, he rode himself out so vigorously on top of it that it had only taken the slightest brush of Ryan’s thumb to the
head of his cock before he was coming, warm and sticky all over Ryan’s stomach.

Brendon hadn’t had an orgasm like that in so long - not at any of his clients’ hands, anyway - probably not since Dallon. It was a climax where his eyes rolled to the back of his head and his muscles disappeared, one where he consciously had to bite his lip to stop the groans from tumbling out of his mouth.

A mixture of cuss words and hot, sloppy kisses punctuated the sudden, shaky afterglow of sex and Brendon found himself grinning into Ryan’s hair as they came down together. Ryan sure knew how to fuck and by the time the sun started to rise, both of them were spent, not a drop more come in either of them. They lay together under Ryan’s sheets, Ryan’s hand at the back of Brendon’s head as they kissed each other through the aftershocks of climax.

“I never had a session like that with anyone before,” Ryan informed him, pulling away with a smug smile on his face. They shared a joint and Brendon rested his head on Ryan’s chest and listened to his heart rate even out. It all felt too worryingly comfortable – the post-coital embrace and Ryan’s sex-flushed chest against his cheek.

He should’ve pushed him away. He should’ve clenched his muscles and gritted his teeth and just pushed him the fuck away. He should’ve made his excuses, pulled on his pants, collected his money and made a dash for the front door, but he didn’t. He stayed because he wanted to – because all that was waiting for him at home were a million unfinished arguments and a boyfriend who never fucked him.

Last night, after a few hits of weed and a long fuck-session, they’d quickly fallen asleep, Ryan’s body slotted behind his; his arm curled around Brendon’s chest and breaths shallow against his shoulder.

He dreamed of Jon and in his dream, Jon looked the same as he had when they first met – handsome and healthy and happy. In his dream, Jon was walking into Ryan’s bedroom and standing over the bed with his hands on his hips and he so clearly heard Jon’s voice ask a cracked, “Brendon, why?” that he’d woken from his slumber with an uneasy jolt.

The dream dissipated as he blinked his sleep-cloudy eyes clear. It was 11:20AM – Jon was going to fucking kill him.

“I have to go,” he said, climbing quickly out of bed, shaking the sleep from his limbs. In the night, he’d fallen away from Ryan’s embrace and when he looked back at the mattress, Ryan was blinking up at him blearily and scrubbing his palm across his jaw.

“Do you really have to go so soon?”

“It’s late. I shouldn’t have slept so long. I have to go.” He started to pick through his clothes on the floor.

Ryan stretched, all ribs, and hipbones and sex-messy hair, looking absolutely irresistible. “Why don’t you stay for breakfast?” he asked with a yawn.

“It’s almost lunchtime, Ryan.” After a pause, he added, “I’m sorry but I have to get home.”

Ryan’s face hardened as he pushed himself up from the pillow and pressed his fingers against the bridge of his nose. “You’re nothing if not predictable, Brendon.” He shook his head slowly and swung his skinny legs off the side of the mattress. Brendon watched as he licked his thumb and dabbed it into the remainder of coke on the side table.
“I could say the same about you,” he bit as Ryan rubbed the powder into his gums and flopped back on the bed.

“Last night was amazing,” Ryan told him, “and you know it was - now you’re freaked out because you enjoyed it so much.”

Brendon shook his head in denial but even he knew how fake his smile was. The silence between them swelled and so Brendon looked away and stepped into his pants. “It’s all just part of the job, man,” he reminded Ryan, without looking up at him.

“Bullshit,” Ryan sighed, frowning at him. “Last night you were all about it – all the dirty talk and the way you kissed me - you wanted to be my little whore.” Brendon blushed at the reminder. “I made you come, remember? Several times. That wasn’t just an act, Brendon. That was real.”

He didn’t know what Ryan expected – late morning eskimo kisses and cooking bacon and eggs together in their underwear? He pulled his shirt over his head and stood at the foot of Ryan’s huge white bed. He looked small under the covers, small and fragile and broken and all those other attributes he evidently found attractive in a man. He sighed, uneasy at the sudden reminder of Jon.

“I need my money,” he said, after a pause.

Ryan huffed and threw back the bedcovers dramatically. “For ten goddamn grand you should at least stay for breakfast,” he muttered under his breath. “You’re my whore in the most literal sense, aren’t you?” he spat, glaring over his shoulder as he pulled on his underwear and a faded, creased t-shirt. “At night, you fuck me like this means something to you and come morning, I’m paying you to leave.”

Brendon followed Ryan out of his bedroom and toward the kitchen. He knew he shouldn’t have got involved with Ryan Ross. He’d known right from the very beginning that he’d be trouble.

“I think you should stay,” Ryan told him as he scribbled out a check. Asshole was writing him a check. How the hell was he going to sneak that one by Jon? Ryan held it out to him, the folded slip of paper between his index and middle finger, held almost flirtatiously – as if he was offering Brendon his number in a bar. When Brendon reached forward to take it, Ryan snatched it back. He wasn’t above begging for his money. “This is a check for one thousand dollars. If you want the rest of it, you’ll have to make sure your schedule’s free when I call you.”

Brendon pinched the slip from Ryan’s fingers and opened it up. One thousand dollars was still a lot of money, but Ryan promised him ten grand. Half now, half later - that’s what Ryan promised.

“Ryan, this isn’t fair. You said you’d pay me ten grand – you said-”

“I know what I said, asshole. I just changed my mind. Are you really in a position to gripe over a check for a thousand bucks?” He paused while Brendon averted his eyes and bit his lip. “I didn’t think so.”

Ryan was right - he really wasn’t - his father’s medical bills needed paying, their rent was overdue… They were meant to be leaving New York - him and Jon, getting out of Manhattan and moving someplace else. He promised.

“I’ll pay you your money, don’t you worry - but you’re going to have to earn it. Next time I call you, I want to spend more than a night with you. I want you for the weekend. You can arrive on Friday and leave on Sunday and then you’ll get your money – but only if I’m satisfied with your work,” Ryan told him, as if he was talking to some business contractor who agreed to give his apartment a
new lick of paint. “You’re not the one who calls the shots here, Brendon. I am. Okay?”

“Okay,” Brendon shrugged, as calmly as possible. “Call me.” Brendon turned and started towards the door.

“You remember that I agreed to pay off that dude from the club for you, don’t you? That’s fifty grand in blowjobs you owe me.”

Brendon stopped mid-step and turned back towards the man. Ryan was trying desperately to keep him in his apartment for as long as possible. “I appreciate you doing that but you promised me ten grand; that was our deal, Ryan.”

“And your half of the deal was that you’d let me fuck you this morning. But I guess you forgot about that as well?”

“Is this about you not being able to fuck me this morning, Ryan or do you want me to stay and play happy families? You paid to fuck me - you didn’t pay me to care about you.”

“Fuck you.” The word fired off Ryan’s tongue as his jaw tightened. “You woke up thinking about your boyfriend, did you? Feeling guilty that you enjoyed having my dick inside you so much, hmm? Maybe I’ll track down your boyfriend, this Jon guy from Chicago? The heroin addict… I bet he’s a good fuck. He’d let me do anything I wanted to him - no hard limits, remember? He likes it rough, doesn’t he? Does he know his beloved boyfriend’s been fucking Ryan Ross?” he sneered. “Maybe I should find him and tell him?”

Brendon’s palms pushed roughly against Ryan’s shoulders. Motherfucker needed to know when to stop running his goddamn mouth. He didn’t push him very hard, but Ryan reeled back in shock, his eyebrows knotting in fury.

“You better shut the fuck up about him,” Brendon spat. Ryan looked like he never had anyone put him in his place before in his entire life. “I’m a goddamn escort, Ryan and this means nothing to me. You’re just another client and I know you’d like to think you’re totally different from my usual type but you’re all exactly the same. I’m a human being, I have feelings. I’m not a machine, Ryan,”

Brendon sighed. “So, if paying me money to treat me like shit makes you feel better about yourself, then I’m more than willing to oblige you that but if you ever contact my boyfriend - I swear to god - I will ruin your life. Do you understand?”

Ryan’s mouth twitched into a pout, eyes downcast and refusing to meet with Brendon’s. He waited for verbal confirmation but it only came in the form of one short, barely there nod of Ryan’s head.

Brendon folded the check in two and slipped it into the inside pocket of his jacket. “Thanks for the meal last night – and thanks again for what you did for me in the club, Ryan - but I really don’t think we should see each other again.” He pulled his jacket straight and moved towards the front door.

Ryan called after him, following him down the hallway. “Brendon, wait up. Please.”

Brendon turned in frustration this time. “What?” he barked. “I did my job, what more do you want from me?”

“I don’t want you to leave because every single second I’m on my own I feel like I’m suffocating. I don’t have any friends – not unless my dad pays them to look after me. My sister resents me, my brother thinks I’m a fucking joke and I’ve never done anything but disappoint my parents. No one loves me, Brendon. No one even likes me.” Ryan’s eyes started to water and he opened them wide to try and dry out his tears. Ryan licked his lips, dropped his eyes down at his bare feet and rubbed his
finger under his nose.

“I’m a drug addict. I’m an alcoholic... and unless I count the people my dad pays to hang around with me, I’m completely and totally alone.” Ryan looked back up at him. Now it was Brendon’s turn to look away. He didn’t want to see Ryan looking so sad – he was the first of his clients Brendon had actually been able to consider human and even then Ryan was so far removed from the real world that he could hardly be classed as such anyway.

“Brendon… if you can stand there and swear to me that you felt nothing for me last night then that’s fine, you can go and I won’t call you again but-”

“I felt nothing for you last night.” Brendon said, his voice feeling like gravel in his mouth. “Good luck, Ryan.” You're going to fucking need it. Brendon left Ryan Ross shivering in his underwear, alone in his hallway.

It was so hard to walk away and not look back, especially after Ryan opened up to him like that. Brendon hated to watch people suffer but he lied and walked away because telling Ryan he felt nothing was a damn sight better than admitting to himself he felt something – and Ryan was a big boy anyway, he could surely survive a little heartbreak, up there alone in his fortress of solitude.

When Brendon exited onto the street, the cold breeze hit him like a slap to the face. He flagged down a cab and gave the driver his address. They were at a stoplight when Brendon first checked his phone. He’d been expecting there to be dozens of missed calls or messages from Jon, accusatory texts or worried voicemails but there were none, which was unusual.

When Brendon didn’t hear from Jon, he always imagined the worst possible scenario. He’d imagine him facedown and bloody in some gutter or tied up and gagged in a shitty motel room after pissing off the wrong people or naked, raped and dead in the trunk of some pervert’s car.

“That’ll be thirty-seven, fifty, pal,” the driver called at him when they pulled up in front of the apartment. Jesus. Forty bucks? He handed the man two twenty dollar notes and waited for the change.

He looked glumly up at the miserable gray brickwork. It was certainly a far cry from Ryan’s multi-million dollar pad on the Upper East Side. They sure led polar opposite lifestyles, him and Ryan; it was like The Prince and the Pauper, or some crappy romantic comedy and if Brendon let himself get too carried away, he could imagine a happy ending.

Every time he thought about Ryan, he was filled with a mixture of debilitating guilt and white-hot arousal at the base of his dick. He hated to admit it, but sex with Ryan Ross last night had been some of the best he ever had. Ryan had certainly been thorough when it came to giving him an orgasm – several orgasms, in fact and orgasms so powerful and earth shattering that Brendon hadn’t even thought about Jon. Not once. The man he loved, the man he always thought about when clients ordered him to come – he hadn’t crossed his mind all night. He let himself in through the main door and climbed slowly up the stairs, exhaustion weighing down his muscles.

He was going to be in such deep trouble with Jon for staying out all night that Brendon had a right mind to just turn around and walk back out of the building. What would Jon do if I just never came home? he thought, pausing on the landing. He could go back to Las Vegas and watch his dad die, watch Dallon play happy families with his sister and continue to lie to his parents about his sexuality, end up sad and gay and alone in a city he hated – and Jon, what would happen to him? Jon would go back to Pete or he’d hook up with Joe and he’d either get clean or be dead in a month.

He climbed the second flight of stairs with a gaping sense of unease in the very pit of his stomach.
He knew how it’d go as soon as he entered their apartment – Jon would bitch at him for not calling and they’d end up having another argument. Brendon wouldn’t be able to bite his tongue long enough to stop the questions that Zack raised last night from spilling out of his mouth and Jon would act passive-aggressive and accuse him of not caring, just like he always did. Brendon would get defensive to deflect the fact that knowing all that shit Zack told him about Jon absolutely killed him, but he still loved that hopeless motherfucker. Who was he kidding? He could never leave Jon. He made that mistake with Dallon and spent the last eight years cursing himself for it – he didn’t want to spend the next eight weeping over what might’ve been with Jon as well.

When Brendon reached their front door, he stopped just before inserting his key into the lock. He could hear muffled voices and loud laughter and he could smell the sweet aroma of weed drifting into his nostrils from under the door. It was a voice he didn’t recognize but it was Jon’s laughter, clear and genuine, coming through the walls.

Irritated, he pushed his key into the lock and twisted it, pushing into the room. He was met with a dense wall of smoke and the sight of Jon quickly pulling away from a man on their bed – Joe Trohman.

Well, he guessed that answered the question about which tatted-up motherfucker Jon had been hanging out with at the club last night – and he’d been hoping Zack was just trying to stir shit. Jon flashed him a stoned smile, the corners of his lips pulling too far into his cheeks.

“So… you didn’t call last night,” Jon said, eventually. “Where were you?”

“Out,” Brendon snapped. “Where were you?”

“Here,” Jon said, equally as terse.

“Can I ask what he’s doing here?”

Jon turned red and Joe pulled a face behind his back, mocking Brendon’s remark. He felt his lips twitch with the effort to keep his mouth shut.

“Well,” Jon started cautiously, treading lightly. “I don’t want you to freak out or nothing and I don’t want this to be a big deal… but I said Joe could stay.” Brendon’s face must’ve clearly given away
his irritation at the news because Jon quickly added, “just for a couple of nights, probably no longer than a week.” He turned back to look at Joe lying back on Brendon’s pillow with his hand behind his head like he belonged there or something.

“Less than a week, right, dude?” Jon pushed against Joe’s elbow and Brendon watched as Joe’s fingers reached up to place the joint between Jon’s lips. They shared a look and then laughed. Maybe there was some big joke Brendon was missing out on. Maybe he was the butt of it.

"Sure," Joe smirked. "Less than a week."

“Why does he have to stay with us? Isn’t there anyone else you can go to?”

Joe pushed up and sat on the edge of the mattress, legs splayed obnoxiously wide, in Brendon’s opinion. He wondered what he walked in on a few minutes ago – whether or not they’d been making out or talking dirty into each other’s ears.

Joe Trohman looked different; he was better looking than Brendon remembered which was disconcerting and he’d obviously been earning pretty good money slinging drugs for Pete Wentz because he had two full sleeves covered in bright tattoos. Brendon already hated him, Joe, with his stupid blue eyes and long curls and strong features. Joe, with his tattooed arms and his stubble-rough jaw. Brendon hated him.

“So, here’s the thing,” Joe started with a sigh. He’d forgotten how much that voice irritated him. “Pete Wentz wants me dead.”

Brendon felt a shiver run over his skin. “And what? You want to hide out here? Lead him to our door? Drag us into whatever fucked up drug-dealer squabble the two of you are in? No thanks. I think I’m good on having Pete Wentz turn up at my door with a baseball bat at 3AM because he got beef with you.”

“No, listen, man - the dude’s completely fucking loopy, like, literally, grade-A cuckoo. He thinks he’s Scarface or Walter White or some shit. I’m like, bro, you are a small time pot dealer, get the fuck over yourself- but you know what he’s like, a little fucker with a big ego. The dude’s got a serious Napoleon Complex.”

Jon held the joint out towards Joe, lying back on the bed beside him. When Joe didn’t notice, Jon poked him in the ribs with his toe and Joe’s fingers slid to tickle the sole of Jon’s foot as he reached for it.

Nice work, asshole – flirt with my boyfriend right in front of my eyes and don’t even offer me any weed.

“He’s still dedicated to his job of fucking up everyone’s lives and just laughing it off like it’s nothing,” Joe continued with a sigh. “I fucking hate him, man.”

Maybe Joe wasn’t that bad – not if he hated Pete as much as he claimed to. At least they had a shared hatred of Jon’s ex-boyfriend.

“So,” the man continued, blue eyes flicking excitedly between Jon and Brendon’s, his voice dropping as if about to indulge them both in some juicy secret. “A week ago, he comes to me, convinced that I’ve been talking to the cops about him, accusing me of ripping him off like, three pounds of weed. I told him, I said, ‘Dude, I am a straight-up, honest guy. We’ve known each other forever - as if I’d rip you off three measly pounds of your crappy weed.’” Joe took a long suck on the joint and exhaled smoke rings at the ceiling. “Guys, I’m telling you, on a scale of one to ten - one
being mildly insane and ten being completely off-the-fucking-scale schizoid - he’s turned it up to eleven. A while back, I was wondering if he was on crank,” Joe mused idly, “because he acts like a fucking tweaker - always peering out of windows and jumping when anyone knocks the door, the dude sleeps with a loaded gun under his pillow,” Joe Trohman said, waiting for a reaction. When it didn’t come, he turned to Jon. “All I’m saying is, Jon, you were lucky to get out from under his feet when you did, man. Guy’s a freaking creep.”

Brendon watched Jon. He was looking at the floor with a blank expression, chewing at his cheek. Dumb fucker was still in love with his ex-pimp/boyfriend. He wished Pete would just move back to Chicago, leave New York completely and take Joe with him. They were fine on their own.

“So anyway, a few days ago, motherfucker pulls a fucking knife on me. Says he doesn’t trust me anymore, says a whole bunch of dumb shit that didn’t make any sense. He said he’d been watching me, sending people out to follow me and he found out I’d been hanging out with Jon. He’s still super pissed that you two fucked off together,” he said, looking up at Brendon. “He hates you – says you stole the love of his life right from under his nose.”

Brendon scoffed, noticing Jon turn red at Joe’s words. “That’s rich – the love of his life? Is that how you do it in the Midwest? Pimp out the love of your life to a bunch of strangers when he’s barely fourteen?”

“I was almost fifteen when I met Pete,” Jon bit defensively.

“That’s exactly the same thing. Barely fourteen, almost fifteen – what’s the fucking difference, Jon? Truth is he sold you to strangers who wanted to fuck an underage teenager – and now look at you. He’s the reason you’re in this mess.”

“Is he, Brendon or is it my mom’s fault for killing herself – or my dad’s fault for letting her, for being an alcoholic and a gambler and someone who used to beat me if I did even the slightest little thing wrong? Maybe it’s his dad’s fault, because my grandfather was exactly the same!” Jon laughed a little frantically. “Hell, my problems started way before I met Pete and the truth is, he was the first person to ever show me any kind of love – the first person to make me feel safe and happy and he may not have shown it in the most conventional of ways but he loved me, he fucking cared about me. I mean, either we’re in this together or we’re not, because half the time, man, half the time, I feel like we’re against each other.”

Brendon reddened, every single one of Jon’s words settling uneasily inside his heart. A silence rang through the room, thrumming through Brendon’s ears. It was almost deafening. Joe was the first one to speak, his hand reaching out to give Jon’s knee a comforting squeeze.

“So, back to what I was saying, long story short,” Joe continued, absently sucking on the joint that was still burning between his fingers. “Pete’s a paranoid fuck and I haven’t got a place to stay. Pete fired me, he doesn’t want me working for him anymore – he actually told me to stay out of his territory,” he told them slowly. "Like something out of Breaking Bad."

Brendon couldn’t help himself from biting at his boyfriend. “See, Jon. I told you Pete was crazy – and if I said it once, I said it a thousand times; if you stayed with him, you’d be in a way worse situation than you are now. I told you-”

“Yes, you were right. I was wrong – what d’you want, a fucking medal?” Jon interjected abruptly. “You’ve made your point, Brendon.” Jon pushed himself up from the mattress and pulled his hands down his face. “Fuck, man,” he groaned, pacing the floor, “I could really go for a hit right about now – just a tiny little bit of H would put me right.”
“You don’t need that shit. I got all the weed you can smoke in my bag over there - three pounds of the stuff I’ve been trying to get rid of for weeks, you’d be doing me a fucking favor, man - and besides, last night you were telling me you’re two weeks clean. That’s fucking awesome,” Joe enthused with sincere eyes. “You must be proud of him, Brendon. I know I would be.”

“Yeah.” That’s all Brendon could say before he lost all enthusiasm for the conversation. Who the hell did Joe think he was, acting like Mr. Nice Guy, playing the role of supportive friend and bad-mouthing Pete? He was obviously trying to get into Brendon’s good books, but it wasn’t going to work – a few weeks ago, Joe and Jon had been happily smoking heroin together. Joe was a bad influence and he’d certainly gotten a lot more handsome since Brendon had last seen him – as if he’d finally grown into his awkward face. No wonder Jon wanted to spend so much time with him; he probably had a big dick and blew big loads and fucked with passion.

He briefly wondered if Joe knew how it felt to have Jon’s lips around his cock. Soon everyone in Manhattan would know what that felt like – everyone apart from Brendon, that is. He sighed and pushed up from the tattered old couch, brushing down his pants – they still smelled like piss. He was in serious need of a shower.

He didn’t want Joe in the apartment for even another half an hour, let alone a couple of nights, but he realized he wasn’t going to win that argument. “You can stay,” he said, nodding at the man, “but only for a couple of nights. This place is barely big enough for two, let alone three.” And then - just because he couldn’t help himself, because he couldn’t rid his mind of all those nasty images that had been inserted into his head last night - he said, “I bumped into that Zack guy last night. You know, the club guy? He said he saw you.”

Joe sucked in an awkward breath through his teeth and said, “Well, I’ve got a serious case of the munchies. Think I’ll just pop on down to the 7/11 and pick up some shit. Anyone want anything?”

Brendon shook his head. “We’re good,” he answered for the two of them. He noticed the sag of Jon’s shoulders, the dread of an ensuing argument etched across his tired face. Jon never smiled for him anymore. When Joe disappeared out of the apartment, the whole floor shook as he descended the stairs. The room fell into silence.

"Well?"

“Please don’t start,” Jon sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose between his fingers.

“He said he spat in your mouth, Jon.” Jon flopped down on the bed with his face in the pillow. "Is that true?” Brendon pressed in a whisper.

“You shouldn’t listen to what Zack says. Zack’s a dick. I thought you knew that.”

“He said you moaned for him when he fucked you, he said-”

“Fuck, man,” Jon sighed in exasperation, rolling over onto his back. “And you’ve never done the same thing? You’ve never made a guy think he’s getting it right when it’s getting it so, so wrong, just to get it over with quicker? Just to earn a tip? It meant nothing to me; it never means anything to me, Brendon and your ridiculous fucking jealousy is getting out of hand. I don’t know why you don’t just finish it – you obviously don’t trust me. I mean, you’re aware of what I do for a living, right? What we both do… But every day, it’s the same; every fucking day you constantly bitch at me. It’s like you think I enjoy going out and being fucked by strangers every night.”

“He attacked me, Jon. You didn’t tell me you still owed him money; he said that if he saw you in that place again he’d break your legs and do you know what else he told me? He said you fuck your
clients without protection. He said you go bareback with your tricks."

“Yeah, well, how would he know? I’ve not slept with him in months. I use protection, without fail, every time. I find it embarrassing that you’d even question that, all because some guy who doesn’t like us was trying to get a reaction out of you.” Jon rolled away from him on the mattress and pulled the pillow over his face. “I’m so tired of this, Brendon. Just fucking leave me, why don’t you?”

“Is that what you want?” Brendon asked, after a pause. “You want us to break up?”

Jon shrugged and let out a shuddery breath but he didn’t say anything. Inside his chest, Brendon felt his heart rate spike – it felt like his lungs were shrinking and he suddenly couldn’t take in enough air.

“If I left, what would you do?”

There was a silence that dragged on for too long. Jon spoke his words into the pillow. “I’d probably just end it all, put a gun in my mouth like my mom did and maybe then I’d eventually get some peace. How about you?”

Brendon thought about it – he never considered that his life may one day be void of Jon Walker; he always assumed they were meant to be together, their relationship seemed intrinsic and so what would he do if one day he found himself without it?

I’d run back to Ryan Ross and make the sucker fall in love with me, he thought. Milk him for all he’s worth.

Brendon sat down on the mattress and rubbed Jon’s shoulder. He felt slow, hopeless tears fill his eyes. “I’d spend the rest of my life regretting ever giving up on you,” he said, leaning down to press the words into the back of Jon’s neck. He kissed him until Jon rolled slowly over onto his back and opened his mouth in acceptance. They made out, Jon’s tongue warm and familiar against his, his lips chapped, stubble-rough jaw rubbing against Brendon’s chin.

“I love you,” Brendon told him. “I love you so much more than he ever did.”

“Yeah. I know - but it’s not a competition, Brendon.”

Brendon buried his head into the crook of Jon’s neck, inhaling the familiar scent of cologne and pot, the smoky smell that clung to his shirt. Brendon sucked it into his lungs, trying to imagine a day where he wouldn’t be able to lay in bed next to the man he supposed he loved. Maybe it wasn’t love anymore, maybe it was just guilt keeping them together.

He wanted Jon to treat him like Ryan had - to fuck him mercilessly and call him beautiful, to prove his love to him in a series of desperate orgasms and hurried, wet kisses. Brendon started to grow hard inside his pants thinking about it - thinking about Ryan Ross and the way he fucked him last night… He pressed his erection into Jon’s hip and rutted against him, circling his hips and rubbing his cock against Jon’s side through his jeans.

His lips puckered against Jon’s shoulder – he imagined Ryan’s fingers inside him, slowly stretching his asshole apart or wrapping around his dick and jerking him off. Jon was silent next to him. He didn’t move or say anything during the short time it took Brendon to feel his entire body clench in arousal as he came inside his pants; Jon’s stiff body acting as nothing more than friction to him.

“Are you finished?” Jon asked flatly. Brendon lay there, breathing hard, trying to ignore the wet patch inside his jeans like a fourteen year old. He tried to peck Jon’s cheek, but his boyfriend pulled back, craning his head from the press of his lips. Jon sighed sadly. “You stink – go and shower.”
Brendon pulled away quickly and didn’t protest. He was worried that Jon might smell the infidelity on his skin.
Sink or swim, his father always told him.

Jump in at the deep end. Sink or swim.

He was swimming all right – in three bottles of whiskey and a couple hundred regrets. Not floating, but drowning.

Two weeks passed and Ryan hadn’t left his apartment in five days; not since a rumor had been started on an Internet gossip site about his exploits with a male escort in some grimy club bathroom. He guessed Brendon was laying low – either that or he was deliberately ignoring him because he called him a few times but hadn’t been able to get through.

These days Ryan lived his life in the extremes – happy and sad and back again, Ryan was crying out for help but all his behavior ever got him was the wrong kind of press coverage. He got high to hide the fact that he was at the lowest possible point in his life and since Brendon left him two weeks ago, he numbed those raw emotions with drugs and booze and nameless, meaningless sex because the fact that even a hooker didn’t want to love him was one hell of a blow to take.

The press was having a field day. Ryan’s recent volatility was tabloid fodder, written about on celebrity blogs and talked about on Entertainment Tonight. People bashed him on Twitter, they downright slated him on Tumblr and to people sat behind their laptops or reading their morning newspapers, he was just some spoiled idiot, some rich white boy with first world problems. He needed to pull himself together and get a real job.

He was troubled and falling apart in one breath and a junkie and an asshole in the next.

Strangers fought to defend him; teenage girls with fan-blogs fighting his corner but the majority of America had come to view Ryan as a national joke, a regular walking, talking disaster.

Ryan popped ten tabs of acid alone one night and an hour into his trip, Gabe called him from a party in LA.

“You’re number three in the celebrity death pool, dude,” he shouted down the phone with a laugh. “Franco’s here; he said if you’re gonna OD, give him a head’s up – he’ll place a bet, donate half of it to a charity of your choice.” Gabe laughed brashly and Ryan lay clinging to his couch with his head spinning. He imagined Gabe stood in a room full of eavesdropping Hollywood party guests with his phone on loudspeaker.

“Yeah?” Ryan breathed a nervous laugh. “Well, tell him he’s an asshole,” he managed to stutter.

He heard James Franco cackle through the phone. He was on speakerphone - and he was the joke amongst his friends now too, not just strangers on the Internet. Ryan couldn’t decide which was worse.

Gossip magazines kept calling him up, asking for exclusive interviews, offering him crazy amounts of money. People offered him one hundred thousand dollars. OK! said they’d double that. Rolling Stone called him up a week ago.

“Mate, we’ll pay you ten grand – not quite as much as them gossip mags, I bet, but we won’t fuck you like they will. You’ll come out smelling like roses,” said the editor with a thick Liverpudlian accent.
The latest issue had gone to print three days ago and William brought him a copy and left it on his coffee table.

“Goddamn asshole writer,” Ryan fumed, slapping the magazine closed and taking a swig of whiskey from his glass. A picture of his face stared back at him from the front cover. ‘Poor Little Rich Boy’ said the title in bold black font. “Fuck that guy,” he spat, opening the magazine back to his interview and scanning his eyes back over the text.

*International playboy, Ryan Ross is no stranger to the world’s press. From his alleged dalliances with male sex workers to his long-term cocaine addiction, Ross is the definition of an American badass but closer inspection revealed a sad young man who’s his own worst enemy, just desperate to find somebody to love. Rolling Stone talked exclusively to New York’s coked-out Dennis the Menace in his suite at The Four Seasons in Manhattan.*

The whole article made him out to be complete moron, with each bump of coke he’d taken throughout the interview marked in bracketed italics. They picked apart his every mannerism like some goddamn Harvard psychologists.

William looked over at him and shrugged. “It’s not *that* bad,” he said, with a hesitant smile on his face.

Later that evening, Gabe dropped by his apartment and sat on the couch for half an hour, reading out passages from the interview doubled up in laughter. *It wasn’t* that *funny*, Ryan thought quietly to himself, the forced smile faltering on his face, becoming all teeth and fear after a while.

“Oh, man,” Gabe laughed, his dark eyes watering, “some of these lines are priceless.”

Ryan pushed the bag of coke towards his friend and told him to help himself – anything to distract him from that embarrassing *Rolling Stone* article. Gabe politely refused and after he settled down Ryan talked to him about Brendon.

’Brendon’ – his ‘AA sponsor.’

“Well, he’s not doing a very good job at sponsoring you, is he?” Gabe derided with a sideward look. Ryan was high and he was drunk, the giddy euphoria of the cocaine finally canceling out his whiskey blues.

“He was so dirty, Gabe – and so fucking perfect. His fucking lips and his ass and his throat, oh *god,*” he’d groaned.

Since Brendon left, Ryan managed to cut him down to just the most sacred parts of his body. He thought about Brendon the same way he thought about coke and liquor – he needed him, even though he knew the boy could very well be his downfall. He fucking *needed* him. “The best fuck of my entire life, Gabe. I think I love him. I think he’s The One,” he pined, clutching at his heart in jest.

“I thought there were rules about that shit, about sleeping with your sponsor? What does this guy even do for a living? I bet he works in some fashionable coffee house in Greenwich Village and goes for cocktails with his *girlfriends,*” Gabe mocked, elbowing him hard in the shoulder. Ryan laughed – *well,* he certainly wasn’t going to correct him.

“You better be wary of this Brendon character, Ryan – you know, with the ninety nine percent chance that he’s just hanging out with you for your dad’s money,” his friend warned.

Ryan shrugged his shoulders and took another line. He really hadn’t needed the reminder that all he was to *anyone* was a bunch of money that wasn’t his.
“You know, I like a line as much as the next man,” his friend informed him as he left Ryan’s apartment that night, “but maybe you should slow down on that shit? Quit drinking or something, you know? Take a vacation.”

“I quit drinking at 3AM every morning, Gabe,” Ryan said with a sigh.

“We all need something to help us unwind, my friend. I get it - but there has to be some type of interval somewhere – even just a short one – or else life will just get utterly relentless. Seriously, Ryan, what are you trying to do, *kill yourself*?”

“With any luck, *yeah,*” he mumbled because he didn’t care anymore, he *really* didn’t. He likened his life to standing on the edge of a burning building. The fear of jumping remained constant; the only variable was the other terror - the fire’s flames. A trapped person will feel the heat as the flames get closer and when the fire gets close enough, jumping to their death becomes the slightly less terrible of the two fates.

It wasn’t that Ryan desired the fall, but he sure as hell was scared of the fire and no one screaming at him to hang on or to not jump could really understand it. Ryan guessed you had to have personally felt flames to understand a terror way beyond falling.

* * *

It had been two weeks; two long, tedious weeks since Joe Trohman showed up on his bed one morning and asked if he could stay for a ‘couple of nights’ – a couple of nights turned into two weeks and Joe’s toothbrush now sat on the ledge of the sink in the bathroom as if he *lived* there or something.

Jon had been clean of heroin for a month and his withdrawal symptoms came and went in tidal waves. His emotions were scattered; one minute Brendon would watch him press against Joe’s shoulder and let rip a true belly laugh and the next, he was pulling his hair and heaving on the floor because he couldn’t tie his shoelaces.

Jon was uncoordinated and clumsy – he lost track during conversations easily and became infuriated when he couldn’t complete ordinarily simple tasks – tying his shoelaces, for example; Brendon sat and watched his fingers and thumbs fumble with the laces for over two minutes one morning. Jon’s hands shook a lot, he cussed loudly and punched walls when he couldn’t do something, but his anger would quickly turn to despair and Brendon wasn’t sure which emotion scared him the most.

All in all, he wasn’t a very sympathetic witness to Jon’s withdrawal. In fact, Jon had begun to piss Brendon off. He found it difficult to sleep and in turn, kept both Brendon and Joe awake for the best part of the night, forever tossing and turning and trembling under the blankets. In the morning, Jon would sit on the edge of the mattress and sniff and say; “I’m sorry if I kept you guys awake.”

One morning, aggravated by his lack of rest, Brendon snapped at him, “Yeah, I’ve not had a full night’s sleep in almost a *week,* Jon.”

Joe playfully knocked his fist into Jon’s shoulder. “Nah, you’re alright, man.” His voice had been light but he caught Brendon’s eye over the top of Jon’s head and frowned at him. *Lay the fuck off him,* his expression said. Brendon wanted to scream. Looking back at Jon, rubbing his back and dropping his voice, Joe said, “Don’t worry about us; you concentrate on you. Okay?”

“Okay,” Jon nodded, sadness clouding his face and voice. Brendon was tearing his hair out. Watching Jon try and kick his addiction was the most frustrating thing he ever witnessed – like watching his grandmother try and use the Internet. *It’s fucking simple, Jon,* he wanted to shout, *stop*
feeling so sorry for yourself.

That morning, Jon dropped his head against Joe’s shoulder and sighed. Brendon looked away, feeling the anger or jealousy or disdain prick at his nose. He glanced back at the bed to see Joe press a small kiss against the top of Jon’s head.

“Chin up, cheer up,” Joe smiled, pulling away and slapping Jon’s back.

Jon and Brendon hadn’t had any physical contact in weeks – not since Brendon brought himself to orgasm against Jon’s thigh - and neither of them had been working as much since Joe arrived. Every morning he’d wake up to a cellphone filled with missed calls from men who were desperate enough to pay to screw him and he never bothered calling any of them back. He was used to physical contact, even if it was one-sided but Brendon didn’t even bother trying to hug Jon anymore; his advances were almost always deflected.

The thing that annoyed Brendon most about Joe Trohman was that he was an annoyingly likable character who gave him no real reason to hate him. He was supportive and patient around Jon and the dude was smart – smarter than Brendon anyway, and he’d been paying more than his fair share towards rent and groceries since his arrival. Nonetheless, Brendon mindlessly disliked the man and that afternoon, after watching Joe’s innocent display of affection, Brendon had taken Joe’s cigarettes and flushed them down the toilet.

The next morning, when Joe told a joke that caused Jon to bury his face in the pillow to try and muffle his laughter, Brendon accidentally stumbled when handing Joe a mug of weak, but boiling coffee. He hadn’t scalded him, but the shock was enough to make Joe jump from the couch and glare disparagingly at Brendon.

“Oh, I’m so clumsy.”

“Jeez, man, fucking watch it, will you?” Joe murmured, dabbing at his crotch with napkins. He sat back down, carefully folded one knee over the other and took a sip from his mug. “Asshole,” he muttered under his breath.

“Dick,” Brendon coughed under his.

Brendon started to notice a theme when it came to Jon’s mood swings. When Joe was around, Jon was generally happy. They would sit opposite each other, cross-legged on the bed and play cards for spare change. Brendon would refuse to join in, merely out of spite and then regret being so petty as soon as he’d see Joe’s hand subtly reach out to touch Jon’s knee as he teased him about what a crappy card player he was. Brendon would stand in the kitchen and listen to them laughing together and when he watched them close enough, he’d notice Jon’s gaze darting between Joe’s eyes and lips when he talked, but it was Jon’s smile that killed him - that subconscious grin pulling at his lips every time he looked at Joe.

Over the two weeks, Brendon noticed numerous subtle gestures and shared glances and the initial anger that their flirtation caused him soon turned to resentment. Brendon hated Joe for the sole reason that he could make Jon laugh. Maybe Jon really was better off without him? Maybe the shitty life they were both leading really was all Brendon’s fault? Maybe I should just leave, he thought one evening.

At night he would lie awake and wish for something to happen that would warrant it; he just wanted Jon out of his hair for a few days, a few hours, anything. Brendon just needed some space to breathe because watching his boyfriend fall in love with another man was suffocating.
When Joe wasn’t around, Jon would start snapping at Brendon and pacing the floor.

“You don’t have to be such an asshole to him,” he would seethe and Brendon would make little effort to counteract the argument.

“Well, do you think he could be a little more subtle about the fact he wants to screw you?”

Jon shook his head and stared at the wall. His jaw was tense, his eyes cold – the relaxed warmth that Brendon could see when Joe was around was long gone. “He’s helping us out,” Jon told him, his voice terse. “He’s helping me out.”

“What, by trying to hook-up with you when my back’s turned? He’s a drug-dealer, Jon, he’s-”

“He slings weed, dude, it’s not like he's selling meth - and I am not even going through this with you again, Brendon,” Jon told him with a tired sigh. “I am so sick of this. I’m sick of you and your fucked up idea of love. You never give me any support – all you do is bitch at me and I’m fucking sick of it.”

Brendon pulled on his coat that night and went to work. Before he left, he leant over Jon on the couch and kissed his cheek. Jon pulled away.

“Whatever, man,” he muttered.

Brendon felt like reaching up and grabbing Jon’s shoulders and just shaking him; shaking him, shaking him, shaking him until he was either laughing or crying or punching him away – anything to get an ounce of passion from the man.

Later that night, after a whole evening of standing on a dirty street corner, Brendon returned home and entered their apartment to see Joe kicked back on their bed, alone.

“Where’s Jon?”

“Out,” Joe replied, bringing a joint to his mouth as he read a magazine. Brendon faltered on the spot, his arms getting stuck in his jacket as he tried to pull it off.

Poor Little Rich Boy, the front cover of the magazine read and on it was a black and white photograph of Ryan Ross’s brooding face, staring back at him with knowing eyes.

“Smack can be a real bitch to beat. You know, Brendon, stress and anxiety only trigger the worst symptoms of withdrawal. Maybe you should go a little easier on Jon? He’s doing really well.”

“When are you going to just leave us alone?” he asked, turned from the bed so Joe wouldn’t notice his flushed cheeks – Ryan Ross had given an interview to Rolling Stone? He hoped to god there was no mention of his name… He needed to hide the evidence before Jon got home; he didn’t want to have to answer any prying questions.

“Is that what you want – for me to leave?” Joe asked, looking over the top of the magazine. “You want to deal with Jon kicking his smack habit on your own? I’ve seen how you are with him; you’ve got fuck-all patience and you don’t trust him.”

“Are you sure you’re not just trying to fuck him?” Brendon asked, folding his arms. “Because that’s what it looks like to me.”

Joe slapped the magazine closed and dropped it onto the bed. “Yeah. I’m trying to fuck him,” Joe replied sardonically, “because that’s what I really want in a partner; a man who’s struggling with
heroin withdrawal, a man who can’t even link sex and pleasure anymore because of what he’s been through. You know, Brendon, victims of prostitution have a higher rate of post-traumatic stress disorder than people who fought on the frontline. Think about that next time you want to accuse him of blowing me or whatever, because I can assure you – that hasn’t happened.” Joe picked up the magazine again and flicked back to his page. Ryan stared back at him.

Brendon stayed silent and felt tears tickle his nose.

The next evening, Jon worked himself up into such a temper about a misplaced pair of jeans that he locked himself in the bathroom, smashed the mirror with his fist and reentered the room trying to hide his bloody knuckles.

Joe bandaged them up, cleaning the blood away over the sink in the bathroom as Brendon laid back on the bed with his heart beating furiously inside his chest, listening to the two of them mumbling softly at each other. You’re not even in love with him anymore, he told himself. You’re in love with the idea of him, the idea of what might’ve been. You’re in love because he’s the only fucking thing you’ve got.

That night, sleep deserted Brendon as the room grew colder.

The Manhattan weather was cruel this year and despite eight years in the city, he still couldn’t get used to East Coast winters. That night, the chill of the wind had blown in through the gap in the single-pane window. That night, Brendon was still awake to hear Jon throw back the covers of the bed and whisper Joe’s name into the darkness of the room.

“You awake?”

Joe grunted a reply. Since his arrival a fortnight ago, he set up a bed on their tattered old couch, with only a lumpy pillow and a thin blanket for warmth. He slept in his jacket and his boots and until now had been kind enough to shrug off the almost sub-zero temperatures their apartment dropped to in winter as ‘not that bad’. Maybe it was the Midwesterner in him because the cold didn’t seem to affect Joe as much as it did Brendon.

“Get in here, silly. You must be freezing.”

Joe hadn’t needed to be asked twice. He pulled his jacket off and toed off his boots and Brendon felt him slip under the covers next to Jon. Brendon blinked at the wall. His life had become one long, crappy joke and this was surely the punch line.

“Oh my god,” Joe breathed, trying to gulp in air – Brendon could hear his teeth chattering.

“It’s so warm in here. Holy fuck, it’s cold on that couch.” His voice was barely above a whisper but Brendon could hear each hitch of breath, each murmured word while he pretended to still be asleep.

“Bless you, you’re so cold,” Jon noted gently. The bed rocked slightly with the movement of Jon’s hand rubbing at Joe’s arm to warm him up. Brendon felt the shift of Jon’s body on the mattress, felt him moving closer towards Joe. His jaw tensed as the heat of his partner’s back pressed against his, disappeared. “You like that?”

“Mmm – that feels good,” he heard Joe murmur under his breath, the words sleepy on his lips.

“Oh yeah?” After a long moment, Brendon heard him speak again. “Huh, I can tell.” Jon breathed a quiet laugh – and Joe better not be getting an erection in his bed, over his boyfriend, Brendon thought. Not after what he told him earlier about nothing having happened between the two of them - the facetious little prick; he knew it. He knew there was something going on, some ulterior motive
why Joe had outstayed his welcome.

Joe chuckled – soft, barely audible. “Uh. Yeah. Sorry about that.”

“Don’t be. It’s fine.” Brendon heard the rustle of covers. He felt the weight of Jon’s body shift as he moved even further away from him on the mattress. “Wow, you’re a big boy. You want me to take care of that for you?”

Brendon wanted to scream, he wanted to vomit, he wanted to jab his elbow back as a warning that he was wide awake and watch Jon beg for forgiveness on the floor. He wanted Joe out of their apartment right now and maybe he should just take Jon with him. His chest was rising and falling rapidly and he was breathing through his mouth, having difficulty keeping silent. Was Jon really going to give his friend a handjob right behind his back? He was lying right there!

“Jon, buddy – your boyfriend is right there,” Joe whispered, but the following silence was punctuated with the sound of one sharp intake of breath and his dick being pulled.

Brendon never felt anger so intense. Why couldn’t Jon just… disappear? Why the hell were they going round in circles pretending that their stupid, fucked up relationship was working?

Ten seconds is a long time when you’re listening to your boyfriend jerk off another dude right next to you, but it was ten seconds until Joe sucked in air and quietly said, “Why are you doing this, Jon?”

“Well, I mean, isn’t this what you want from me? It’s the only thing anyone wants from me. Isn’t it the reason you’re still here?”

Brendon’s heart tightened in his chest as he heard Joe shift on the mattress and pull Jon’s hand out of his pants. “Jon, no. It isn’t. This isn’t what either of us wants - you’re not in the right frame of mind for this and Brendon is right there.”

“He doesn’t love me, Joe.” Brendon heard the crack in Jon’s voice.

“He does,” Joe replied weakly.

The silence that followed seemed infinite. Brendon silently cussed Jon out, his whole body tense in anticipation of his reply.

“But I don’t love him anymore.”

Brendon stayed quiet, but his eyes leaked sorry tears. Jon was releasing soft, shuddery sobs, pulling away and nestling in Joe’s arms and Brendon just lay there and listened to his boyfriend’s mouth move against Joe’s, wet and breathless as they shared heavy kisses - and in that moment Brendon never hated anyone more than he hated Jon Walker. Brendon was so through with him. He just wanted him gone...

The next night, Jon didn’t return home after work.
Chapter 20

He’d been summoned by his father.

George Ross evidently read his son’s interview in Rolling Stone and decided they needed to ‘have a chat’, as he put it on the phone. He called him at 10AM on Wednesday morning, a few days after that month’s issue had been published and suggested that Ryan should think about checking into rehab again.

“There’s a great place in Malibu, son,” his father told him, “One of the absolute top in the country - and you can’t beat the weather in California at this time of year. It’d be nice to get out of New York for a bit, wouldn’t it?”

Ryan groaned, still only half awake as he sat up in bed and rubbed the sleep from his eyes. It was too early in the morning for this conversation and he was too hung over to deal with father’s suggestions that he return to another crappy rehabilitation facility, no matter where in the country it was.

“I read that interview, son,” George told him with a sigh. “Pamela’s been crying for three days. This Passages place we’ve been reading up on could really do you some good. Listen to this – one of the few treatment centers in the world that provides customized, holistic treatment programs, in addition to 5-star amenities and cutting-edge therapeutic methods. Sounds nice, huh?” His father paused, waiting for an answer. Ryan could tell he’d been reading off their website. “So, do you want me to give them a call?”

Ryan stayed quiet, reaching over to his side table and wrapping his hand around the neck of the half-empty bottle of Grey Goose – vodka wasn’t his first choice when it came to spirits, but over the course of a week he’d drunk his entire apartment dry and it had been the only thing left last night. Half a bottle of neat vodka, glugged down like it was water… Even the memory of it made Ryan want to heave.

“I think I will call them up. Just to explain our situation,” his father mused on the other end of the line. After a big breath he said, “I’m sending William over with Shane in half an hour. Your mother and I would like to speak with you over lunch, so make sure you’re relatively sober. I’m hoping you haven’t started drinking yet? It is only ten o’clock.”

The only reason why Ryan hadn’t started drinking yet was because his father’s phone call had woken him up. He was still drunk from last night and the sickness of a hangover pulled at his stomach.

“Damn dad, get off my case, will you?” He sighed, taking a slug out of the bottle in spite of his father’s wishes. It burned as it slid down his throat. “Stop nagging me.”

“Well, if I don’t nag you Ryan, no one else will. You’ll end up dead within a year and believe it or not, I don’t want to have to bury my youngest son before his next birthday; no parent wants to do that.”

“Whatever,” Ryan mumbled, trying not to give a damn, but he felt the tears slip slowly over his eyelids anyway.

Maybe George really did care. Just a little bit.

Later that morning, Ryan sat on his couch and point blank refused to move. William arrived a little
William Beckett looked like a man who was reaching the end of his tether, which seemed to be a common theme around the people Ryan associated with. His long suffering PA eventually snapped. “Just face up to your fucking responsibilities, man! Your dad’s worried about you – that’s why he’s nagging you. He’s not doing it because he wants to piss you off.”

“Fuck him,” Ryan muttered venomously. He thought they’d been through this before. “He only calls me when I fuck up; when there’s something negative in the press about me–”

“Well, in that case he must be on the phone to you all the goddamn time,” William interjected, muttering under his breath. Ryan chose to be the better man and ignore him. Fucking asshole.

“The only thing he’s worried about is his stupid reputation – as if he needs any help from me to fuck that up.”

“You’re going to your parents’ house – you’re not arguing about this with me,” William told him, his voice stern. It sounded like he was talking to a child. Ryan often wondered if there was actually any difference between William’s Dad Voice and his PA Voice. Pinching the bridge of his nose between his thumb and forefinger and taking a breath to calm himself down, he said, “Go get yourself dressed and meet me down in the car in fifteen minutes. Shane’s waiting – and please,” he begged, “just lay off getting high for like, a couple of hours. You can do that, can’t you?”

Ryan huffed up from the couch and stalked to his bedroom. He took three lines of coke and slipped a pre-rolled joint in the pocket of his jacket. He had a feeling he’d need it after the berating he was about to be subjected to by his interfering parents.

He stared at his reflection in the bathroom mirror as he washed his face and frowned – he looked like shit but he felt much worse; he felt completely void of any positive emotion - just like a ghost, floating through his life with no real purpose. Boneless and gutless and totally fucking hopeless.

Shit, he thought, he couldn’t go to his parents’ house feeling like this. He couldn’t focus on anything, his head was a constant whirl of dark thoughts and guilty desires; the drugs were meant to help with his anxiety, they were meant to help him forget but all they’d done recently was make things worse. Maybe he could go back to rehab? Just for a month or so. Maybe then Brendon the Hooker would be more willing to spend some time with him because Ryan sure felt good about himself when his dick was in that boy’s mouth.

Perfect Brendon - with his tight ass and endless throat and filthy mouth. Why was it that a man he deemed so irrevocably perfect was a hooker who wanted absolutely nothing to do with him? There were hundreds, if not thousands of men and women out there who’d kill to settle down with Ryan Ross and it was just his luck that the one person he felt he’d made a connection with over the recent months happened to be one of the very few people whose love he couldn’t buy by flaunting his father’s cash.

I should call him, Ryan thought, pulling his hand through his hair and turning away from the mirror. Perhaps by now, he’s down on his luck enough that he’ll come crawling back?

The little white-robed angel on his shoulder spoke up softly, just forget about him, Ryan, he’s not worth all this, but the horned devil stabbed that voice to silence with his pitchfork, a delirious smile on his lips, just fucking call him, you pussy. Fuck everyone else! Just. Fucking. Call him.
Once he made it down to his car, he sat next to William and scrolled absently through his contacts. He could sure feel that coke kicking in now and his limbs were starting to jerk as he shifted restlessly on the backseat of his Mercedes. He tried to relax but Brendon was on his mind, the thought of him nagging inside his brain.

_I want to be your fucking whore_...

When Ryan was alone at night and when he was sober enough to make it to bed before passing out, he would wrap his hand around his cock and jerk off to that memory – of the words leaving Brendon’s lips as he fucked him in the shower. He would lie on his stomach with his palm tight around his dick and hump the pillow, trying to imagine it was Brendon underneath him. Ryan sucked in a deep breath and tried to shake the fuzzy fantasies from his head.

“Can’t be bothered staying sober for your parents then?” Shane asked him with a chuckle as they sat in traffic on Lexington Avenue.

Ryan shrugged. “What’s the point?” he answered with a sigh.

“Well. I guess there is no point,” Shane told him, glancing up at him in the rearview mirror.

“Exactly.”

They finished the rest of the drive in awkward, sated silence.

When he arrived at his parents’ townhouse in Gramercy Park, Ryan was greeted by his stepmom, who wound him into a hug so tight it almost squeezed the breath out of him. When she drew back, she looked at him sadly.

“Honey, you look so…” she paused, her eyes drifting over his face, “sick – are you eating? Is William taking sufficient care of you? We haven’t seen you in so long; you haven’t been answering your cellphone, your father and I have been worried sick.”

Ryan squeezed her shoulders and forced a smile. “I’ve been fine, mom,” he said, kissing her head. “You worry too much.”

“You drink too much,” she added. She smiled up at him, but her face was sad, her eyes looking glassy as she blinked away tears. Pamela looked up at the ceiling and attempted a laugh. “Gosh, Ryan – it’s so hard seeing you like this.”

Ryan gave her shoulder a gentle pat – if there was anyone he’d go to rehab for, it was the selfless woman who’d raised him. She dabbed at her eyes and shook her head, pulling herself back from the brink of tears. Pamela gathered herself up and waved him towards the sitting room. “Marc’s through there, why don’t you go say hello.”

The name scuttled around his head, knocking through his brain like a pinball. “Marc?” he echoed, moving slowly down the hallway.

“Marc Willis,” Pamela hissed, nodding her head at the door, dabbing at her tears with a handkerchief. “Go and keep the man company. Your father is on his way downstairs.”

It was like a nightmare or a scene out of some bad horror movie because Ryan felt his feet carrying him toward the sitting room, despite the fact that he knew evil was lurking there. If he’d have been watching himself on a TV screen, he’d have been rolling his eyes, sighing at the predictability of it but he watched as his hand slowly pressed against the sitting room door and pushed it open. His eyes fell on the monster within.
The first thing Ryan noticed about Marc Willis that afternoon was the way his cold, gray eyes moved down his body when he entered his parents’ sitting room, how his pupils dilated when he gazed at him.

The second thing he noticed was his red, raw knuckles as his hand rubbed over his chin – he was unshaven and his usually neat, greying hair looked limp and greasy on top of his head, as if he hadn’t showered in a few days. Ryan thought it strange that a man of Marc’s caliber would be sporting such unsightly abrasions somewhere so visible, but the observation quickly filtered to the back of his mind as the man slowly leant forward, put his elbows on his knees and steepled his fingers.

“Hey, Ryan,” the man smiled, slow and sick.

Ryan’s vision blurred as he heard his name – it sounded disgusting on Marc’s tongue. He glanced back over his shoulder in a silent panic.

Where was William – and where the hell was his father? How the fuck had he managed to end up alone in his mom and dad’s sitting room with a rapist? His rapist?

He felt the heat rush into his cheeks. He felt his fingers go numb and all at once, Ryan felt like he was crumbling from the inside – as if someone set off a bomb inside his stomach and he was about to implode. He could feel the chill race up his spine, right through his shoulders, making him shiver and he couldn’t let this happen – not here, not now… He couldn’t let this fucker win.

But it was happening – and Marc and his parents were going to be witness to it, the huge knot in his chest tightening, tightening until he couldn’t even breathe. Fuck, everything was fading to gray. The bile was rising up his throat. Ryan blinked – he could just about manage that, but with each slow second that ticked by it felt like someone was pulling out his insides. He felt like his guts were unraveling.

Ryan wanted to kill himself. Seriously. He wanted to put a gun in his mouth and blow his brains out all over his parents’ wall because this was surely the most unpleasant experience of his entire life. This is how it feels to be caught in crossfire, he thought, unable to take a step forward or back, his stupid, dumb legs feeling heavy as stone. Marc was still looking at him, an amused half-grin on his ugly face.

“You well?”

Ryan managed a nod and swallowed. “Fine,” he managed – but only barely; his mouth was dry and he suddenly felt the biggest desire to get spectacularly and irrevocably fucked up. He pulled his eyes away from Marc sat on his parents’ couch - the same couch he groomed Ryan on ten years ago while his stupid, oblivious parents vacationed in Italy. The same couch where Ryan answered all of Marc’s intrusive questions about his sexuality - where Ryan dangled his virginity and youth like a carrot in front of Marc’s nose…

“Ryan, you’re here!” He heard his father’s exclamation. Ryan turned to see George enter the sitting room from behind him, carrying a decanter of fine whiskey and two crystal glasses. He futilely hoped that one of them was for him but George Ross placed the glassware down on the coffee table and poured Marc a generous shot. His father looked awkward decanting a drink for himself - guilty almost, and he brought the glass to his lips with an uncomfortable glance at his son.

“I’m glad William managed to get you out of the house. It’s good to see you again. You look…” His father paused and looked him up and down with a creased brow, much like his stepmother had. His smile faltered but after a second, he nodded his head. “You look fine,” he said, as if ‘fine’ was the best adjective he could think of to describe his son’s physical appearance.
Ryan pursed his lips, glancing nervously over at Marc to watch him take a sip of whiskey. He cleared his throat. “What did you want to see me for? Was it important?” He wanted to cut through all the bullshit and niceties and get the fuck out of there. He wanted to drink himself into oblivion and end the day face-down in a mountain of coke, snorting and sniffing and inhaling until his lungs gave out, until he couldn’t even breathe anymore.

George shrugged off Ryan’s question with a wave of his hand. He was unusually jovial for a man who was currently clinking glasses with his son’s rapist. “Don’t worry about that. We’ll talk later,” he smiled. “Why don’t you sit down? Come join us – it must be years since you last saw Marc, huh?”

_Not fucking long enough_, Ryan thought, forcing his feet into step and shuffling over to the couch. He sat down carefully, glancing at Marc from his peripherals. Marc Willis hadn’t taken his eyes off Ryan since he entered the room. What a creep, what an absolute fucking creep, Ryan cursed. _I should’ve told someone. I should’ve spoken up. I could’ve been a survivor and instead I became a victim._

“I saw you on the cover of the _Rolling Stone_,” Marc told him, taking another sip of his drink and licking his lips. Just _looking_ at the man nauseated him – those lips and that tongue and his voice like dirt. “It was a very… enlightening interview.”

Ryan hummed and looked ahead, desperately thinking of an excuse plausible enough that he wouldn’t have to hang around. _Fuck_, he didn’t _do_ anything that would warrant him needing to leave. Maybe he could lie that he agreed to meet Gabe for lunch or perhaps he was scheduled to meet his sponsor? _Brendon_ – that was it! _AA_ – he had to go to an AA meeting and Marc and his father were drinking around him; it wasn’t good for his recovery… His father surely couldn’t argue with _that_.

He was about to bring up his point when he tuned back into the conversation around him just in time to hear Marc tell his father, “-well, what with the missus being out of town this week, I’ve quite a bit of time on my hands.”


Ten years ago, Marc’s wife being out of town had meant he’d been able to raping him on his couch. Usually Ryan tried as hard as he could to forget it, but sitting barely five foot from the man, he remembered it all too clearly - the sour taste of Marc’s tongue on his lips, the press of his hand against the side of his face and that immeasurably sharp pain as he pushed inside him, unlubricated and unprotected.

His eyes settled uneasily on the man. The skin on his knuckles was raw and torn; fresh wounds running across three fingers of his right hand. Ryan wondered how he got them and why he hadn’t bothered trying to cover them up. Maybe he was proud of them? Maybe he wanted to remind Ryan to keep his mouth closed for _another_ ten years? Marc must’ve caught him looking because a second later, he covered his cuts with his left hand, rubbing gently at his swollen knuckles. There was blood under his fingernails.

“There was blood under his fingernails."

“Are you alright, son?” His father’s voice startled him.

“Would you please excuse me? I need to... go.” He waved his finger towards the hallway and then added, “To the bathroom.” He stood and felt his knees quivering as he tried to support his weight. _He was about to puke_...

Forcing his heavy feet across the rug, Ryan started towards the hallway. His father called after him
but he kept walking, furiously blinking back tears. It felt like an out of body experience – he could feel the fibers of his clothes and noticed the grain of his parents’ front door as he watched his fingers close around the handle and pull it open.

The cold wind bit through him, stinging his skin but not drying out his eyes. He pressed his hand to his face and let out a shuddery exhale – Marc, Marc MarcMarcMarcmarc; Marc's hands and Marc's breath and Marc's voice in his ear telling him he wanted it, the sick paradox of Marc saying he loved him… Ryan was trembling and he couldn’t shake the memories from his head.

He cussed, his whole body tensing up in a sudden fit of anger as he made a fist and punched the wall. Ryan immediately regretted it when the skin on his knuckles tore and started to bleed. He rubbed at his hand and sniffed; he couldn’t deal with this reality. He needed to get fucked up and he needed Brendon there to watch him do it – maybe Brendon would even care enough to try and stop him.

He pulled his cellphone out of his pocket and brought up his contacts, his eyes blurring with tears as he scrolled through them and tried to ignore the sting of his torn flesh. Brendon would be able to sort him out, he thought, pressing his name and bringing the phone to his ear – yes, Brendon with his ass and his tongue and his throat. Brendon – the only man who had the ability to make him feel like he wasn’t completely falling apart.

Maybe it was because Brendon himself was so desolate, so down and out and broken that it made Ryan seem relatively stable by comparison.

Ryan counted the rings. The fucker better pick up. He could feel his hand sweating, he could feel his stomach twisting in fear or anticipation; he couldn’t tell. The call connected on the thirteenth ring and Brendon’s voice on the other end of the line was what finally broke him.

“Brendon,” he choked, his distress finally getting the better of him. “I need help.”

“Jon? Where are you? Wait, are you-” Brendon sounded confused – and he sounded concerned. He sounded like he hadn’t had much sleep. “Is that you?”

Ryan bristled, taken aback that he’d been mistaken for Brendon’s junkie boyfriend. “It’s me. It’s Ryan. Ryan Ross.” His anger was suddenly directed at Brendon as his tears slid down his face. He’d forgotten about Brendon’s boyfriend, the asshole who constantly kept them apart. Ryan was sure that if Brendon was single, he wouldn’t have to call the dude and beg him to sleep with him. There was a long pause.

“Ryan..? Look. I can’t talk right now. This isn’t a good time.”

“I need to see you. I’ll pay you this time, the whole fee. Please, I have something I need to get off my chest. It's killing me.”

“I said this isn’t a good time.”

“Please…”

“No.” Brendon’s voice was firmer and more assertive than he ever heard it before.

“I’m sorry. I’ve got to go; don’t call me again.”

The line went dead and he blinked back tears of disbelief. He stared at his cellphone, almost expecting Brendon to call back and apologize. What’s wrong with me?, he thought, trying to sniff back his emotions. God, we could be so good together. He rushed down the path of his parents’
private front yard and towards his car, pulling open the door and sliding into the safety of the backseat. William was sat in the front next to Shane. They were smoking hash; Ryan could smell it.

“You look terrible. Are you okay?” William asked, raising one concerned eyebrow and looking at him in the rearview mirror. Ryan shook his head. He was not okay. Not this time. His father was still best friends with his rapist, Marc Willis still had some sort of sick fascination with him and Brendon the Hooker, the only one who could save him, still wanted absolutely nothing to do with him.

Oh, Brendon would pay. He was about to feel guilt and shame like no other. He was about to get dangerously high, and then Brendon would come running back to him...

He leaned over the front seat and snatched the hash pen from his driver’s fingers.

“Hey, dude!” Shane protested. “Don’t you have enough drugs of your own without taking mine?”

Ryan took three long, deep inhales until he coughed and then passed it back. He didn’t feel any calmer but he felt a little heavier, as if he wasn’t going to float away anymore. “Who do you get my coke from?” he asked Shane, refusing to make eye contact until his tears dried up and his heart rate evened out.

Shane shrugged and looked cautiously over at William before speaking. “I don’t think I should be telling you, man – I mean, what did your dad say to you? Wasn’t he trying to get you to go back to rehab or some shit?”

“Who is he?” Ryan barked, punching the back of Shane’s headrest.

“I don’t know! Just some guy called Pete, he’s got a few dudes that work for him; I hardly ever deal with him personally.” Shane paused, glancing skeptically over his shoulder at him. “Ryan, he lives deep in the Bronx, he lives in the fucking projects, man – you don’t want to go up there.”

So, that’s what it came down to - some scummy guy in the projects feeding Ryan’s addiction. Who was the real loser in that situation?

“Take me to him,” he ordered. “I want to meet him.”

His driver huffed and William pursed his lips and shook his head, but Shane put the car in drive and pulled out from the curb. Ryan smoked his joint, refusing to roll down the windows and half an hour later, he was sat on a crusty old couch, accepting every pill, line and pipe this guy, Pete, so generously offered him, happy, as he finally forgot about Marc’s sick smile and bloody knuckles.
Chapter 21

Joe was chain-smoking cigarettes by the window. Every time he exhaled, Brendon would hear the tremor in his breath. The smoke clouded the room and Brendon tried hard not to complain, because in the grand scheme of things, a little secondhand smoke didn’t really matter.

Jon should’ve been home hours ago.

This was all his fault; he asked for this. He wished for Jon to disappear and in some sick twist of fate he had. Jon’s cellphone stopped ringing at just past 5AM, two hours after he usually arrived home and now Brendon’s calls were being forwarded straight to voicemail – the robotic voice informing him over and over and over again that the number he was calling was not available.

It was now approaching the early afternoon and there was still no word from Jon. It started to snow and after smoking cigarettes in silence all morning, Joe pulled a knitted beanie down over his hair, wrapped an old scarf of Jon’s around his neck and decided to go out to search for him. Brendon agreed to stay at the apartment - just in case Jon returned home - and Joe said he’d check in with Pete to see if Jon had been in contact with him.

“I know you hate him,” Joe said on his way out the door. “I’m not his biggest fan myself but it’s worth a shot…” Joe had given Brendon’s shoulder a reassuring pat before he left and Brendon held back the urge to smack his hand away – that two-faced, lying son of a bitch, pretending like he cared, playing his part of Mr. Nice Guy to a tee after making out with his boyfriend in their bed two nights ago. “I’ll call you if I hear anything – and you’ll call me if he comes home, right?”

“Right,” Brendon nodded, barely aware of the fact that Joe lingered at the door before closing it behind him.

Dozens of possible worst-case scenarios had been whirring through Brendon’s head for hours now – Jon could be dead in the gutter with a needle in his arm or sodomized and murdered in some shitty motel room in Brooklyn, left there with his throat slit for the maids to find. Or maybe he’d just gone, perhaps he finally had enough of pretending he was still in love and decided to go back to Chicago or had gone to find Pete Wentz or jumped off a bridge into the Hudson River? Maybe they’d only find his body in the spring, once the ice started to melt…

Joe had only been out of the apartment for an hour when the tinny sound of his cellphone punctured the silence of the apartment. Brendon leapt from the bed and stumbled towards the sound, groggy from such little rest and his head pounding from worrying too much.

He stared at the withheld caller ID. His cellphone felt like a time bomb in his hand – at best it was Joe, calling to tell him that Jon had been found and was safe, but where did that leave them? Jon would probably arrive home and admit to him all the stuff he admitted to Joe the other night – that their relationship was over, that Brendon didn’t make him happy anymore and at worst… well, Brendon couldn’t even begin to think about what he’d do if the call brought bad news.

With a shaking hand, he brought his cellphone to his ear and for a second he thought it was Jon choking back sobs on the other end of the line – he couldn’t think who else would call him crying down the phone, but almost as soon as he uttered his name, he realized he made a mistake.

It was Ryan Ross – of course it was. He always seemed to call at the most inopportune times and Brendon didn’t have time for that poor, rich boy’s issues, not when he had his own to deal with – like whether his boyfriend was dead or alive… He cut him off quickly and hung up on him, his
nerves rattled as he lay back on the bed.

What had Ryan wanted? He sounded totally beside himself – he probably just got too high and couldn’t come down; maybe his father cut him off again or he was being forced back to rehab – some pathetic billionaire problem that Brendon would never understand.

As he lay there that day waiting for but also fearing another phone call, his final conversation with Jon kept rattling guiltily around Brendon’s brain. The previous evening, before Jon left for work, Brendon followed him out of the apartment and jerked his head towards the door. Jon hadn’t looked him in the eye all day and Brendon hadn’t mentioned the fact that he’d been awake to hear his boyfriend admit he didn’t love him but the anger was bubbling away inside his chest and he was having a hard time keeping a lid on it.

“I want that fucker gone by tomorrow morning,” Brendon spat. “I don’t want him here another night. You have to ask him to leave.”

Jon sighed, hard and heavy. “He’s my friend - and this is just as much my apartment as it is yours. He’ll stay for as long as he goddamn needs to.”

Brendon felt his rage swelling. The previous night Jon welcomed another man into their bed, propositioned him and then shakily admitted that he wasn’t in love anymore. The sound of their kiss was still fresh in Brendon’s head – wet and breathless and desperate. Talk about betrayal – at least Brendon had been paid for his.

“You’re a pathetic coward,” Brendon bit, letting his insult hang in the air, waiting for Jon to react. He said it to bait him, hoping to pull a reaction from the man – it was the only reason he said anything to Jon these days.

Jon just looked straight through him; it was like he didn’t even care. He shrugged. “It’s getting so hard to breathe around you, Brendon. You’re suffocating me, man.”

“Well. Either he goes or I do.”

Jon’s dark eyes gazed around the landing, looking everywhere except Brendon’s face. “Dude,” he started with a sigh. “You can’t seriously believe that this is still working out?”

Was it? Brendon didn’t even know what he wanted anymore. Jon was the only friend he had and he let his jealousy cloud their relationship until he couldn’t see the wood for the trees – he let all the small, insignificant factors of the past outweigh their hopes for a future.

“Listen, man… I gotta go,” Jon told him with a sigh. “I’m sorry I couldn’t make you happy and I’m sorry I couldn’t fuck you like you so desperately wanted. I’m sorry that you meant way more to me than just another screw but I can’t do this anymore, Brendon. I wanted to get out of the city months ago. I quit smoking heroin for you and even that wasn’t good enough. It’s like I can’t do anything right. What more do you want from me, dude, because I’ve got nothing left to give,” he’d finished with a hollow laugh.

“I want Joe out of our apartment by tomorrow. That’s what I want.”

Jon nodded and Brendon’s muscles jittered. “Okay,” he shrugged, “then maybe I’ll just leave with him? The ball’s in your court, Brendon. I’m so fucking tired – every second I spend in that apartment I feel like I’m dying, so if you want me gone, pack up my stuff and I’ll leave. Okay?”

Brendon shook his head in a daze. He felt like he won the battle, but he sure as fuck just lost the war. Motherfucker couldn’t even take the initiative to end a loveless relationship by himself.
“I’m late,” Jon told him. “I got to go.” He pushed his hand through his hair and avoided Brendon’s gaze for one more moment before turning away and walking towards the stairs.

Brendon lost it. Months of pent-up aggression and shame and heartache exploding out of his body as his boyfriend walked away. He followed after him, lunging forward to grab at the collar of Jon’s jacket. He pulled him back roughly, and when Jon’s balance was off-kilter, he shoved him hard, watching as he stumbled down the last three steps. Jon lost his footing on the landing, but caught himself before he fell into the wall.

“The fuck, Brendon? What the hell’s wrong with you?” Jon glared at him, striking out with his fist. Brendon deflected the attack, gripping Jon’s wrists between his fingers and holding them down by his side.

“Fuuuuck, Jon. Fuck. You.” He closed the distance between them and they were standing so close that Brendon could smell his breath – minty fresh for his first client. Jon struggled, caught between Brendon’s body and the wall. “I love you. I’m the only one who’s ever loved you. How can you just walk away from me?”

Jon yanked his wrists free, pushing back against Brendon’s shoulders roughly. “You keep telling me you love me but all I hear is blah, blah, blah. Love isn’t how many times someone fucks you, Brendon and I’m sorry that I couldn’t give you the thing you wanted most, but tell me, exactly how would doing something I hate prove my love for you?” he finished with a yell.

“This isn’t about the sex,” Brendon hissed, under his breath. “I heard you last night.” He gestured up the stairs with a nod of his head, “You and him, going at it. I always knew my suspicions about you were correct but doing it in our bed, when I’m lying right there?”

“And what suspicions were they exactly?” Jon sneered at him, folding his arms across his chest. “That you’re a cheat. That you never loved me.”

Jon didn’t react. The silence swelled, heavy in the cold stairwell. “I did love you – I loved you a lot, but the other week you came home after staying out all night – no phone call, by the way! – and then you lay down next to me and dry-humped yourself until you came in your pants like a little boy… and when you did that, for the first time in the six years we’ve known each other, you made me feel like a whore. I didn’t want that. You felt like a client to me, Brendon – you literally made me feel about this small.” He held his finger and thumb an inch apart. “So don’t act like I’m the only bad guy in this situation. Okay?”

Brendon furiously tried to blink back tears. “But you kissed him,” he whispered, his voice hitching, the panic rushing through his veins. “You told him you didn’t love me and then you kissed him.”

“Yeah,” Jon nodded. “I did – and it felt good. He made me hard and-” Brendon raised his hand and with a closed fist struck Jon hard across the face. Jon regained his composure pretty quickly, enough to finish his sentence. “I feel pretty terrible about it but I’m going through really tough withdrawal, Brendon - I don’t even think you know how hard that is - and the only person who’s given me any support is Joe. I’m sorry about what happened, but I can’t say I regret it.”

Brendon let his words sink in. “Just leave,” he breathed, rubbing at his knuckles. “Your addiction doesn’t excuse your shitty behavior.”

“And your insecurity doesn’t excuse yours. We’re both to blame for this; it’s not just me.”

Jon left after that – he always needed the last word in an argument and this time, Brendon decided to
let him have it. He turned away down the stairs and left Brendon stood there in the cold stairwell with only a million regrets tumbling through his head. He told Jon to leave and perhaps now he was gone for good. It didn’t feel as good as he thought it would.

Brendon lay on the bed and wondered who’d attend Jon’s funeral if he did turn up dead – just him and Joe probably, glaring daggers at each other from over his casket; an appropriately miserable sendoff for the man who’d been born under a black cloud.

He paced the room and then sat back down on the mattress with his head in his hands. He was restless and he couldn’t get the countless images of Jon out of his head – of him tied down on a bed, gagged and blindfolded while a bunch of Wall Street suits gang-raped him or being tortured in a scummy motel room, just because he was easy pickings – a hooker that nobody would notice was missing, a recovering drug-addict who was best put out of his misery…

He loved Jon; despite all his recent indiscretions, he still loved him. He’d never forgive himself if anything happened to him, at his own hand or someone else’s. If Jon was dead, Brendon wouldn’t be able to live with it.

It was approaching 5PM and despite his restless mind, Brendon’s eyes were just slipping closed in exhaustion when he heard a knock at the door. The sound startled him and immediately a tidal wave of emotions washed over him. He sprung from the bed and looked blearily around the apartment. It had gotten cold and dark very quickly and Brendon wrapped his arms around his body as he stumbled towards the door, his teeth chattering as he yanked it open.

It took a second for his eyes to adjust to the jittery fluorescent lights from the hallway, blinking, blinking, blinking, reflecting off Joe’s abundance of curls, but there was Jon - alive - shoulders sagging, head dropped forward, his face partially hidden by Joe’s shoulder. Joe’s hand was wound around Jon’s waist and Jon didn’t look like he was supporting his own weight at all. His hand came up to rub at his eyes and Brendon noticed the dried blood under his fingernails.

“What the fuck?” He mumbled the words so quietly under his breath that even he hadn’t heard them. Joe huffed and shifted his weight; Jon’s body slumped almost entirely against his side.

“A little help here?”

Brendon looked dumbly over at Joe and then back at Jon, stepping forward to wind his arm around Jon’s waist from the other side. Jon’s feet dragged across the floorboards as they pulled him into the apartment.

Brendon’s stomach dropped as his eyes dragged up Jon’s body from the floor; it felt like he’d been teetering on the highest point of a roller coaster, and seeing Jon had been the thing to push him over the edge – there was blood on his pants, almost black against the dark navy of his jeans and his t-shirt was speckled with red, torn at the neck and soaked in sweat. Brendon could see what looked like fresh, red rope burns around Jon’s neck, the raw skin scattered with blue and yellow bruises and when Brendon forced his eyes to take a closer look, he noticed dried blood at his hairline, his long hair hanging limply over his eyes. Brendon could see short tufts of it sticking out at the back of Jon’s head, as if someone just pushed their hands into his hair and pulled it out from the scalp just as hard as they could.

Together, they sat him down on the bed. Brendon drew back quickly and tried to process the sight. Jon toppled forward, right into Joe’s arms and looked at Brendon from over his shoulder.

“Are you happy now?” he spat. His face was swollen, his lip busted open, slowly leaking fresh blood. “Are you going to ask me if I enjoyed this too?”
Joe hushed him, his hands running down Jon’s arms and Brendon couldn’t help thinking that there was something wrong with the equation – *he* should’ve been the one comforting Jon, not Joe Trohman.

He shook his head and looked away from his boyfriend’s accusing eyes. “What the fuck happened?”

“What do you even care?” Jon bit back, pulling away from Joe’s arms and wrapping his own around his body. Jon was shivering, his teeth chattering in the cold. Or maybe it was shock; they had very similar symptoms.

“Fuck, of course I care, Jon – are you fucking stupid? I’ve been out of my mind—”

“I think you both need to calm down, dudes,” Joe interrupted, holding his hand out to try and keep the peace. “Jon, you’re upset; Brendon, you need to think about what you’re saying — *both* of you.” Joe sounded like some sort of school counselor. He turned towards Brendon and gave his shoulder a pat. “He needs you now more than ever,” he mouthed – and for the first time in over two weeks, he was thankful that Joe was stood in the room with them, acting as mediator. He felt his chest tightening as he tried not to look at Jon’s bruised face. His right eye was swollen almost completely shut and he looked like he cleaned up some before coming home but there was a gash at the bridge of his nose that was crusted in dried blood.

“What in the fuck happened?” He moved towards the bed and knelt down in front of Jon’s feet. He took his hands in his own, rubbing his thumbs gently across Jon’s swollen knuckles.

Jon slowly blinked back tears as he told his story.

Joe was chain-smoking cigarettes by the window. Every time he exhaled, Brendon would hear the tremor in his breath. The smoke clouded the room and Brendon tried hard not to complain, because in the grand scheme of things, a little secondhand smoke didn’t really matter.
This guy, Pete, was kind of… intense.

Perhaps it was the drugs or maybe it was just a character trait but Pete Wentz - or whatever the fuck his name was - was a little overwhelming for a man of such little stature. He was handsome, Ryan supposed, in an obnoxious kind of way. After just ten minutes of sitting on the man’s couch Ryan would hazard a guess that Pete was a heartbreaker, a cold and indifferent lover who most likely used his good looks to get what he wanted in life with a fuck everybody else attitude. It was probably why he was a semi-successful drug-dealer – because the dude looked utterly ruthless.

The man drew back from the coffee table, cluttered with empty Ziplocs of coke and bags of dried out weed, empty beer bottles and smelly take-out containers – he guessed a tidy apartment wasn’t important when the majority of the dude’s houseguests were stoners and coke-heads. Pete sniffed hard, rubbing at his nose and then went back for another line. Ryan was no expert, but wasn’t that rule number one? Don’t get high on your own supply.

The dude turned towards him and grinned, a set of perfect white teeth behind his wide smile. “God fucking damn! I can’t believe that Ryan Ross is here in my living room, getting high with me and smoking my weed. Hey… hey,” he smirked, slapping Ryan’s thigh for his attention. “I should put that on a business card.” Pete fanned his hand in front of his face. “Ryan Ross Approved. What do you think?” He elbowed him hard.

Ryan laughed nervously and took a tentative hit from the joint Pete passed him. “My father’s the businessman, not me and I don’t know if he would approve of me endorsing marijuana. I need to stay in his good books. I mean, I don’t want to sabotage my inheritance now, do I?”

Pete laughed, too loud and too hard and rocked back on the couch, slapping his knee. “Fuck, man, that’s too funny. You’re too funny, Ryan – you should be a comedian.”

Ryan smiled. He’d actually been serious about the inheritance and it was no laughing matter. It was only a matter of time before George Ross cut him off again and then what would he do? He’d have to go back to rehab to prove he could be trusted.

He dared a cautionary glance over at his driver. Shane sat on the edge of the opposite couch looking about as uncomfortable as he possibly could. He kept checking the time on his cellphone, as if to make a point that they shouldn’t still be in the living room of a drug dealer, in a project-housing block in the South Bronx. Ryan didn’t know how a deal like this worked; he never had to buy his own drugs before, he always had people he paid to do that part for him, suckers like Shane Morris. Is this what it was like every time? Shane hanging out with some insane dealer until they’d finally done enough bullshitting for the transaction to go down? Ryan watched as this Pete character hunched over the coffee table again to snort another line.

“Ryan, we should go-”

“Here, Ryan – have a bump,” Pete encouraged over Shane’s quiet protest, pushing the small tray of cocaine towards him - at least Ryan assumed it was cocaine; Pete was acting more than a little yipped-up. “Help yourself. It’s on the house, of course – I wouldn’t dream of charging my most famous friend. Having you here is payment enough,” he winked and then nodded at the tray.

Ryan paused, but only for a brief moment – he could still see Marc’s sick grin and bloody knuckles when he closed his eyes and the images had been bothering him since he fled his parents’ place. He
just wanted to switch off and forget about that fucker and the drugs would certainly help him do that. He cut himself a line from the diminishing pile and snorted it up his nostril - when Pete prompted him to take another, he did: because why the hell not? He was here now, miles from his safe haven on the Upper East Side - and didn’t he know it? Pete’s place was a shithole, but he may as well make the most of the dude’s generosity.

When he drew back, he rubbed at his nose, feeling the drip at the back of his throat. Sometimes, Ryan thought that instead of doing coke, he could just drink enough strong, black coffee to make him sweat, rub the insides of his nostrils with sandpaper until they bled and then go and hang out at a place he didn’t like with people he didn’t trust. He guessed this time he was halfway there already. The first line made his heart pound. The second one made him perspire. He wondered how much cocaine it’d take to knock him out because he wanted a sleep that was completely void of dreams. He could still hear Marc’s voice, could still hear his laughter as he joked with George in his parents’ sitting room.

“Ryan. We should really go.”

Ryan’s eyes snapped up towards his driver. That asshole was always bringing him down from his high – Shane was a fucking killjoy and Pete jerked his thumb over at him and scoffed. “This dude sounds like your dad or something. Don’t tell me you take orders from this guy? You should stay, Ryan. I want to get you high. I mean, it’s not every day a world famous celebrity drops by my place. Fuck, man, my friends are never going to believe me when I tell them you came here – we should take a selfie - you know, as proof. Do you mind?”

“Ryan,” Shane barked from across the room. “We need to leave. Now.”

Fuck! Now even Shane was beginning to sound like his father. Pete shifted his hips up on the couch to pull his cellphone out of his pocket - fucking hell, maybe this was a mistake, because generally how trustworthy were drug-dealers? Not very. This dude, Pete, could go to the press and sell his story – at the very least he could post any photographic evidence he took up on the Internet and that would only further rile his father. George probably wasn’t too keen on the idea of his son hanging out in the Bronx as it was, let alone hanging out in the Bronx with a renowned drug-dealer. He probably shouldn’t have come here; he should’ve listened to William and Shane on the ride over. They were right; this was a bad idea – he should’ve just gone home... But home was too lonely, his apartment was full of regrets and ceaseless nights. He’d take snorting coke with some whack-job stranger in the projects over doing it alone in his penthouse.

“Dude, I thought you were cool.” Pete pointed an accusing finger at his driver and shook his head. “But you’re just bummering me out, man. Why don’t you leave? Then me and Ryan here can get better acquainted.”

Shane looked over at him and Ryan could read the silent plea behind his eyes. He knew what he should do if he wanted to avoid another salacious story in the newspaper tomorrow morning - get up, thank Pete for his drugs and walk out the front door - but when had he ever made a sensible decision? He ignored Shane’s penetrating glare and leaned forward to take another line of coke. This time, when he drew back, his head swelled and his vision blurred and he slumped back on the couch with his eyes closed. He was beginning to feel distinctly woozy, but at least the memories of Marc were becoming blurry.

“So, I’m really interested to know... Tell me, which of my guys do you usually deal with?” Ryan heard Pete ask Shane.

“He’s just some guy. I don’t know the dude’s name.”
Beside Pete, Ryan felt like his bones were melting; he felt like the tightness around his heart was suddenly disappearing. He was unraveling, coming undone and he finally felt like he found his perfect balance as he lay back and listened to the conversation going on around him.

“So...? What does he look like? I want to know which of my guys you buy from – is it Travie – tall, black guy? Neck tats and stretched ears?”

“Nah, bro. This dude’s white.”

“Are you talking about Joe, the Jewish-looking motherfucker - frizzy hair and tatted arms? A big old nose?”

“Yeah. That sounds like him,” Shane mumbled. His voice was small. Ryan opened one eye to make sure he hadn’t moved.

He heard Pete laugh, but he sounded bitter. “That motherfucker’s got some balls, you know. I always said ‘you’ve got to keep your friends close and your enemies closer’ and that fucker fucked me over – took off about two weeks ago with three pounds of my weed and I haven’t heard from him since. None of our mutuals seem to know where he is - either that or they’re covering for the prick.” There was a pause in the conversation where Pete took another line. “I have a pretty good idea who he’s hiding out with though.” He rubbed his nose and fell against the back on the couch, his shoulder brushing Ryan’s arm. Pete was sitting a little too close to him. Even through his high, Ryan felt like the man was purposefully invading his personal space – but being famous he kind of got used to strangers doing that.

“So... if you do see him again, tell him to stay the fuck away. If he knows what’s good for him, that is. Tell him from me that it ain’t cool to hook up with your best friend’s ex and if I find out that’s where he’s run off to, I’ll fucking kill him.”

“Sure. Best friend’s ex. Got it.” Shane shifted uneasily on the couch as Ryan helped himself to another line. There was a pause, the room falling into an uncomfortable silence. A police siren blared by outside. “Ryan, could we talk alone for a moment?”

By now, Ryan had quite a nice buzz from the drugs and he really didn’t want Shane ruining his high but he figured the guy wouldn’t give in without a fight. He pushed himself up from the tattered, stained couch and scuffed towards the hallway behind his driver, dragging his feet along the grubby living room carpet. He couldn’t believe the filth some people lived in, drug-dealer or not, it couldn’t be that expensive to keep a clean house. A new carpet would cost the dude, what – a couple thousand bucks? That was nothing.

Shane pulled the door to the living room closed behind him, ran a hand over his shaved head and glared. “We need to leave, bro.”

“I’m not your fucking bro, bro – and if you want to leave, you’re more than welcome to do so but I’m staying here and there’s absolutely nothing you can do about it.” He folded his arms high across his chest.

Shane was sweating as he rubbed his hand across his forehead. “Listen, man. You make some pretty fuckin’ awful decisions sometimes; some of the worst I’ve ever seen a fully-grown man make but I’m not letting you make this mistake, okay? Dude just threatened to kill the guy I’ve been getting your weed from for years because he hasn’t seen him in two weeks - that’s the talk of a fuckin’ psychopath, Ryan. That Joe guy’s cool.”

Ryan didn't care about any of Pete's personal drama. He had enough of his own to deal with.
"I’m not just leaving you here with this dude, alright?"

Ryan shrugged. “Well then, you’re going to have to drag me out of here.”

“Ryan, are you fucking blind? Oh, man, this is all going to end so badly,” he muttered, almost to himself. Shane wasn't concerned about Ryan’s well-being. Shane was only thinking about saving his own ass. He was worried that if Ryan fucked up, he’d get fired and Ryan reckoned that was an incredibly selfish thing for his driver to do. Ryan pursed his lips and rolled his eyes. That was so typically Shane.

“Ryan, why would you want to hang out with some loony drug-dealer who lives in the fucking projects? You don’t even know the guy. You don’t belong here, man… let’s just take you home. Come on, bro - your dad doesn't have to know about this."

“And where is home exactly, Shane? My apartment doesn’t feel like home anymore, it feels like a goddamn prison – and my parents’ house? I feel more comfortable here than I did there. My dad – the fucking asshole – chumming it up with Marc Willis back there, acting like he cares about me when the only thing that old bastard cares about is whether Time magazine choose him as Person of the Year again.”

Shane huffed. “This is not the right way to battle your demons, Ryan.”

Ryan Ross felt his lip twitch. Shane didn’t have a clue. It was the only way he could battle his demons - by dressing them up and feeding them. He pushed his finger hard into the man’s chest. His driver tried to knock his hand away. “You’re dismissed,” he spat. “I don’t need you. I don’t need anyone.”

Ryan was half expecting Shane to argue with him, to grab his wrist and yank him towards the front door, but he merely shrugged his shoulders and held up his hands in defeat. “Whatever you say, bro. Good luck explaining all this to your father if it gets out to the press - which it no doubt will, with Mr. Let's Take a Selfie back there. There’s only so much responsibility Bill and I can take for your sorry ass. Don’t come running to me the next time daddy cuts you off and you need some sucker to pick up for you. I’m through, Ryan. I fucking quit.” Shane turned away and left the hallway with a noisy slam of the front door.

Ryan was alone with a coked-out drug dealer after burning his final bridge. His driver quit – surely he didn’t mean that? Maybe he could call Brendon again, put him in a taxi and not take no for an answer. Last time it had taken an offer of ten grand to get the boy home with him. What would it take this time? Twenty? Fifty? Was he even worth that?

Ryan felt lost. Shane left, Brendon didn’t want to talk to him – even his own father would rather make idle chitchat with his rapist than talk through his son’s problems. The only person he was left with was the stranger on the other side of the wall. Perhaps Pete would be able to recommend a good hooker? He looked the type who’d associate with prostitutes.

“So, you managed to get rid of him then?” Pete asked with a wide smile when Ryan returned to the sitting room. He held a pipe out towards Ryan – and it certainly wasn’t a pipe that was used for smoking weed. Ryan didn’t bother asking what was in it. He didn’t care – he just held the lighter under the glass bowl and inhaled the poison.

“Yeah. I fired the fucker.” Ryan forced a laugh, smoke pluming out from between his lips as he sat back down on the couch. He took another hit. “My driver’s a bit of a prick,” he sighed on the exhale – he’d forgotten how quickly smoking crack affected him; almost immediately, he could feel his heart rate spike and his skin starting to burn.
“Man, no one’s going to believe me when I tell them you’re here. They’ll think I’m crazy. You have to tell me, are all those rumors in the magazines and shit true? About you being gay or bi or whatever? Because me - I’m gay as fuck. So if you wanted me to suck your dick or something, I totally will.”

The guy was forward. Ryan liked that. He paused to consider the man’s offer.

The dude was attractive enough, with a genuinely wide smile and eyes that creased up at the corners. A day’s regrowth of dark stubble made his handsome face a little more rugged, but he was too short to be Ryan’s regular type and he had too much product in his hair. Ryan liked to be able to pull on soft locks when a dude went down on him.

He could tell the guy worked out – he probably had a great body underneath his clothes – that’s if Ryan could ignore those *Nightmare Before Christmas* tattoos… but hey, a blowjob was a blowjob and he’d be a fool to turn down such an offer.

Ryan settled back on the couch and popped the top button of his pants. Pete unzipped him the rest of the way, pulling the fly of his pants open and pulling his cock out. The drugs made him a little jittery – he was peaking. The effects should be subsiding in about ten minutes, which would probably give him enough time to come before he crashed and needed another hit. He wondered if Pete was as good as Brendon when it came to sucking dick.

When Pete’s mouth closed around his cock, Ryan shut his eyes and tried to imagine he was getting head from Brendon, but Pete was a cautious dick-sucker. He wasn’t anything like Brendon. Pete was slow and precise; he couldn’t deep throat and he held Ryan's hips down with both hands to stop him from bucking up into his mouth. Brendon would just open his throat and let him fuck his face, but maybe that was because he was a whore with no self-respect. He wondered how Brendon gave head to someone he was in love with…

Ryan had a hard time keeping his hands from pressing down on the back of Pete’s skull – he just didn’t take his cock deep enough and Ryan wanted to hear him gag. As Ryan felt himself peak, he uttered a weak warning but Pete kept sucking, his cheeks hollowing around the shaft of his dick. The dude had a mouth like a vacuum and when he sucked the come out of him, Ryan found it almost impossibly difficult not to jerk his hips up into the man’s throat. There was something about a stranger letting him come in their mouth that made his heart race – Pete pulled back, opened his mouth up wide to show Ryan the semen on his tongue, swirled it around and then swallowed. That little show alone boosted Pete’s average dick-sucking skills tenfold. That had been hot to watch - he should definitely call Brendon, he thought, get him over here and pay to watch Pete fuck him; they could double-team him, both their dicks inside Brendon’s tight ass. It’d be fun to watch Brendon squirm between them.

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“It was hot to watch you swallow,” Ryan told him with a smile, tucking his dick back into his pants and zipping them up. “I usually have to pay extra for that.”

“Yeah,” Pete grinned, still licking the taste of come out of his mouth. “I forgot about your affinity for male hookers. That one's on the house though,” he laughed. “Payback for keeping me in such good business.”

“Do you know any?” Ryan asked. He may as well; he’d already thrown most of his principals out of the window since arriving – his driver quit, he was smoking crack cocaine in a crappy apartment in the Bronx and he just let his dealer suck his dick. It was hardly as if he had much dignity left to lose.

“Any what?” Pete pulled the crack pipe from where it was still clutched loosely in Ryan’s palm. He
held the lighter under the bowl and turned it slowly between his fingers.

“Any male hookers – as you so eloquently call them.”

Pete barked out a laugh, coughing out smoke. “You want me to hook you up, bro?” he asked, slapping Ryan’s arm. He handed the pipe back. Ryan took another hit. His heart started to pound.

“Yeah. I mean, only if you can recommend someone hot, someone slutty – someone who’ll do anything.”

“I used to know someone like that. I used to date someone like that when I first moved here from Chicago. Fuck, man – he’d have done anything for a dude like you – but we lost contact. He left me to set up house with some needy fucking kid he’d known for all of three weeks. Now all the hookers I know are either dead or drug-addicts or moved back to whatever bum-fuck town they thought Manhattan would save them from.”

“You sound bitter,” Ryan pointed out. “Didn’t mean to bring up any dark ghosts of boyfriends' past or whatever.”

Pete snatched the pipe back and laughed. “I guess I am bitter. I loved that boy. I wish I treated him better when we were together. Are you dating anyone right now?”

It was oddly easy conversation – the kind of talk he expected two good friends would share. “Not really.” Ryan couldn’t help but open up. “But I met someone not too long ago and I can’t seem to get the guy out of my head. I think about him all the time – he was so perfect but he couldn’t care less about me. He thinks I’m an asshole.”

“Is he famous?”

“No. Far from it – that’s why he probably hates me. We’re from two totally different worlds. I don’t belong in his and he sure as fuck doesn’t belong in mine – but he was cute,” Ryan sighed. “What we had together was brief, but it felt real. Real enough to me, anyway.”

“He didn’t want to go public?”

Ryan shrugged. Pete didn’t need to know that Brendon was a hooker. Did he? “It’s complicated,” he finished with a sigh.

“It always is. That’s the problem.”

Pete pushed himself up from the couch and stretched. His t-shirt rode up, exposing a large expanse of tight, flat stomach and a tattoo that Ryan couldn’t quite make out. Pete dropped his arms and smiled down at him. “So, what d’you wanna do now? Shall we get stoned and order pizza? D’you want a beer? I got some Blue Moons in the fridge,” he called as he wandered out of the room. “I’ll call for delivery. You cool with pepperoni?”

Ryan’s eyebrows raised in pleasant surprise. He didn’t know what Shane was so worried about; this dude, Pete, was fucking cool. A regular dude. A genuine guy. Pete treated him like he was normal. “Sure. Sounds good.”

Ryan leaned forward and grabbed the half-smoked joint from the ashtray on the coffee table. He was already high and he’d long forgotten about Marc but now he couldn’t stop thinking about Brendon. He sparkled up and sagged back on the couch. Brendon, with his tight, round ass and his never-ending throat and his filthy slut mouth. I want to be your fucking whore...
The phrase felt like it was caught in his chest, exploding through his ribs as he repeated it inside his head. It was the single hottest thing anyone ever said to him and Ryan was sure he’d never forget the way his dick pulsed inside Brendon’s ass when he heard him say it. Ryan made a vow that night that he’d hold the boy to his declaration – and the next morning, Brendon kept his word and disappeared after claiming their sex meant nothing - like a true whore. But Brendon was a fucking liar. That sex meant something to him. He pulled his cellphone out of his jacket pocket and brought up the man’s contact.

>You’re my fucking whore, he wrote. Always. RR.

He pressed send just as Pete walked back into the sitting room, clutching two already opened bottles of beer and handing him one. Ryan took a swig and flashed Pete a smile. Pete was drawing the curtains and tapping at his iPhone. The room got dark and Ryan didn’t remember much else after that.

The next morning he woke up in hospital with a sore stomach, an angry father and some very foggy memories of the previous evening.
Jon had been attacked.

Someone picked him up from his usual pitch around midnight, drove him to a hotel, knocked him unconscious and raped him. Jon couldn’t be sure if they used protection or not and Brendon found it hard to breathe ever since – he may have hated how the man made him feel over the last few weeks, but he never meant for something like this to happen.

Jon told his story in a slow monotone and Brendon got the feeling that Joe heard it all before, but he guessed that figured. In his time of need, his boyfriend called Joe for help. Brendon felt like a toy car with a broken wheel that nobody had a use for anymore or a ragdoll, forgotten at the back of the closet.

The trick had been driving a nice vehicle; some shiny, new BMW – the car had been the first thing that grabbed Jon’s attention. The corner where he usually waited wasn’t renowned for drawing a very high caliber of client.

“He was one of yours, Brendon,” Jon sniffed. “Some rich, white guy – said he wanted a bit of rough.”

The man had been charming and smartly dressed, in his mid to late fifties, Jon told them, and reasonably handsome for an older man. Before he climbed into the passenger seat, the guy asked Jon what his hard limits were – and how much it’d cost to waive them.

Jon told him – no scat, no watersports, no bondage and no cameras. I don’t fuck bareback; I’ll only fuck one dude at a time and absolutely no kissing of any kind. That’s non-negotiable.

Brendon sucked in a breath. They always kept what they did with their clients a secret from each other. Hard limits were sacred and Brendon had given in to the most important one with Ryan Ross months ago. Jon evidently kept his promise, even if Brendon hadn’t. No kissing - it was a shame he couldn’t have kept his word when it came to Joe Trohman…

The man offered him three hundred dollars. He’d even given Jon the money upfront and Jon tucked it into the inside pocket of his coat. That’s for one hour, the trick told him, and there’s an extra two hundred bucks in it for you if you forgo the no bondage rule. Nothing weird, he smiled, just a little light restraint.

“I thought about saying no, but it was five hundred dollars, Brendon,” Jon defended himself, slurring the words through his busted lip. Brendon wondered how Jon would’ve reacted at Ryan Ross offering him five thousand dollars for just one night. He thought about all the things Jon would be willing to do for five grand, considering he so willingly sacrificed his hard limits for just five hundred.

“That was half our month’s rent – I thought it’d be easy money, so I went to a hotel with him. The
dude seemed legit."

The old man had driven to a sleazy hotel a few blocks from the Flatiron building and they made idle conversation in the car ride there. The man claimed to work on Wall Street but he hadn’t talked much about himself. He asked Jon how long he’d been in Manhattan, whether or not he had a place to stay at night, if he had any family who knew his situation and if he was a hooker to support any horrible drug habits.

Jon made up lies and reeled them off. The man asked his name. Jon told him he could call him whatever he wanted and so the man smiled, gave Jon’s knee a gentle rub and said, “Okay. My little whore.”

Joe was the first of them to speak. Brendon was having trouble even processing his thoughts as he looked at Jon’s swollen face and bruised neck. “You should go to the cops.”

“And what are they going to do? They don’t care about me. I’m a hustler, I’m a drug-addict – I don’t even know the dude’s name. They’ll sweep my claim under the rug and it’ll be a big waste of everyone’s time.”

“He raped you, Jon.”

Jon paused and then answered quietly. “Men have been doing that to me for years. It’s not as if I ever want it – what was the difference this time? That he roughed me up?”

“Roughed you up?” Joe spluttered. “Jon - look at what he did to you. He could’ve killed you!”

“Yeah, but he didn’t – and the cops don’t care. You think they’re going to favor me over some Wall Street motherfucker? Some millionaire whose name I don’t even know?”

Joe sighed and dropped his head forward, thick curls falling in his eyes. Brendon knew that Jon was right. The law didn’t favor hookers, even if they had been beaten up and left for dead in some scummy hostel off of Broadway.

The place Jon’s trick had taken him to was a seedy pay-by-the-hour sex hotel and walking through its hallways to the room, Jon said he found it hard to believe the place hadn’t already been shut down. The room was on the ground floor - a small barred-up window overlooked a dark alleyway and along the full length of the wall adjacent to the bed ran a huge, grubby mirror. Later, Jon said, when the man fucked him, he forced Jon to watch their reflections and pulled his hair out at the scalp when he tried to close his eyes.

The man wore a silver wedding ring. Brendon watched as Jon tried to recall the details – gray hair and a matching gray designer suit, which he hung up on a hanger before fucking him. He told Jon to strip and kneel down on the floor with his hands behind his back and Jon’s knees turned raw on the bedroom carpet as he sucked the man’s cock.

“Just like that, as soon as we were inside the room, he switched,” Jon sighed. “He turned from being reasonably friendly, charismatic – I mean, for a trick – into some monster in about half a second. I could see the hate in his eyes. It was like he wanted me dead.”

Jon had been almost certain that he was going to die at the hands of some Wall Street suit in a crappy hotel on West 24th Street – “I thought, this is how it ends. Twenty-eight years of nothing but pain and this is how it ends.”

The trick told Jon that he wasn’t his preferred type – he liked his boys young and pretty; he liked
them to look almost like girls. “He said the reason he picked me up was because I didn’t look like I could put up much of a fight.”

Brendon looked over at Joe, still stood at the barely-cracked window, smoking cigarettes. Joe’s eyes were closed, his head dropped down and his jaw tight at Jon’s words. Brendon wondered if Joe was in love with Jon – maybe it was better that way, because the thought of leaving his boyfriend with no one to take care of him was the only thing keeping Brendon in the relationship. Well, that and the fact that he didn’t have any other place to go, except for back to Las Vegas where he’d have to deal with Dallon, his heartbreaker of a brother-in-law.

“He kept calling me his fucking whore. He kept telling me I wanted it…” Jon sniffled. “And I tried to fight him off, Brendon, I really did but he had me on the bed, he pressed his knee into my chest and held me down – both his hands around my neck, just squeezing until I couldn’t breathe anymore. I thought he was going to kill me – and I just thought; maybe it’s better for everyone if he does.”

“Fuck, man.” Joe shook his head, looking back at the bed. “Don’t say shit like that.”

Brendon chewed at his thumb nail.

“He put his mouth to my ear and he whispered – ‘you’re not the first boy I’ve done this to and you’re certainly not gonna be the last.’”

Brendon felt the chill run down his spine. He recalled his experience with a similar trick – that guy, Marc Willis, who incidentally also had an office on Wall Street. Marc Willis attacked Brendon and then made off with his fee as he tried to recover. After eight years on the streets, it came as no surprise to Brendon that there was obviously more than one fucked up asshole with a desire for devastation, stalking the male hookers of Manhattan.

When Jon started to struggle, the man pulled his belt from the loops of his pants and lifted it high in the air, whipping it down hard across Jon’s bare back and ass until the metal buckle drew blood. Jon lifted his shirt and sure enough, decorating the pale skin on his back were several red raw welts, surrounded by ugly, dark bruises.

“I almost blacked out,” Jon claimed. “The pain was unreal, but I knew I had to fight him.” A pause. “He took his belt and he put it around my neck and then he pulled until I couldn’t breathe – and then he was hitting me in the back of the head, pushing my face down into the pillow and I could feel that he was hard; that all of this was turning him on – and then I must’ve passed out. I don’t remember much else.”

“I told you – you should go to the cops, dude.” Joe was staring blankly out of the window. The snow that started to fall earlier turned to sleet; it was falling in droves behind the glass.

“He doesn’t want to go to the cops,” Brendon spat back at Joe. “Why don’t you just drop it?”

When Jon had come to, the trick was fucking him, one hand pressed around his neck, nails digging into his skin and three fingers from the other shoved deep into his mouth to keep him from making any noise that would be audible from outside of the room.

Jon claimed that having the man’s fingers in his mouth was the worst part. He said he could still taste them; dry and dirty, pressing his tongue down. They made him gag and he coughed up saliva over the sides of his mouth. It had been almost impossible to breathe, but each time Jon felt like he was about to black out, the man would pull away, loosen his grip around Jon’s neck and drag his wet fingers out of his mouth, pressing his sweaty palm over his face – just enough for Jon to catch his breath. Then it would start all over again.
At one point, Jon managed to sock the trick across the mouth with his fist and the man punched him so hard in return that he knocked him out cold. When he’d woken up, the man had been sat astride him, stroking his cock. His come streaked his right cheek and eyelashes, but Jon figured he must’ve been out for some time because his hands were tied to the metal bedpost with the man’s tie and the blood had already crusted on his face.

Joe paced the room. “That fucking prick deserves what’s coming to him. What d’you know about him? I’ll kill the fucker myself, given half the chance.”

“The only thing he told me was that he worked on Wall Street – was involved with hedge funds or some shit, I don’t know. He said he’d been blackmailed by some other escort a few months ago – said this dude turned up at his work and threatened to tell his wife if he didn’t pay him a thousand bucks. He said this was his revenge, because we hookers are all the same.”

Brendon’s head swelled.

Marc Willis. Jon’s attacker had been Marc Willis… The realization flooded his veins, a silent curse falling from his lips. It was the same guy – the same guy who paid to fuck Brendon and subsequently made off with his fee was the man who Jon had gone back to that hotel with last night. The chilling guilt paralyzed him as Jon finished up his story and wiped tears from his eyes.

The man left Jon naked on the bed, tangled in sheets stained with blood and come. Jon had fallen in and out of consciousness until he was awoken the next morning by a hammering on the door, and an angry manager demanding he leave the room immediately or pay up for another night.

Jon said his bones felt like stone tied together with barbed wire. His mouth had been full of blood, the metallic taste coating his tongue and he struggled stiffly back into his pants before he realized he’d been robbed of his wallet, his cellphone and his house keys – as well as the promised fee of five hundred dollars.

The trick had even gone through his pockets and snatched a half-smoked joint and around seven dollars in change – Jon had been left with nothing and when he opened the door, the manager – a petite Asian lady in her late sixties - simply rolled her eyes and told him she didn’t want his type around there anymore. This is a family hotel, she snapped. No hustlers welcome.

Jon had to beg her to let him use her phone and when he called Brendon in the early afternoon, his phone was engaged. Typical. The only phone call he received all day from that fucker, Ryan Ross prevented Jon from getting through to him. He could’ve been Jon’s savior but instead it had been Joe who’d been there to rescue him.

Jon managed to convince her to let him make just one more phone call – he dialed Joe’s number, barely able to stop his hands from shaking as he pressed the buttons. Joe arrived in the hotel lobby forty minutes later.

“You were white as a sheet,” Jon claimed, smiling over at Joe. “You looked so concerned, bless you.” Jon even forced a laugh.

Brendon’s head was still in a spin. He should’ve told Jon about his dealings with that Marc Willis guy as soon as it happened. That was part of their deal – to warn the other if they encountered a rough trick so that they could stay away. He could’ve warned him but he decided to keep it to himself, because he thought Jon would be pissed at the fact that he let himself be robbed. He had a chance to warn him about Marc Willis and now his boyfriend was sitting in front of him, beaten and
broken and it was all his fault.

Brendon was unable to look at Jon’s busted up face anymore. He understood hate and he understood pain – almost a decade working the streets taught him more than he ever wanted to know about those two emotions, but he didn’t understand unprovoked violence. He could’ve stopped this from happening – he’d almost got Jon killed.

“I still think you should go to the cops,” Joe said again with a tired sigh. “Get this fucker sent down, buddy.”

“You should go to the hospital is where you should go. Why didn’t you take him to the ER?” he snapped, turning towards Joe – he certainly wanted to pass the buck on this one.

“I didn’t want to go to the hospital, Brendon. All they’d want to do is give me morphine to help with the pain and as soon as they find out about my history with drugs, they won’t be able to do shit.”

“You should’ve still gone to get checked out,” Brendon mumbled. “You might have a concussion. I can’t believe you didn’t just take him, Joe. I would’ve.”

“Fuck, man, why don’t you just get off my fucking dick? I had a hard enough time convincing him to even come back here to you, let alone taking him to the ER against his will.”

Through his bruises Jon’s face flushed. Silence – he didn’t even try and deny the fact that he hadn’t wanted to come home.

All Brendon’s secrets and lies finally caught up with him and Jon had been the one to suffer for it. He’d been trying to save his own ass from a disappointed boyfriend when that fucker attacked and robbed him, instead he should have warned Jon not to go home with a certain Marc Willis.

Later that evening, Brendon decided he needed to get the fuck out of that apartment. He couldn’t even look at Jon anymore, much less try and offer him support – every time he replayed Jon’s recollections of last night, he felt the guilt rush straight into his chest, constricting his heart – it was becoming so hard to breathe that he grabbed his coat and his cellphone and made an excuse that he needed some fresh air. He’d not slept in over thirty-six hours; he needed to clear his head, to walk with no direction and try and let go of his shame.

Brendon could tell his announcement pissed Joe off – but it wasn’t as if he was running out on his boyfriend in his time of need. Jon had Joe and evidently Joe was the only support he wanted right now. He wasn’t going to let that two-faced son of a bitch make him feel guilty for needing to get out of the house. Jon was half asleep anyway – he wouldn’t miss him.

“So, you’re just going to ditch out on him?” Joe bit, tapping the ash from his cigarette into the overflowing ashtray on the arm of the couch. “After all that’s happened?”

“Leave it, Joe,” Jon mumbled from the bed, face buried in the pillow. “Just let him go.”

Brendon raised his eyebrows. Jon just proved his point – he didn’t even want him there. “If you need me, you can call me,” he said, before opening the door and pulling it closed behind him.

He walked out onto the street. The sidewalk was sludgy with wet snow and Brendon scuffed through it and walked down the block – he didn’t know where he was wandering to, but he was going to keep walking until his chest stopped hurting.

After a few blocks, Brendon checked his phone – he had one text message and he opened it up, his feet faltering on the sidewalk as he read over it.
You’re my fucking whore. Always. RR.

RR? Ryan Ross.

He received the message hours ago, but he quickly text back, his hands shaking as he typed his reply.

Your whore needs a big hard dick to suck on. Gonna invite me over?

It had been a long day and Brendon felt like he needed to vent. He was certain that Ryan would lend an open ear, so long as he was prepared to indulge the boy’s fantasies but Ryan, of course, didn’t reply and Brendon returned to the apartment two hours later. The pain in his chest was still there, but it had spread to his head, his brain pumping inside his skull. Snow started to fall again and he was frozen to the bone. His socks were damp after walking through slush.

He twisted the key in the lock and pushed quietly into the apartment. The lights were off, but there was no mistaking the shapes on the bed.

Jon was asleep in the crook of Joe’s arm, rolled like a dead weight against his shoulder. Joe’s hand was at the back of Jon’s head, cradling him and in the dark Brendon could see the slow rise and fall of the man’s chest, steady and even, as if it was nothing – as if their blossoming affair was just nothing. Routine. Neither of them awoke and Brendon walked back out of the room and stood on the cold, concrete landing.

Someone once told him that love never died a natural death – it died of wounds and illness, of exhaustion and betrayal. He guessed that was the difference between love and friendship; how much it hurt letting go.

He closed his eyes and pulled his cellphone from his pocket. He still had one lifeline, one more chance for salvation. He still had Ryan Ross. He gulped back tears and counted the rings.
Chapter 24

The next morning, Brendon returned home when the sun came up.

After walking in on Jon and Joe sleeping, twined around each other as if Brendon didn’t exist, as if it were somehow natural, he tried to call Ryan Ross and when Ryan Ross didn’t answer, Brendon spent the rest of the night offering twenty buck blowjobs to dirty tricks he picked up on the street corner, thinking the whole time about Jon’s busted face and Marc Willis’s ugly smile.

Brendon was running on almost fifty hours without sleep and he’d begun to feel shaky and weak hours ago. He felt like a zombie, a shell of a human whose body was simply a vessel. When he pushed through the door, Jon lifted his head groggily from the bed and greeted him with a disappointed grunt.

“Oh. I thought you were Joe. He went out for coffee,” Jon mumbled, dropping his face back into the pillow. He was still bruised and swollen, a dark purple shiner around his left eye – Marc Willis had really gone to town on Jon. Jon’s hair was long and it fell over his ears but Brendon could see the shorter tufts of it at the back of his head where that fucker pulled patches of it out at the scalp. It made Brendon sick to think someone could enjoy inflicting that much pain on someone, but it didn't override the fact Jon and Joe were hooking up when they thought Brendon’s back was turned. That realization hurt more than any beating.

“I’m so sorry to disappoint you,” Brendon bit, slipping out of his jacket and throwing it onto the couch. The pillow and blanket Joe had been using were both neatly folded on its arm – they obviously spent the whole night in their bed together, arms wrapped around each other, warm and comfortable while Brendon turned tricks on the dirty street corner.

Jon ignored his little jibe. “Joe said he could probably score me some codeine, you know – for the pain. Joe said that fucker probably broke my ribs – and well, there’s nothing you can do for broken ribs,” he huffed, struggling to push himself up on the mattress. His arms were weak, unable to hold the weight of his body but Brendon didn’t step forward to help him.

Brendon never received a beating quite as bad as Jon’s before, but he knew what it felt like to get roughed up by a trick like that – your muscles ache for days, you feel weak and not just physically beat, but emotionally too. It was like getting hit by a truck. When he finally shifted upright, Jon’s shoulders slumped with the effort – Brendon already knew he’d be in bed for days with those injuries. The fact that Joe was going to be the one to kiss them better left a sour taste at the back of his throat.

“Joe’s playing doctor, is he?”

“Well, someone’s got to.”

The silence hung in the air like a bad smell, unmentioned and unwelcome and neither of them said anything else. There were so many questions that Brendon wanted to ask – so many whys and wheres and for how longs... The darkest parts of him wanted to know whether they’d fucked in their bed yet and what Joe did to make Jon come. Perhaps they didn’t fuck, perhaps they made love – the one thing that Brendon had been so desperate to share with Jon and maybe Joe had beaten him to it? Maybe Joe called Jon his baby as they moved inside each other, Jon’s cheek pressing tenderly into the palm of Joe’s hand as he stroked him to orgasm. Afterwards, as they both came down from their climax, maybe they both laughed at Brendon for hanging around so long after Jon made it obvious there was no love left between them.
“What’s going on between the two of you?” Brendon asked eventually. Jon’s sad eyes looked up at him, one ugly black bruise coloring his left socket.

“Nothing,” he said, but his voice wavered, and his eyes cut to the side when he said it. He was lying.

“Bullshit,” Brendon breathed. “I’ve seen the way you look at him; the way you are together – that’s not nothing, Jon. How long has it been going on?”

Jon shook his head. “It’s not like that. Joe’s different, he’s a good person and he’s been helping me out. He’s my friend-”

“Joe’s the reason you’re in this situation. He’s a fucking drug-dealer, Jon – or are we both conveniently going to forget that that’s the only reason you’re friends?”

“And you’re a fucking hustler, Brendon. Joe slings weed, dude – and not even that much of it these days. We’re all cut from the same cloth - you’re no better than him, you know?”

“So, you’re going to deny the fact that you two used to smoke smack together?”

Jon huffed. “I’ve been clean for over a month – no morphine, no fancy detox program or rehab or NA meetings, just pure willpower. Brendon…” he sighed, "you can badmouth him all you want but maybe you should remember that he was there for me when you weren’t. He helped me when you couldn’t.”

Brendon scowled at Jon’s words. They hurt, but only because they were true.

Jon continued. “After you left last night, Joe said that you and I had something worth saving. He said that we should both leave Manhattan and start someplace new. Get out of the game; maybe move back to Chicago.”

“Was he fucking high?” Brendon snapped, folding his arms across his chest. What the fuck was that Joe Trohman playing at? “I thought you hated Chicago? You always said the best way to see that place was through the rearview mirror of a fast car.”

“I know what I said but that was a long time ago and now I hate Manhattan a whole fuck load more than I ever hated Chicago. I lived here since I was sixteen; twelve years in the city that never sleeps and I, for one am fucking exhausted.” Jon laughed sadly. A pause. A sigh. “I mean, I guess I really do love you and I don’t want us to break up hating each other – perhaps... if you really wanted to work things out, then, I don’t know... Maybe I’d be willing to give it another shot?” Jon seemed to have as much enthusiasm for the prospect as a prisoner on death row awaits execution.

“That’s a very contrived sentence, Jon,” Brendon told him. Jon let go of a heavy sigh. “Did he tell you we should give our relationship another go before or after you fell asleep together last night? I came back here and I saw the two of you. I have to admit, you both looked very comfortable,” he snapped.

“I didn’t want to disturb you, so I left and I went out to work. I thought it might make you feel a little better if I earned back some of the money you lost out on the other night. Not quite five hundred, but close enough,” he commented, pulling the roll of crumpled up bills from the pocket of his coat and throwing them down on the bed. “Maybe that’ll cover your trip back to Chicago – there’s about two hundred and twenty bucks there. Surely it’ll buy a one way ticket?”

Jon’s jaw tensed and Brendon saw the hurt flicker in his eyes. “Or maybe a flight back to Las Vegas?” Jon spat, ignoring the money. “I don’t need the cash you earned sucking dick last night -
take it back.” Jon reached forward to grab a fistful of notes and threw them at Brendon. They fluttered to a slow, sad stop on the bed in front of him.

When did they go from being each other’s lifelines to being so spiteful? Brendon’s relationship with Dallon had come caterwauling to an explosive ending when he was barely eighteen; he’d been left so full of anger and hurt that he left Las Vegas and hadn’t gone back since. His relationship with Jon seemed to have just fizzled out, like the bubbles in a soda can going flat or a sad, deflated helium balloon. It was slow and steady and utterly heartbreaking. It was kind of like watching someone die.

When Jon spoke again, his voice was terse. “Maybe you should go visit your parents? Isn’t your dad dying or some shit? You should go see him before he croaks.”

Brendon tensed his jaw. He hadn’t checked in with his parents in over a month and Jon always did know how to get under his skin. “Well then, maybe I’ll take your advice. I’ll get out of your hair and go back to Nevada for a few weeks. Then you and Joe won’t have to sneak around me anymore, trying to hide your pathetic fucking love affair. Just imagine, he’ll be able to screw you whenever you want. You won’t have to worry about me walking in on you and cramping your style.” Brendon finished with a shout, his voice giving way to his true fury.

Jon stared back at him, blank expression unreadable. “Do you know why I like Joe?”

Brendon shrugged and pursed his lips. “No, but I bet you’re going to tell me. Is it because he’s got a big dick? Is that what you need to keep you truly satisfied?”

“I like him because he’s the first guy I’ve ever met who doesn’t give a fuck about sex. He doesn’t talk about it, he doesn’t constantly nag me for it, he doesn’t even want sex with me. He’s the first guy who’s ever just accepted me for what I am, including all my fucked up issues. He likes me for me and sex doesn’t even come into the equation with him, so get your mind out of the goddamn gutter and accept the fact that our relationship didn’t fail because you couldn’t satisfy me sexually – it failed because you couldn’t support me emotionally or mentally or cerebrally.” Jon shook his head and sighed. The cut on his lip had started to seep blood.

Brendon understood – he suspected for months now that Jon was being unfaithful to him and the thoughts that constantly kept him awake at night were those of Jon giving himself fully and willingly to another man. Now Brendon knew the truth and all those sleepless nights had been in vain. Jon was still a fucking cheat; just not in the way Brendon let himself imagine. His boyfriend had been emotionally unfaithful; in his darkest hours he’d run into another man’s arms and suddenly that hurt more than the thought of any sexual infidelity.

Brendon felt guilty – he pushed Jon away by trying to get closer to him, because he couldn’t let go of his fantasy of Jon, proving his love with hot kisses and nervous fondling and eager, desperate sex.

“I needed your support, Brendon – not your constant, crazy accusations that I actually enjoy it when clients screw me or that the only reason Joe’s hanging around is because we’re fucking every time your back is turned because, FYI – I hate sex, it's not even sex, it's penetration, it's just friction and pain and it's gotten to the point where I can’t even think about it without feeling disgusted with myself and how I ended up. When that dude picked me up the other night and took me back to that hotel, I swore to myself that was going to be the last time I was ever going to put myself in that situation again and I know if we stay together, nothing’s going to change.”

“So, is that your grand plan? Run off back to Chicago with Joe and start some comfortable new life together – an ex-hooker and his drug-dealer living together in Illinois? Sounds like a terrible sitcom, Jon.”
“This is the only terrible sitcom I can see, Brendon – us, you and me and this loveless relationship we’ve found ourselves in. I never meant to hurt you, you know.”

Brendon bit his lip and answered slowly. “Well, you did. You hurt me more than anyone else ever has.”

“That’s why we can’t be together anymore – we both hurt each other way too much. This is nothing,” Jon scoffed, pointing at his bruises. “When that old man fucked me the other night, I was praying he wouldn’t kill me, not because I have anything to live for but because I didn’t want to die without apologizing to you – for hurting you and not being the boyfriend you need. There’s someone out there for you, Brendon; someone who can make you happy and take care of you and I’m sorry that wasn’t me.”

Brendon’s shoulders were tense. He wasn’t even aware that he was holding his breath, until he tried to speak again. He didn’t want to acknowledge that Jon was telling him their relationship was over, so he changed the subject, wrapping his arms around his body to stop himself from shaking.

“Fine,” he nodded, a little too aggressively. "I'll go back to my mom and dad’s. She could probably use a hand looking after him and there’s plenty of jobs in Las Vegas, I’m sure I’ll find something – in a bar or a casino. There are lots of escort agencies out there if the worst comes to the worst,” he pointed out. He sounded breathless – he felt breathless, as if his lungs were shrinking and he couldn’t gulp in enough air. Jon looked over at him and rolled his eyes.

So, this was it - the culmination of their six and a half year relationship, thrown out like a faded memory. “Perhaps Joe’s right though; maybe you should go to the cops about that guy. You can’t just let him get away with it. What if he does it to someone else?”

Jon shook his head. “Karma, Brendon,” he warned, laying back down on the pillow and pulling the comforter up to his chin. “We all get what we deserve in the end.”

Brendon felt his lips twitch and then the tears threatened to spill over his eyelids. He exited the apartment before he broke down, swinging around the bannister of the stairwell, desperate to get outside into the fresh air. The apartment was stifling and Brendon couldn’t take much more of Jon’s sad, sincere eyes and busted-up heart. The sadness tickled his nose and he wiped his hand over his face to relieve the pressure of emotion. For six and a half years Jon meant to world to Brendon. He was only now accepting the fact that their relationship had meant different things to each of them.

As he was rounding the final stairwell, he crashed with a thud into another body. The man cussed as three paper cups of steaming coffee fell to the floor, spilling over the wooden staircase and seeping into the cracks. Even before he pulled back and blinked the man into focus, he knew it was Joe. He stood poised on the step in his coat and hat with a newspaper tucked under his arm, snow dusting his shoulders and caught in the exposed curls of his hair. Joe rubbed at his burned, gloved fingers and looked down despondently at the spilled cups of coffee.

“Well, I’m glad I only paid ninety-nine cents for each of those,” he mumbled, leaning down to pick up the mess. When he straightened back up, Brendon grabbed the collar of the man’s coat and pushed him back against the wall of the landing. He was pretty sure that Joe could take him in a fight – they were around the same height, but Joe was of a slightly broader build and no doubt he hadn’t ended up as a drug-dealer in New York City without learning how to defend himself – but Brendon caught the man off-guard, forcing him back roughly until Joe’s head bounced off the unplastered wall with a thud. His newspaper fell to the floor, landing in the pool of spilt coffee.

“This is your fault,” he spat in Joe’s face, gripping his collar so tight in his fists that his knuckles turned white. “We were okay until you came back on the scene. Why couldn’t you have just stayed
away from him, you fucking asshole? I loved him, Joe.” Brendon choked on his final decree. He didn’t want Joe to see his tears, but he also didn’t want to be the first one to look away. "I fucking loved him."

Joe didn’t say anything for a moment. He wrapped his fingers around Brendon’s wrists and pushed him back, kicking the sodden mess of pages into Brendon’s feet. He huffed and straightened his collar when Brendon let go. “Fuck, man. You need to chill out a little. Smoke some weed or something, bro.”

Brendon balled up his fist and hit Joe hard in the shoulder. Joe’s gloved hand raised up to rub it and Brendon was so angry at the man’s stupid retort he could’ve punched him in the face. How had this guy - with his long curls and bright blue eyes and stupid tattoos – managed to creep into his life and steal his boyfriend? Jon was all Brendon had – and this fucker had taken him from him… but it was pointless. Joe wasn't the problem – he and Jon were the problem.

He sighed at the depressing realization and took a step back, letting his gaze drift around the sad stairwell. They focused briefly on the sodden pages of newspaper on the steps and scanned absently over the headline. It took a moment for it to sink in, but when it did, Brendon's eyes snapped back to the front cover.

Ryan Ross hospitalized after overdose in drug den.

Without thinking, he bent over to pick it up, scanning his eyes furiously over the front page – an inset picture of Ryan's pretty face taken from the shoot he did with Rolling Stone magazine and then a larger picture of an ambulance pulled up outside some high-rise tenement housing block, a stretcher being wheeled into the back of the vehicle. Brendon was shaking, the newspaper rattled in his hand as he pulled the coffee-soaked pages apart to read more.

Ryan’s sad life of drugs, drink and sex with male escorts – where did it all go wrong for Manhattan’s most messed-up playboy?

“That’s fucking Pete’s place they’re pulled-up outside,” Joe leaned over him and pointed at the picture. "I tried calling him to see if he knows anything about it, but I can’t get through – not that he’d even want to talk to me, I still owe him for those three pounds of weed,” he commented absently.

Brendon looked back at the front cover. “Wait. This is Pete’s apartment block? Pete Wentz lives here?”

“Yeah, dude; that’s where I was living before I came to stay here and that rich fucker Ryan Ross was found passed out in a stairwell after popping too many pills. Fuckin' crazy, or what?”

Brendon felt his mouth go dry; all the panic and jealousy and anger pouring out of his body as he turned away and rushed down the stairs.

“Yeah, you can have my newspaper, Brendon – that’s cool, don’t worry about it. Here, take your fucking coffee with you too,” Joe shouted a little louder, kicking a paper cup down the stairs after him. Brendon glared up at him and threw the paper up the stairs. The pages fluttered right back at him, floating to a stop at his feet.

He turned and with as much rationality and poise as he could muster, he walked the rest of the way down the stairs and out onto the street. It had been raining and the clouds hung low in the distance, threatening another downpour. Brendon always found it harder to breathe after a rainfall.
His anger quickly lost momentum; all the emotions that had once been raging inside of him – fear and love and jealousy and anger all seemed to be waning. He was left with a distinctly empty hole inside the center of his chest. Brendon’s fairytale turned sour the moment Dallon asked his sister to marry him and since then it had all been downhill. There is no happy ending – this really is as good as it gets - Brendon thought, balling his fists in the pockets of his jacket.

In the distance, thunder rumbled, a car screeched to a brake in the rain and the angry, impatient New York drivers honked and hollered. It started to drizzle again, raindrops spider-webbing over Brendon’s hair and shoulders. Everything was grey and cold and sad. He felt like an extra in somebody else’s story - a passing stranger, a forgettable ghost. Brendon felt like the curtain was falling before his act was truly over and he could do nothing about it but follow his instructions.

Exit stage left. Fade to black.
Chapter 25

Ryan Ross hospitalized after overdose in drug den.

Ryan Ross, 26, youngest son of real estate entrepreneur, George Ross and heir to the family’s $33 billion fortune was last night found unconscious outside a public housing project in the Morrisania area of the Bronx, NY. Medics arrived at the scene after receiving an anonymous call at 9.05PM on Wednesday evening. Later, Ross was taken to Lenox Hill hospital in the Upper East Side and is said to be under observation. The family PA said in a statement; ‘Mr. Ross is in a stable condition and continues to improve. It is not yet known whether this incident was drug related as it was thought that Mr. Ross was seeking help for his recovery.’ The family has been unavailable for personal comment.

When asked about Mr. Ross's addiction, a close family friend told us: ‘He's been on a downwards spiral for a long time now. I guess that’s what happens when you have that much money at such a young age.’

Ross is expected to leave the hospital later this evening. Last month, the heir checked into The Meadows, a recovery clinic in Wickenburg, Arizona but discharged himself after only three weeks.

Ryan sighed and folded the newspaper in half, shoving it down the side of the armchair. The paper was four days old and he couldn’t understand why it hadn’t already been thrown out. Almost ninety grand a month this place cost – he’d have thought they’d be able to afford to pay someone to get rid of the trash.

He was back in rehab. The world’s press was screaming about it, making assumptions about how long he’d stay locked away this time and whether or not he’d remain clean after he got discharged. The tabloids and Internet forums had very little faith in Ryan’s recovery and since leaving the hospital, he faced an onslaught of ridicule from journalists and bloggers alike.

Ryan’s a mess, they screeched. That pampered asshole got what was coming to him. Why are we even giving this waste of space the time of day? Ignore him, then maybe this jackass will disappear.

They called him troubled. They called him a liability. They called him a junkie and Ryan thought how easy it would be to prove all the tabloids right. After all, they all thought he was going to fuck up anyway, so it wasn’t like he’d be letting anyone down but before he left New York, George rubbed Ryan’s shoulder and said, “Let’s prove them all wrong, son. Let’s show the press that you got the courage to do this, shall we?”

Ryan didn’t particularly care about what the newspapers said about him anymore and he cared even less about scoring one over on all those catty journalists by getting clean, but he promised his father he’d stay in rehab this time and after his overdose scare, he owed his parents that much at least.

Four days in and he already started to regret it. The rehabilitation facility in Malibu reminded him of taking a really depressing vacation. Sure, he had his own room, with a private patio and 24-hour access to the onsite gym which the doctors so feverishly encouraged him to use and the winter temperatures in Southern California continually crept into the seventies but he couldn’t take drugs and he couldn’t drink so his luxury surroundings were lost on him. The only thing on his mind was how tired and cranky cocaine withdrawal made him.
Four days ago, Ryan had woken up in the hospital, feeling like he’d just been hit by a truck. They pumped his stomach - a process his father said he’d been barely awake for and something Ryan conveniently neglected to remember. There’d been an IV sticking out of his arm, pumping fluids back into his system and he was wearing one of those awful hospital gowns with the split up the back, his clothes neatly folded in a pile on the chair next to the bed.

When he’d first woken up, he couldn’t for the life of him remember how he managed to end up in the hospital. He considered himself something of a drug connoisseur, proud in the fact that he never OD’d until now - but as the morning dragged on, foggy pieces of his memory started to return. They weren’t a welcome addition to his coke-binge comedown.

His father stood over the bed, looking disheveled and under slept. He’d been wearing a t-shirt and a pair of faded old sweatpants. Ryan realized he’d never seen his father dressed in anything other than expensive suits and collared shirts – he looked odd dressed in such casual attire; Ryan almost felt like he was looking at a stranger – a weaker, more exhausted version of his father.

“Oh, Ryan,” he groaned, screwing his eyes closed and rubbing the bridge of his nose. “What on earth were you thinking?”

Ryan struggled to sit up, his arm tingling from the IV, his muscles weak. After a few seconds, he realized where he was, but he had no idea how he got there. His memories raced back over the previous day – of his father calling him in the morning and then Marc Willis and his bleeding knuckles and blood-crusted fingernails…

“What happened last night?” he asked his father, falling back onto the pillow – every muscle in his whole body ached, the sickness of his comedown pulsed through his head.

“What happened last night?” his father scoffed. “What, you don’t remember? Ryan, paramedics picked you up outside some drug den in the Bronx – you were unconscious, lying in some dirty flophouse stairwell – six different types of drugs they found in your system, Ryan.”

George picked up the clipboard at the end of Ryan’s hospital bed, flicked through the pages and then read from the sheet. “Cocaine, amphetamine, morphine, diazepam – that’s tranquilizers, Ryan; Rohypnol - Tramadol, Ketamine… Ryan…” His father blinked at him with wet eyes. “You’re killing me here, son.”

Ryan didn’t remember doing all those drugs, but he remembered sitting in that flophouse in the Bronx – with that dude Pete, whatever his name was. He closed his eyes against the bright florescent hospital lights and rubbed at his face. He guessed he truly fucked up this time.

“I’m sorry,” he sighed – his hands were shaking, the realization that he probably wouldn’t be able to get away with his behavior this time started to panic him. Sober was the last thing he wanted to be right now. “I guess things got a little out of hand.”

“You almost died, Ryan – you came this close. The press knows all about it – there’s hundreds of them outside the hospital; all of them waiting to write about how you were apparently hanging out in squalor, taking drugs with dealers and pimps and god knows who else. Shane’s quit, William’s hanging on to his job by the skin of his teeth for letting this happen and Pamela’s absolutely beside herself.” His father pushed his hand through his hair and then sat down on the edge of the bed with a frustrated huff.

It had slowly come back to him. The memories of the previous night - Shane tried his very best to get him to leave that dude’s apartment and Ryan refused. Instead he returned to the sitting room, accepted a blowjob from Pete the drug-dealer and started opening up to him. He remembered foggy
parts of the evening now, texting Brendon and smoking crack and feeling the room pulse in and out of focus as he sat there and just got higher and higher and higher…

George steadied his voice with a deep breath. “I want you to go back to rehab, son. I can’t watch you kill yourself,” he told him, his voice breaking. “I’m so worried about you – you’re my boy and I love you, Ryan. I can’t stand seeing you this unhappy.”

Ryan couldn’t remember his dad ever saying that he loved him. George Ross had always been a very indifferent father when he was growing up. He showed his love for his children in the form of expensive birthday presents and luxury vacations. Ryan hadn’t minded until he realized that family wealth did not exist on pieces of green paper alone and once he’d taken that out of the equation, his family were some poor motherfuckers.

George rubbed at his son’s knee and gave his hand a reassuring squeeze. “Please do this – for yourself. You need to get sober, Ryan or else you’re going to die.”

His father’s eyes had been wet and his bottom lip trembled, so Ryan ruefully agreed to go back to rehab, if only to appease his father. He had been whisked from the hospital and put on a private plane to LAX as soon as the doctor said he was stable enough to be discharged.

Halfway to Los Angeles, George handed Ryan his cellphone – one text and seven missed phone calls from Brendon. The dude had been trying to get a hold of him. Ryan cursed himself for getting so high – perhaps if he listened to Shane he’d have been able to fuck that whore and his parents would’ve been none the wiser about his trip to the Bronx.

He arrived in California a few hours later but everything had seem alien to him – from the amount of caution his father was treating him with to the lack of drugs and booze flowing through his blood.

On his arrival, they’d examined his luggage for contraband – things he could use to get high or drunk - things like shoe polish and aerosols and mouthwash and things he might be able to use to kill himself - razorblades, glass photo frames, shoes with laces. The idea never even crossed Ryan’s mind to get drunk off mouthwash or hang himself with a pair of shoelaces before – he’d never been quite that desperate.

There were dress codes and rules and it was like being trapped inside paradise. The staff had taken his cellphone and told him that contact with the outside was detrimental to his recovery. It was almost like being back in high school. Ryan wasn’t used to being told what to do, much less having to obey orders but even paradise managed to feel like hell when he was four days without drugs and being carefully monitored by men with clipboards.

The facility recommended no contact with family or friends for the first ten days of the detox program. After that, the doctor told him Sunday visitation rights and monitored phone calls may be approved by a psychiatrist, but only if it was deemed progressive to the patient’s recovery. Ryan bid his father farewell four days ago and he was thankful he wouldn’t have to see him for a few weeks. He didn’t want his family around him – his emotionally stunted father would feel out of his depth and he’d seen enough of his stepmother’s tears recently to last a lifetime.

“Addiction is all in the brain,” the head of the facility told him when he arrived. “Give a mouse a hit of coke each time it presses a lever and it’ll do nothing but press that lever over and over again. It’s won’t stop to sleep. It won’t stop to eat. It won’t stop to drink – it’ll just keep pressing that lever until it dies from an overdose. Cocaine is one of the most addictive stimulants out there. We’re here to help you control your urges. You’re more than a mouse, Ryan.”

But Ryan wasn’t afraid to die; he’d been trying to do that for ten years but now he felt like he hit a
Everything he’d ever seen anyone truly stand in awe of was in transition - like music or the ferocity of nature or a lover’s face right before they came. Life was made of endless transitions - internal, external, physical, sexual and his life had been stuck in the mud since he was sixteen – he was finally ready to take that leap and get better, not because he didn’t want to die but because he finally wanted live.

He felt guilty – and he felt stupid for OD’ing in that dealer’s apartment, but only because he’d been caught out. He’d accidentally given the world a glimpse into how unhappy he really was and Ryan had always been carefully guarded with his emotions. He felt like he exposed to the press the part of him he always wanted to keep secret – his crippling depression and self-medication. The tabloids were cruel and unforgiving; they were all waiting for him to fuck up again.

Ryan agreed to his father’s wishes simply because he was tired of hating himself. His psychiatrist told him, “People take drugs because of some underlying issue or an unresolved problem in their lives” and Ryan didn’t need therapy to figure that one out.

Dr. Stump was only a few years older than Ryan and it wasn’t that he didn’t trust the man because, for a shrink, he seemed like a very likable character - it was just that Ryan’s past experiences in therapy had been nothing short of pointless.

During their first meeting, he offered Ryan his hand and smiled. “Call me Patrick. Dr. Stump sounds way too formal. It’s good to meet you, Ryan. I’ve read so much about you but I’m sure the majority of it is fabricated, right?”

Ryan snorted. He wished.

“Why don’t we get to know the real Ryan Ross?” Patrick sat down opposite him in an armchair with his legs crossed and his hands pulled into the sleeves of his cardigan like a child. Ryan was skeptical – the dude barely looked older than twenty-five but the framed M.D certificate on the wall said he graduated from Harvard three years prior.

He didn’t know why Dr. Stump wanted to get to know the real Ryan Ross – Ryan spent the last decade of his life running away from him. He sat upright on the couch with his hands on his knees and tried not to let the doctor see how nervous he was. He knew how shrinks worked; this dude would probably be taking notes about his tense shoulders and closed body language.

“So. What would you like to talk about?” Patrick asked him with a smile. Ryan shrugged. He didn’t want to talk about anything. “Are you here because you want to change or because you think this will keep your family happy and get them off your back for as long as you choose to stay?”

He shrugged again at the question, but Patrick didn’t speak until Ryan let go a deep sigh, ruffling the curls of hair that fell in his eyes. “I guess it’s because I need to change – for my sanity - not because I want to. I’d rather be anywhere but here, to be honest,” he admitted.

The staff was always reminding him that he didn’t have to stay, there were no locks on the doors and he could leave at any time. Your participation is one hundred percent voluntary, they told him when he threatened to leave after they confiscated his cellphone. But do you really want to wake up in hospital again after overdosing in a stranger’s apartment? The next time, you might not be so lucky, they warned.

Ryan didn’t want that – his memories of the evening were still foggy and the parts he could remember, he was ashamed of – Shane walking out on him, smoking weed with that dude Pete, the
blowjob, the crack, accepting all his drugs with slurred words even as his head rolled on his neck…

“Why don’t you want to change, Ryan?” Patrick asked him, clicking his pen. “Are you happy with how you are?”

He hadn’t been happy for a long time. He couldn’t even remember the last time he felt an ounce of happiness without the aid of Class-A drugs. Ryan avoided the man’s gaze and shook his head. He looked out of the window at the patio that boarded a swimming pool backed by the Pacific Ocean – blue, California sky and manicured palm trees swaying in the breeze. It was an ironically beautiful setting for a place that housed so many ugly emotions.

“I’m terrified of living my life sober,” he confessed.

“Why’s that?”

“Because I never had to do it before.”

“Well, if you never had to do it before how do you know it’s anything to be scared of?”

Ryan laughed and thought carefully about his answer. “When I’m not high, I feel empty. I remember that nobody likes me. It’s as if the drugs amplify me; they make me human, they’re the only reason I can get out of bed in the morning. It’s like the only way I can talk to anyone these days is if I’m high.”

“You’re talking to me right now and you’re not high,” Patrick pointed out with a smile.

Yeah, Dr. Stump: one, Ryan: zero. He looked down at his hands and he thought about Brendon. Brendon, with his pale, unmarked skin and twinkling eyes. Brendon – the man who tried to call him seven times the other night. That came across as pretty desperate for a hooker.

“The drugs are just a ruse, Ryan. They’re not what you need to fulfill your life; they’re simply acting as filler – and you said it yourself; you use to amplify yourself out, to feel human. The drugs aren’t the problem I’m going to help you tackle. I’m here to help you find out what’s missing inside here,” he told him, tapping his pen against his chest, “but until you accept the fact that you don’t need those drugs to complete you, we’re not going to make any progress.” He paused. “How did you feel when you woke up in the hospital the other morning?”

Ryan felt the tickle in his nose. He certainly wasn’t going to cry in front of Dr. Stump – not after just five minutes of therapy. He bit down on the inside of his lip until the threat of tears subsided. “Scared,” he admitted. “And foolish. Embarrassed.”

Patrick nodded. “It’s okay to feel those things, Ryan. They’re perfectly natural emotions and sometimes when we take drugs, we mute those emotions so that they don’t bother us and through time, these feelings become more and more raw and harder and harder to deal with, because we get so used to brushing them aside. Do you agree?”

Ryan felt one tear slowly leak down his cheek. He nodded, keeping his eyes attached where his hands were folded in his lap. He sniffed. “I guess there’s a lot of pain which I don’t know how to deal with. Years of it – all just bottled away because I never wanted to admit to myself or anyone else that I am weak.”

“Is there nobody in your life you feel you can talk to about that?”

Ryan shook his head – but he guessed there was maybe one man he could divulge his secrets too, the only person he knew lived a more pathetic life than him – Brendon Urie. “A few months ago I met a
“guy – we were romantically involved,” Ryan sighed, air-quoting the phrase. “The night I OD’d, I tried to call him and I think the reason I went and got so fucked up was because he said he didn’t want to meet up. I guess it’s stupid – I wanted him to feel guilty for refusing to see me.”

“So you went and got high to teach this guy a lesson?”

“I guess you could say that. I wasn’t planning on winding up in the hospital.”

“Are you in love with this guy?”

Ryan’s heart started to pound. He shrugged. He wasn’t in love with Brendon – not real love, anyway - maybe lust. Brendon could satisfy him like no other – he was good-looking and selfless and brazen. The man had no shame, but those weren’t reasons to fall in love with someone. The dude was a hooker and this was real life, not some nineties romantic comedy about a rich idiot falling in love with a streetwalker.

“Why do you think he didn’t want to see you; do you think your addiction might have anything to do with it?”

“No,” Ryan laughed. Brendon was probably one of the very few people in his life who he could safely say didn’t care about his drug addiction – he was, after all, dating a heroin addict the last Ryan heard. It was Brendon’s indifference that was the problem - the fact that Brendon didn’t care - because Ryan wanted so desperately for somebody other than his meddling parents to give a fuck. “I needed him. I needed his support and he wasn’t there for me.”

“Is this a man who owes you his support?” Patrick asked. “You said you only met him a few months ago. Maybe he had his own issues to deal with that day? Change starts with you, Ryan – you can’t keep blaming other people for your mistakes.”

“I don’t blame other people-” he spat, but he fell silent because he recognized that the words on his lips were a lie. He always blamed everyone but himself for his fuck-ups.

“This is why I’m here to help. First and foremost, to make sure that you can take responsibility for your own actions and then we can work on helping you to love yourself. You shouldn’t be thinking about outside relationships until you have what’s going on inside under control.”

Ryan sniffed back tears and wiped at his face. “It’s just – I feel like this guy could really help me out. You know - help with my recovery… The other night, before I blacked out, he tried to contact me and I was so out of it I didn’t even realize he called. When I came here, they confiscated my phone and I didn’t have a chance to call him back…”

Patrick beckoned him to continue.

“I mean, I know he’s probably read the papers. I know he knows what happened, but I care about what he thinks and I want to tell him the true story, so he doesn’t have to listen to gossip. If only there was some way I could contact him and let him know that I’m thinking about him, then perhaps it’d help my recovery?” he finished wistfully.

Patrick smiled, friendly eyes creasing at the corners behind his glasses. “Well, perhaps we can strike a deal – a little give and take, what do you say?”

Ryan nodded. He was prepared to strike any bargain at all with this man if it meant being able to speak to Brendon again.

“How about this? You try your best to work with me on fixing what’s broken in here,” Patrick told
him slowly, the palm of his hand covering his heart. “And I’ll see what I can do about getting you cellphone privileges. Then you’ll be able to call your friend and tell him what’s up.” Patrick raised his eyebrows expectantly and Ryan nodded a slow agreement. “But only if you work with me, Ryan. You scratch my back, I scratch yours.”

“Okay. I can try.”

“And that’s all I ask. Remember, when you have a bad day, a really bad day, try and treat the world better than it treated you. Only then are we going to make progress. You’re a good person, Ryan, with a lot to offer the world. Anyone saying otherwise hasn’t figured that out for themselves yet.”

Ryan felt his lips pull up into a bashful smile. He was far from a good person and he did nothing but hurt the people who loved him but he wanted to change. He couldn’t stay the same. Not after the other night, not if he wanted to be treated with any amount of respect by the important people in his life.

“Thanks, Doc,” he smiled. Patrick laughed and stood from armchair to cross the room. Ryan felt his smile fade at the thought of talking about Marc and how he’d been raped at fifteen. He pushed himself up from the couch and walked over towards the door.

“That’s what I’m here for – as a friend though, not as a doctor. I have a feeling there’s a lot we need to talk about. Right?”

Ryan lips twitched into a nervous smile. “You wouldn’t even believe, dude…”

“You’d be surprised,” Patrick chuckled. He gave his back a friendly pat and nodded. “Take care of yourself, Ryan. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Ryan left the psychiatrist’s office that afternoon with a small flicker of excitement inside the pit of his stomach. He was going to get to talk to Brendon and maybe he’d finally get to shift the weight of his problems onto somebody else’s shoulders.

The door closed behind him, but Ryan’s attention was dragged across the main entrance and towards the wide marble staircase. There was some kind of commotion as doctors marched an attractive blonde female up the steps. She was wild haired and cussing, trying to struggle out of the strong grip of her minders. Her dark eyes were shadowed with last night’s make-up and she always had been a little firecracker.

Keltie Colleen. **Damn,** Ryan hadn’t seen that chick in years. She was an ex-screw of his, semi-famous with teenage girls for dating rich, attractive men. *This can’t be good,* he surmised as her noise disappeared up the staircase and towards the bedrooms.

With just one look, Ryan decided he simply had to have her - again. At any cost. He was certain that the task of trying to secretly seduce the woman under the watchful eyes of doctors and therapists and junkies-in-recovery would not be easy. In Manhattan, women like Keltie swarmed around him like flies. He didn’t even have to do anything to make their panties drop. Women like Keltie; they just fell into his lap but sex in rehab? That was against all the rules, but then Ryan never cared much for rules.

He was a drug addict, after all.
Chapter 26

The rehab facility in Malibu was essentially a luxury vacation with two major rules – don’t get high and share your feelings. There were no cops or doctors or family members riding his dick about staying sober and Ryan kind of liked being so cut off from the world - from the tabloids, the rumors and the speculation. Rehab had become his little bubble – he was safe from the outside world, but he sure as hell felt like he was suffocating on the inside.

The not-getting-high part, he could just about manage; it was the share your feelings thing he was finding a little tricky. Ryan’s fellow patients all had tales to tell, each one crazier than the last and while he sat there listening to their sad life stories, Ryan realized that if there’s one thing a recovering addict enjoys, it’s the sound of his own voice.

His co-patients ranged from over-worked LA attorneys and strung-out pseudo-celebrities to drug-dealing scumbags and drunk drivers who killed whole families after too many flutes of champagne at another fancy soiree in West Hollywood – all of them sharing and caring like one big, dysfunctional, jonesing family.

After Keltie Colleen’s arrival a few days ago, the dynamic amongst the patients seemed to have shifted slightly. Keltie was a manic presence, intense in even the most neutral of conversations and all the men wanted her – so did some of the women - and she was probably crazy enough to fuck them all but Ryan wanted to make sure that he’d be the only one to have her.

Several years prior, Ryan and Keltie had a fling – he’d met her through mutual friends and they’d got along for the sole reason that they were both lonely and had a desire for self-destruction. It had never been anything more than sex and after a few weeks, the passion had fizzled out.

Keltie used to be a dancer before the pressure of fame got to her and she started snorting coke every day but it meant she had a killer body and could twist herself into all sorts of tempting positions. Keltie was also batshit insane – a complete freak between the sheets and when she first spotted him, she pouted over at him, pushed her finger in her mouth and sucked, dragging the fingertip over her lips and down between her breasts. She always had been a little dicktease.

These days, Miss Colleen was more notorious for her multitude of famous ex-boyfriends than she was for her dancing. She’d written a book about one of them and had been playing the role of spurned ex ever since.

In short, the woman was famous because she was beautiful. She dressed well and always looked great and she moved in the right celebrity circles in LA and New York and Miami. She dated rich men who treated her badly and then she wrote about them in online blogs. She had a mega-watt smile and a dancer’s body; tight, lean and bronzed – and she sure liked to flaunt it.

However, in rehab, there were rules about inappropriate dress.

Inappropriate dress constituted any clothing depicting the use of alcohol or drugs and anything that revealed too much skin – women were asked to cover-up in loose fitting attire, but despite this, it didn’t stop Keltie from lounging around by the pool in a tight, black, one-piece swimsuit – the kind that cut up high over her smooth ass cheeks and dipped low at the chest.

He would watch her – and she knew that he was watching. He would admire her body – all soft, tanned skin and long, blonde hair, curves and breasts and smooth legs. It was strange; Ryan didn’t desire that anymore – he wanted sharp hips and a rough jaw, the strong shoulders of a man. There
was no mistaking Keltie for anything other than an over-styled Hollywood bombshell – but they had history and Ryan just couldn’t let that slide.

Keltie would pull the front of her swimsuit down to expose her breasts while she was in the pool or she would hitch up her skirt to reveal she wasn’t wearing panties and she was always getting herself in trouble with the staff for being so sexually inappropriate.

One afternoon, as he was watching her from behind his sunglasses, she walked over to him and plopped herself down in his lap. His hand slid automatically around her waist, his fingers rubbing idly at her hip. She was slick with tanning oil, water droplets beading over sun-kissed skin and Ryan hadn’t any action in weeks. He wondered briefly what the consequences would be if they fucked.

Keltie looped her arms around his neck, pressed her lips against his ear and whispered, “You really know how to make a girl wet. Just watching you makes me want to finger myself.”

Under her wet ass, Ryan could feel his dick twitching to life.

“Why don’t you then? Maybe let me watch?” he suggested, as she removed his sunglasses and tried them on. They slid down her nose. Keltie pouted at him and ground her ass into his crotch.

“Oh, Ryan Ross, you haven’t changed!” she giggled. “The tabloids seem to be insinuating that you’ve gone a bit gay recently. Don’t you miss pussy?” She spread her legs slightly, opening herself up to him and Ryan’s hand fell between her thighs and slowly pushed aside the material of her swimsuit, sinking one finger inside her pussy. She hadn’t been lying earlier when she told him he still made her wet.

“I miss your pussy,” he retorted, raising his eyebrows and flashing her a grin as he curled his finger inside her. Keltie’s head dropped back and she fucked herself into his hand slowly. His dick was hard and leaking through his pants.

“Group therapy starts in fifteen minutes. Do you think we have time to fuck?” she smiled, letting her legs fall further apart.

“Wait, what? Here? You want to fuck here?” Ryan glanced around their surroundings. People were watching – and he couldn’t exactly get thrown out of rehab after a week for fucking an ex-girlfriend in plain view of everyone.

“Of course not, silly. In the bathroom,” she whispered, pulling away from him. “Unless I’m too much woman for you? I always thought you were more gay than you were straight, always wanting to fuck my ass from behind with all the lights off.”

Ryan frowned. That wasn’t strictly true. Well.. sort of, but he hadn’t thought he made it that obvious. He was suddenly filled with self-doubt. Perhaps Keltie was right, perhaps she was too much woman for him? He’d not fantasized about fucking a chick in months – not since he met Brendon, anyway.

Keltie replaced Ryan’s sunglasses and walked away, grinning back over her shoulder at him. She was beautiful and she was sexy - he wasn’t blind - and they had history, which meant something to him but Ryan realized that all his recent fantasies starred men – dark-haired men with round asses and narrow hips.

When he jerked off, he would always imagine the same kind of boy sitting down on his cock and when he came, he would find himself tightening his fist around his dick extra-tight, reminding him of how it felt to be inside a man right before they came – and to finish himself off, he’d always recall
the same words that would pinball around his head.

*I want to be your fucking whore.*

Yes, in his fantasies, it was always a dude. In his fantasies it was always **Brendon**.

Ryan closed his eyes behind his sunglasses and pressed his palm against the bulge in his pants. Keltie started him off, but she wasn’t going to be the one to finish him.

That was Brendon’s job.

* * *

**It never rains but it pours,** his father always told him – and it had been pouring for almost a week straight.

Brendon hadn’t slept, he hadn’t eaten and he felt like a lost soul floating through the oppressive fog shrouding the streets. When it rained, Manhattan transformed into a misty and dark, inescapable Gotham City – the air appeared a little colder, the wind a little stronger and the nights were infinitely longer. Without Jon, Brendon felt empty but at least now he was awake - his head was no longer filled with lies and rootless proclamations of love, but Brendon didn’t know whether he was any better for it.

At night, he had been checking into a youth hostel in the East Village – the place was a dump but it was the only place he could afford. Paper thin walls and cracks in the doors made sleep almost impossible for the last several nights, but that evening, through pure exhaustion, he passed out at 6PM only to be awoken by his cellphone two hours later.

The loud, tinny ringtone startled him from his slumber and he answered it almost in a daze, bringing the phone up to his ear and mumbling a bleary hello into the mouthpiece. In his heart, he hoped it was Jon, begging him to return home, but in his head, he knew his hopes were futile – Jon hadn’t contacted him since he walked out of the apartment six days ago. His bruises would probably linger longer than any hard feelings regarding their break-up.

The familiarity of the voice on the other end jolted him to panicked consciousness as it cut through his head like a lightning bolt. Brendon pushed himself up on the grubby hostel mattress, blinking in the darkness of the room.

“Brendon Urie? It’s Ryan Ross.”

**Ryan Ross? Damn,** when was the guy going to leave him alone?

The last few days left Brendon with a rolling unease inside his stomach – **why had Ryan been found unconscious outside Pete’s apartment? What had he been doing in that area of town?** The tabloids had been screaming about Ryan’s latest scandal for days now and Brendon’s mornings had become consumed with scanning through newspapers and gossip magazines to check whether his name had been leaked. It had been reported that Ryan Ross had been filled with so many drugs that he almost **died** and Brendon couldn’t ignore the suspicion that Pete Wentz probably played his part in Ryan’s trip to the ER. **Well, he guessed this was his time to find out for sure…**

“Ryan. Hello, it’s good to hear from you again.” he said with a dry mouth. A week ago, Ryan had been his only lifeline. In his time of need, Brendon tried to call Ryan Ross **seven** times and that just reeked of desperation, but if he wanted to settle his fears about Pete Wentz knowing more than he should about their relationship then he was going to have to be civil. “How are things?”
On the other end of the line, Ryan sucked in a breath. “Pretty shitty, actually. I’m here in LA, back in rehab again,” he sighed.

“So I heard.” He was just going to cut the bullshit. “What were you doing in the Bronx, man?”

“Oh. Yeah… that’s kind of a long story.”

Brendon wanted to hear it, each and every detail – if Ryan had been taking drugs with Pete Wentz then Brendon wanted to know about it. Pete was a notoriously shifty character and if he had the dirt on Brendon, he was sure it would be only a matter of time until Jon found out about it.

“Were you really visiting a drug den?” he asked, quickly adding, “I mean, that’s what all the newspapers have been saying, but I imagine they can exaggerate things at the best of times.”

Ryan laughed. “Unfortunately in that particular instance, they were not exaggerating. I guess I got it into my head that I wanted to meet the dude who’d been selling me coke and to be fair, my driver tried to talk me out of it but I can get a little demanding when I’m high.”

Oh, didn’t Brendon know that to be true? He experienced it all first hand.

“So, you were just hanging out in the projects, getting high with your dealer?” Brendon kept it light, but only because he wanted Ryan to open up to him. Inside his chest, his heart was thumping. “What was his name? I might know him.”

Ryan huffed. “Pete something or other. Weird surname.” Brendon’s heart dropped like a rock into his guts. Ryan had been hanging out with Pete. “There’s a lot of stuff I don’t remember about that day though, he-”

“Do you think he’ll go to the press?” Brendon interrupted – because that would just top off his monstrously shitty month. If Pete knew about him and Ryan and his name got leaked to be tabloids then Brendon would be in a world of shit. His family would know. Jon would know and Pete would’ve found a perfect way to exact revenge on him for stealing Jon away six years ago.

“Does it matter? My reputation’s already shot, there’s nothing some drug dealer can say to make it worse.”

Maybe not for you, but for me there sure as fuck is, Brendon wanted to add.

He heard Ryan sigh and the silence swelled just long enough to make it uncomfortable. Ryan was the first to speak. “Well, anyway. Enough of that - I saw you called me the other night. I didn’t want you to think I was ignoring you.”

Brendon felt the ghost of a smile pull at his lips – at least someone was still thinking about him. He looked despondently around his single room. It was suitably depressing – a place where drug-addicts go to die. The twin bed was pushed into the corner and if Brendon sat on the edge of it, his knees touched the opposite wall. There was barely any room to breathe and yet here he was, talking to Ryan Ross in a rehabilitation facility that cost more money per week than Brendon had ever seen in his entire life. The social divide between them wasn’t so much a gap as it was a chasm – an abyss.

“I wished you agreed to meet me when I called you last week.”

“He too,” Brendon admitted with a sigh. Maybe if he hadn’t been holed up in the apartment, praying that Jon wasn’t dead then he would’ve. He’d have an evening in a fancy hotel with a billionaire’s son instead of a night on the streets after finding his boyfriend curled up with another man.
“How’ve things been?” Ryan asked him after a pause.

Brendon laughed before answering. “Kind of shitty on my end too, to be honest.”

“Do you need money? I can send you money, it’s no problem. I mean, I feel like a dick for behaving the way I did last time we saw each other, so I’d like to make it up to you, it’s just - I really need to get clean this time. My mom and dad were freaking out because I almost died and shit and so it looks like I’ll be here for a couple of months until I complete my program – ninety fucking days, dude.” He let out an exasperated sigh. “But if you need money, I can help you with that - if you need me to pay your rent or whatever, it’s cool. I want to see you again when I get out though,” he finished hopefully.

Hearing Ryan get flustered was kind of cute. Brendon battled a grin. “That’s very sweet of you, Ryan, but I don’t need your money.”

That was a lie. He needed Ryan’s money, but he sure didn’t want to accept it. He was struggling, but he wasn’t about to start begging a billionaire for spare hundred dollar bills so he could pay his rent.

“I thought you might say that. To be honest, I’m surprised you’re even still talking to me after the way I treated you.” Ryan paused and then he sighed. His voice came as a desperate whisper down the line. “I wish I could see you.”

Brendon didn’t. He’d been a mess since he walked out on Jon. He couldn’t stop thinking about what he said before he left. *Karma, Brendon. We all get what we deserve in the end.* Brendon didn’t know if he deserved any happiness after how his relationship with Jon had panned out

“I’m glad you can’t see me. I’m a mess right now, Ryan. I don’t know what to do.” He heard his own voice crack but swallowed his emotions.

He didn’t know why he opened up to the man. Probably because there was no one else who would listen to him. He laid back down on the mattress and curled under the thin blanket. The room was cold. The New York winter seemed utterly relentless this year.

“You know, something I learned since arriving here, something my therapist told me is, when you have a real shitty day just try treating the world a little better than it treated you.”

*That* was ironic, coming from such a self-absorbed mercenary as Ryan Ross, but at least he was trying. Maybe he really *wanted* to stay sober this time. Perhaps three months locked away in rehab would do him some good.

Brendon sniffed, pulling the comforter up to his chin. “I’m thinking of going back home to Las Vegas.”

Ryan’s reply was abrupt. “You’re going to leave New York?”

He’d been thinking about it since he walked out on Jon. He left Nevada eight years ago and he hadn’t seen his family since. They were homebodies, never having travelled further than Salt Lake City and Brendon always managed to make up excuses as to why he couldn’t return home but there was nothing left for him in Manhattan anymore – unless bad memories counted.

“Maybe for a little while; there’s a lot of shit I need to sort out.”

Ryan hummed on the other end. “You’ll keep in contact with me, won’t you, Brendon - even if you *do* leave New York?”
Brendon thought about it. “Sure,” he said with a smile. “I’d like that.”

The smile faded from his lips once Ryan hung up. Through the walls, he could hear a couple arguing and outside the window, the rain kept falling.

The next morning, Brendon awoke early.

After Ryan’s phone call, he found it difficult to go back to sleep and remained awake until the small hours, trying to ignore the thoughts battling for dominance inside his head – the memory of Jon and the way his eyes used to light up when he smiled and later, he recalled the way Dallon’s voice sounded when he called him his angel.

At 4AM, he was still awake and he wound up thinking about Ryan Ross until his cock grew hard. He wrapped his fingers around himself and jerked off until he came into his hand. After that, Brendon hadn’t found it difficult to fall straight to sleep but had awoken a few hours later with the sunrise.

Next door’s argument was still unresolved and the rain was still falling outside the window.

Brendon showered and dressed and by 8AM he left the hostel and started walking up 3rd Avenue towards Midtown. It was the first time in days that he actually walked anywhere with a purpose and Brendon couldn’t be sure that his grand plan was going to work, but he was going to give it his best shot.

Since leaving Jon to be with Joe in their apartment, Brendon had done his research. Marc Willis was still posing as a happily married man – that is when he wasn’t trailing the backstreets of New York, looking for fragile hookers he could assault. The man was worth close to seventy-five million dollars. The fucker was rich beyond Brendon’s wildest dreams but had gone through the pockets of Jon’s pants to rob him of seven measly bucks.

Marc’s wife was a high-flying CEO for a financial services company based on Lexington Avenue. She was one of the highest earning female CEOs in the state of New York and together, the couple owned a townhouse in Tribeca as well as various overseas properties. They were childless after having suffered a miscarriage in the mid-eighties but to his inner circle, Marc was a well-known philanthropist and supporter of various charities across the United States. The couple was held in high regard amongst their peers and to all intents and purposes, Marc’s image in the media was squeaky clean.

His wife was an attractive woman from what Brendon had seen on the Internet – petite and slim and always immaculately dressed. She was in her early fifties but he could tell she looked after herself – well, she certainly had the money to do so. Brendon very much doubted that she had any knowledge of her husband’s sordid affairs outside of their marital bed and he had been running over the pros and cons for days now. There were plenty of cons but he knew the moral thing to do would be to tell her; he should’ve done it months ago when he had the opportunity.

Brendon had given Marc a second chance, but he hadn’t taken heed of his warning. He almost killed the man that Brendon loved – and he couldn’t let that go.

Mrs. Willis’s office was inside a sprawling glass building just south east of Central Park. Sometimes his rich clients would take him back to one of the nearby 5-star hotels and if he remembered his bearings correctly Ryan’s apartment was located only a few blocks up the street. He was in millionaire territory and he stuck out like a sore thumb in his cheap clothes and tired eyes.

As he entered the lobby, the draft from the heating vents blew over him, ruffling his hair as he
scanned the reception area. As he walked towards the front desk repeating the well-practiced lines in his head, Brendon could only hope that the result of his conversation with Mrs. Willis would, at the very least, be a very messy divorce settlement. That fucker deserved to be taken for everything he was worth.

Behind the front desk sat an attractive, dark-haired woman in a tight-fitted black dress. She smiled amiably up at him and tucked a tendril of glossy, black hair behind her ear. She was pretty and if Brendon was straight, he’d probably marry a girl that looked like her.

“Good morning, sir, I’m Sarah. What can I help you with this morning?”

“I’m here to talk to Mrs. Willis.”

She knotted her brows and frowned. “Okay… do you have an appointment?”

“No,” he shook his head, “but it’s urgent. It’s in regards to her husband. I have some information about him that I think she’ll be interested in hearing.”

Sarah flashed him a dubious smile and picked up the telephone. Brendon listened in on her hushed conversation.

“I’m not sure… he said he had information regarding Mr. Willis that you might be interested in hearing… No, he didn’t say what… A young guy, mid-twenties, kind of… poor-looking,” she whispered. What a bitch. Brendon bit back a scoff. “Excuse me, sir - what was your name?”

Brendon panicked, caught off guard at such a simple question. He clamored for any kind of answer but the truth. He really hadn’t thought this through. “Jon,” he said quickly, without even thinking, “Jonathan Walker.”

The girl nodded and repeated the name into the receiver. Fuck. Why the fuck had he said that? He could’ve given any name; they were all coming to him now – Joseph Trohman, Peter Wentz, Zack Hall - but he’d given the name that had been stuck in his head for days now, the name of the man he was trying to defend.

Mistake number one, dickhead, he chided himself.

Sarah pointed back at the waiting area. “She’s on her way down, Mr. Walker. If you’d like to take a seat?”

Brendon walked towards the plush armchairs and he sat down, trying hard to look like he knew what the fuck he was doing.
Brendon had to knock three times before Jon answered the door. It had been almost two weeks since
they’d seen each other and during that time, neither of them contacted the other. Brendon didn’t feel
comfortable just using his key to let himself in – he was scared of what he might walk in on - but he
was running out of clean clothes and early that morning, he’d booked himself a one-way plane ticket
to Las Vegas and he thought Jon deserved to know about his plans.

When he opened the door, Jon appeared still half asleep, sweatpants hanging loose around his hips
and his hands pulled into the sleeves of an oversized sweater that Brendon didn’t recognize –
perhaps it was Joe’s, he thought with a shudder. Perhaps they were sharing clothes now too.

He regarded him quietly as Jon scrubbed his palm over his face and blinked the sleep from his eyes.
“Brendon? Fuck. What are you doing here?” he asked blearily.

He was still pretty busted up but his bruises didn’t look quite as aggressive as they had two weeks
ago. The swelling had gone down considerably and he’d cut his hair; a mid-length buzz cut – the
exact same style Jon had been sporting when they first met and most likely shaved to hide the parts
where Marc Willis pulled his hair out in clumps as he raped him. He almost looked like the man
Brendon had fallen in love with six and a half years ago.

“How’re your ribs?” he asked.

“Broken,” Jon huffed. “Still sore. Joe couldn’t manage to get me any more Codeine once the first
batch ran out, so I’ve just been smoking a shit ton of weed to get me through the days.”

So then, a typical day in the life of drug addict, Jon Walker?

Brendon hummed, uninterested. “Where is Joe?”

“He went out to get coffee. Just down to the 7/11, he should be back any minute now.”

Jon sat down on the bed and winced. He was still in pain following the attack and Brendon hated the
fact that he still felt so much compassion for the man when it was obvious Jon already replaced him.
His side of the bed probably wasn’t even cold before Joe hopped in to keep Jon warm at night.

“Yeah, right. Whatever.” Jon sniffed and looked away. “He said you accosted him on the landing
before you left the other week. Tried to blame him for our break up too, did you? That’s pretty
fucking typical.” Jon folded his arms.

“I didn’t come here to argue with you.”

In return, Jon rolled his eyes and looked up at the ceiling. He gained back a bit of weight, his cheeks
didn’t look quite so hollow and his eyes looked a little brighter. Despite the fading bruises, Jon
looked good and Brendon couldn’t stand it.

“So, why are you here? Or did you just come over to bitch about Joe, because it’s too early, dude. I was asleep.”

Brendon looked over at the digital alarm clock on the side table – it was just past 8AM but Brendon had already been up for hours. He felt like he hadn’t slept in two weeks. Even when he did manage to get a few hours rest, his subconscious was plagued by nightmares of his own mistakes and it had become a rare occasion that he actually woke up feeling refreshed.

The youth hostel in which he was staying was putting a huge strain on his mental state; it was full of dead-eyed tweakers and crusty old prostitutes and their pimps. Brendon kept his head down and laid low, he didn’t want any trouble, but after two weeks of very little human contact, he felt as if he was slowly going crazy. He hadn’t heard from Ryan in days and as he lay in bed at night, he began to understand the suicidal thoughts Jon used to claim plagued him – death seemed but a small step from his current state of mind.

At night, he listened to the police sirens racing by his window, offset by the sound of junkies dying or hookers being fucked in the next room over – and that was the soundtrack to his miserable life.

This is how people lose their minds, he told himself. This is how people end up talking to themselves on a park bench or going into a supermarket and opening automatic gunfire on its customers. A life like this is what makes the already brittle just snap, Brendon thought.

In his small bedroom at the youth hostel, Brendon would often lay awake at night wondering how he’d off himself. He’d grown up thinking suicide was a sin and even during his darkest times as an adult, he still thought there were better ways to deal with sadness.

It’s not sadness, Jon told him once, it’s desperation. People don’t kill themselves because they want to die, they kill themselves because they can’t go on living.

Is that how you feel? Brendon remembered asking him. He remembered the way Jon sparked the lighter and held it under a dirty strip of aluminum foil. He remembered the way the heroin bubbled and smoked and the roll of Jon’s eyes toward the back of his head as he inhaled the vapor into his lungs.

Not when I smoke this shit, Jon managed to smile, falling back against the mattress.

How would you do it? If you wanted to kill yourself, how would you go about it?

Gun in my mouth, Jon replied, without even a hint of hesitation. Just like my mom. Least I know I wouldn’t survive it – just aim into the brain, pull the trigger and boom - job’s a good ’un. Jon made the shape of a gun with his fingers and pushed them inside his mouth. Brendon remembered watching his tongue press against them and the way his lips parted around his knuckles as his thumb pulled the trigger. He looked good like that – strung out and sated on their mattress, with his fingers in his mouth.

Now Brendon could see why Jon hated him so much. Jon couldn’t even talk about killing himself without Brendon’s mind dreaming up some impossible sexual fantasy.

If Brendon were to kill himself, he’d choose a much less dramatic method than Jon. He didn’t have the guts to hang himself or jump in front of a train or slice his wrists open. He just wasn’t that desperate – if he were to kill himself, he’d OD on meds. An overdose was more or less painless unless it went wrong, right?
Brendon shook the thoughts from his mind and glanced over at Jon on the bed. He hadn’t taken the decision to go back to Las Vegas lightly. He thought about it long and hard but after visiting Mrs. Willis the other week to divulge her husband’s secrets, he told himself that he’d only stay in Manhattan for as long as absolutely necessary and he’d been measuring on how long it took for the news to break in the tabloids about Marc’s indiscretions.

A little over a week ago, Brendon sat in Mrs. Willis’s top floor office and watched her cry as he accused her husband of being a rapist. At first she wholeheartedly tried to deny Brendon’s claims; she called him a liar, she called him a troublemaker, she tried to have him removed but Brendon threatened to go to the press if she didn’t hear him out.

She offered him money – tens of thousands of dollars just to keep quiet but Brendon didn’t want her money. He wanted to take revenge against Marc Willis for hurting Jon, for not taking heed of his warning, so he sat opposite her and he told her Jon’s story until she had tears in her eyes.

*Your husband’s a rapist, he told her, and the other night he was almost a murderer. If I find out that you let him get away with this I will go to the press and I’ll tell them what kind of man Marc Willis is and your perfect life will be completely ruined, because they’ll know you knew about it. You got two weeks to leave his ass before I go to the press.*

He left the situation in her capable hands – it was probably a lot for her to take in all at once; the fact that her husband enjoyed raping male prostitutes so much but when he left her office, he felt like a huge weight had been lifted from his shoulders. Brendon didn’t take any joy in ruining that woman’s marriage but Marc needed some kind of comeuppance for what he’d done to Jon. The only reason he was still in New York was because he was waiting for a scandal to break and for that fucker to get what was coming to him. In that morning’s *New York Times*, page twelve covered the story.

*Manhattan CEO cites ‘irreconcilable differences’ in $75 million divorce battle with husband, Marc Willis.*

Brendon took the newspaper from under his arm and held it out to Jon on the appropriate page. “Is that your guy?” he asked, watching as Jon’s hand reached forward to take the paper and his eyes scanned over the page. Brendon saw Jon’s confused expression give way to recognition – the slight widening of his eyes, the way his face fell and his lips moved as he read the article. His brows knotted.

“This is the guy, the guy who attacked me,” Jon said, tapping the picture of Marc Willis and his wife, smiling together at some star-studded charity function.

“Brendon, what the fuck? What is this?” he snapped, throwing the newspaper down on the bed.

Brendon’s heart started to thump inside his chest. He didn’t know what kind of reaction he’d been expecting from Jon, but it wasn’t likely to entail the man falling into his arms and pressing a string of thankful kisses against his jaw. “I guess his wife must’ve found out that he’s queer as fuck. They’re getting a divorce.”

Jon glared up at him, dark eyes stormy. “I can see that, Brendon but what the fuck is going on? How did you know that this was the guy?”

He shrugged. He *really* hadn’t thought this though. “Just a shot in the dark, I guess.”

Jon cocked his eyebrow and then shook his head. “That’s not a shot in the dark, dude. You’re telling me that out of all the rich, white dudes in Manhattan, you just so happened to see this article and made the wild assumption that this was the guy who picked me up the other week? There’s
absolutely no evidence supporting that.”

Brendon paused, stumbling over his lies – he was too caught up in them. His relationship with Jon was over and there were a million reasons why, some of them Jon’s, most of them his but he couldn’t quite force the truth from his lips just yet. He was hanging on to a sinking ship and he didn’t have a life raft.

“It was just the way you described him – working on Wall Street and all that, I just thought-“

“Brendon, just for once in your goddamn life can you try not lying to me?” Jon’s eyes were dark and he was looking at Brendon, not with hate, but with a weary despondency. Brendon didn’t know which was worse. “Do you know him?”

He nodded once and felt his mouth go dry. “He’s an ex-client,” he confessed quietly and watched the color completely drain from Jon’s face. “I’m sorry.”

He expected an explosion of anger to erupt from the other man, something loud and volatile, something that would warrant an argument, but Jon was silent and still – like a lake with monsters under the surface.

His voice was brittle when he next spoke and Brendon really didn’t want to watch Jon cry again. “So… Hold on a second, I’m confused. You’re telling me that you know this guy? That he’s an ex-client of yours and that when I came home the other night you just put two and two together? That’s your shot in the dark? Just come clean, Brendon! It’s not like our relationship isn’t already over.”

Brendon swallowed, the words stuck inside his throat. He didn’t know how far he should go back, how much he should admit to Jon, because he just wanted the man to be happy and all the truth would ever cause him was pain.

“He did a similar thing to me – a few months ago, he picked me up, he paid me to fuck him and then he got rough. He left with my money and I was embarrassed. I thought you’d get pissed because it was a rookie mistake - I left my money right there on the dresser.”

That’s all Jon needed to know, not the part where he stalked Marc Willis online and turned up at his office, demanding payment – and nor did he need to know that later that day, he met Ryan Ross for the first time and broke their agreement not to make out with clients. That’s where it all gone wrong for them, Brendon remembered. All of this was Ryan’s fault.

“When you came home after that night, everything you said, the way you described him, it just seemed too familiar – and then I recognized his picture in the newspaper this morning. I was just wondering if it was the same guy…”

“Yeah,” Jon breathed with a nod. “It is – and you didn’t tell me? You didn’t think of warning me a few months ago after it happened to you? I could’ve stayed away from him, Brendon – this didn’t have to happen. Christ, you didn’t even say anything about it the other week when I came home. Fuck, man – what’s your fucking deal?”

Brendon bristled. He never planned on that sick fuck attacking Jon. He never meant to get so in over his head. His life was spinning out of control, he was veering off-track and the worst part was, he was riding solo. His passenger bailed months ago and now he had no one to take the wheel.

“So, is this something to do with you?” Jon asked, holding up the newspaper. Jon may have been a drug-addict and lousy boyfriend, but he certainly was no fool. “This article, the fact that he’s suddenly getting a divorce? Is this your doing?”
“Yes,” Brendon croaked. “I found his wife. I went to her work and I told her what he did to you.”

Jon’s mouth fell open. It was like watching a slow-motion reaction to an incomprehensible news report – Jon looked totally dumbfounded. “Why?” he managed to utter.

“I wanted to help you, Jon. I wanted him to pay – you didn’t want to go to the cops and he almost killed you. I didn’t want him to get away with that.”

“I didn’t want to go to the cops for a reason, Brendon,” Jon told him slowly. “Because he is a fuck load more powerful than me. You don’t even know the kind of man you’re messing with here. Why couldn’t you just leave it? Christ, I survived; he didn’t kill me. I was just going to let it go and now you told his wife – and they’re getting a divorce? Did you give her my name?”

“No,” he answered quickly – but that was another lie because the only name he’d given her had been Jon’s.

“If he knows my name, Brendon, he’s going to come looking for me.”

“Your name’s Jonathan Walker, it’s like the most common name in the whole of the United States. There’s probably thousands of Jon Walkers living in Manhattan alone; he’d never find you.”

Jon raised his eyebrows at him. “Thought you said you didn’t give her my name?”

“I didn’t,” Brendon mumbled. He couldn’t keep a track of the lies. “I did this for you,” he protested – and he had. He’d done it because of love – to prove just how much he cared. His plan seemed to have miserably backfired.

Jon looked as if he was on the verge of a panic attack. He laughed a little hysterically and said, “I didn’t want you to do anything. Oh my god, Brendon, you grind my gears so much - if he knows my name, he’s going to come looking for me,” he repeated. “You think this fucker is just going to sit back and accept the fact that a few days after he picks me up and almost kills me, some dude turns up at his wife’s work and tells her about it? Brendon, he’s going to think it was me who told her. He’s going to find me and he’s going to kill me.”

Jon rubbed his palm over the back of his head and started to shake, his voice fraying. “What the fuck were you thinking?”

Brendon guessed he hadn’t been thinking – not quite this far ahead anyway. He wanted payback. He wanted to ruin Marc Willis’s life as much as he ruined his and Jon’s. He wanted vengeance and retribution and he supposed that revealing to Marc’s wife what an ugly man she was married to didn’t really have anything to do with love after all. It was hatred and revenge that had driven him to talk to Mrs. Willis. Anger and pride - not love.

“Well, you said you wanted to move out of Manhattan; perhaps this is a good time to leave.”

“Yeah, so that my dumbass ex-boyfriend doesn’t manage to get me murdered by a trick who already tried to kill me once. Christ,” Jon sighed, blinking up at the ceiling, “we’re not even together anymore and you’re still fucking up my life.”

“I think you’re being a little overdramatic, Jon. How the hell would he find you anyway?”

Jon shrugged and then put his head in his hand, rubbing at his eyes. He exhaled a wavering breath and said, “I know you were just trying to help, dude, but why couldn’t you have just left it? And if you knew this fuck, why couldn’t you just tell me?” After a pause, he asked, “Was this some kind of plan to win me back?”

Jon looked up at him. The bruise around his left eye was fading to yellow and pink. Soon it’d be fully healed, unlike the psychological bruises that were left after such a bad beating.
“I don’t know,” Brendon shrugged. “I just wanted to do something for you, something that I thought was right. I’m sorry if I fucked up.” Had it all been one elaborate plan to get Jon to fall in love with him again? Brendon didn’t think so; the saddest part about their relationship ending was that they’d both seen it coming for months. It hadn’t even come to a proper end; it just disintegrated and rotted over time. It had been left to rust outside in the rain.

“I’m going back to Las Vegas.” When he spoke, his voice was dry and gruff. It was hard to get the words out – he felt like his throat was tightening. “I just need to pick up a few things and then I’ll be gone. Don’t worry; I’ll try and get out of here before Joe gets back,” he added snidely. Joe’s name felt like dirt on his tongue.

Jon stayed quiet for a moment while Brendon moved around the room, opening drawers and closets and tearing the very few clothes he had from their hangers. This was it - this truly was the end. Their ship had sunk – he was floating in his own ocean, calm above water but desperately kicking to stay afloat under the surface.

“Bren… Stop. Listen to me. I didn’t want it to end like this.” Jon almost shuddered. The weight of emotion hung heavy in the room.

“How did you expect it to end then, Jon? I tried to make you happy. Wasn’t what we had enough for you?”

“It was too much,” Jon spat under his breath. “Brendon, the last few months have been really difficult for me. I’m two months fucking clean, dude–”

“Apart from the weed,” Brendon interjected.

Jon scoffed. “Weed hardly counts, Brendon, it’s a fucking plant. It’s organic–”

“And Codeine? Codeine’s an opiate, Jon and you’ve got Dr. Trohman here, scoring you pain meds, running down to the 7/11, probably slinging you free weed and isn’t he convenient?” Brendon taunted. He could see Jon’s shoulders tensing under his sweater. He couldn’t resist pushing for more. “You’re a fucking drug-addict and he’s a dealer. You belong together.”

“You don’t even know how much I want to knock you out right now, dude. It’s not even real,” Jon breathed, averting his eyes toward the window. “This is exactly what I’m talking about. I’m fucking two months clean and all you can focus on is the negative. You’re the one who asked me to quit and you never even gave me any support – and yet you hated the fact that Joe did. I know I wasn’t easy to live with, Brendon but neither were you, so don’t try and make me feel guilty for not feeling for you what you wanted me to.”

“I loved you, Jon–”

“And I loved you too, dude – but we were in this relationship for different reasons. I felt like you constantly wanted something from me that I couldn’t give you and I’m sorry about that, but I think spending half my live hustling my ass on the street kind of ruined sex for me for life. Don’t take it personally, it’s just that sex isn’t something I want to do with someone I like, let alone love.”

“I’ve seen the way you look at Joe. It’s like you desire him or something.”

Jon paused and then breathed a laugh. “I wish you could hear how ridiculous you sound right now. How much more obvious do you want me to be? How many more times do you want me to say it? What, do you want to hook me up to a lie detector and ask me questions about how many men I’ve willingly fucked in the last, what, ten years?” Jon looked up at him incredulously. “The answer is
“But sometimes it was like you purposefully did things you knew upset me – like hanging out with Joe, like smoking smack, like inviting him back to our apartment and not even giving me an option of whether or not I wanted him to stay or not.”

“I know I did things that upset you – and I know that thing with me and Joe in bed that night… I know that was kind of out of line, but…” Jon paused to gather his thoughts and ran his palm over the back of his head – only kind of out of line? “I was going through really tough withdrawal. I was confused. My head was a mess – but you did things that really upset me too, you know? You started staying out all night and after a while, you stopped even explaining yourself. Sometimes, I felt that you cared more about the fact that I smoked up with Joe a few times than you did about the fact that I was using again. Sometimes, it was as if you didn’t mind me having sex with other men - so long as I didn’t enjoy it, so long as I was being fucked by a client who hated me and not someone who actually cared about me,” he finished with a shout.

Brendon’s muscles stiffened at the truth in Jon’s words.

“It drove you crazy to imagine me enjoying it, didn’t it?” he sneered. ”You showed more concern at the fact that I kissed Joe than you did when you found out that fucker raped me. I loved you, Brendon. I truly did, but I can’t change my past to suit you and I can’t sit back and pretend like we’re good for each other anymore, because we’re not.” He took a breath, when he spoke again his voice was level and steady. He sounded stronger than he had in a long time. “I’m angry about what you did but I know why you did it. This past two weeks has not been easy; trust me. Don’t think I replaced you with Joe or that this break-up hasn’t affected me, because it has.”

“You got a funny way of showing it,” Brendon remarked, pushing the last of his belongings into a duffel bag. Jon looked hurt at his comment and Brendon’s shoulders slumped but before he could apologize, he heard the key in the lock and then Joe’s voice calling from the doorway.

“Wakey, wakey! I got coffee for my baby.” He stopped dead in his tracks when he saw Brendon, his expression quickly falling to one of surprise. Jon reddened, his eyes pulling away from Brendon’s and down at the floor. “Oh… Hey, Brendon, what’s up?” Joe bumbled, his blue eyes wide.

“Nothing,” he snapped. “I was just about to leave. I came here to tell Jon that I’m going back to Las Vegas.”

“Oh.” Joe paused, his lips pulling into a thin line. “Well, that’s… cool.” He still stood awkwardly at the door, keys still jangling in the lock, letting in all the cold air. “Uh… Did I just walk in on something? Do you want me to leave and come back?”

“No,” Jon answered quickly. “Brendon was just on his way out.” For a brief second, Jon caught his eye. “I’ll see you down the stairs. I need a smoke anyway,” he said with a sigh, pushing himself up from the mattress. He grabbed a half-smoked blunt from the ashtray on the bedside and tucked it into his palm.

“Wake and bake, huh? I like your style, buddy,” Joe remarked happily, patting Jon on the back as he passed by him on the way to the door. Brendon hated Joe purely for the fact that he didn’t seem to let the tension in the room affect him. Joe was pretty unflappable, cool in even the most awkward of moments – which was why he was going to make a damn near perfect partner for Jon. Jon needed the stability, that was for sure.

Brendon followed him out onto the landing, closing the door behind them as Jon led the way down the stairs. When they reached the front steps of the apartment, it was still raining and Jon pushed his
back against the wall to avoid getting wet. He lit up the blunt and Brendon watched the end glow orange as he sucked the smoke into his lungs.

“He calls you baby,” Brendon remarked. “That’s sweet.”

Jon’s eyes narrowed as he took another drag and exhaled smoke from between his lips. He always loved watching Jon smoke – it always seemed so suggestive and erotic, all the focus on Jon’s lips and fingers. Brendon wasn’t proud to admit, but he envied the men who paid Jon for oral sex.

“Are you in love with him?”

“With Joe?”

“Oh course with Joe. Unless there’s someone else you’ve not been telling me about.”

Jon looked up at him with tired eyes. “Yeah,” he said, exhaling. “I am.”

Brendon blinked up at the sky, feeling the rain hit his face. There was a storm coming in from the north, a downpour of rain would later be falling over the city. Brendon would make a bet that those black clouds would follow him all the way to Nevada.

He inhaled slowly through his nose and looked back at Jon. “Be honest; were you ever in love with me?”

“Yeah, I was,” he nodded, bringing the blunt back to his lips and sucking. The smoke left his mouth in a plume. Jon looked at the ground. “You’re one of the very few good things that’s ever happened to me, Brendon and I loved you, I truly did but not in the same way you loved me. I think we stuck together so long because we didn’t have anyone else to turn to.”

“You did. You had drugs.”

“Yeah – and look where that got me. I’m an addict because I’m constantly trying to numb whatever’s causing me pain; my mom killing herself, the fact my dad used to beat me, the fact that my first boyfriend got me all fucked up on heroin and started pimping me to his friends… When I met you I thought things would change.” Jon gave a sad sigh and kicked at the ground with his feet. “I don’t know; perhaps what I wanted was too simple – just someone to love me, someone who’d be happy with a kiss before bed and waking up next to me.”

“So, is that someone Joe?”

“Yeah. It is.

“Fucking hell, Jon,” Brendon breathed, his sadness slowly bubbling. “You did it right in front of my fucking eyes, didn’t you? You could’ve broken up with me, but you kept me around. You invited him into our apartment, into our bed, Jon – and you did it right in front of me.”

“I’m sorry,” Jon mumbled. “He just gets it. He gets me – and he makes me laugh. I feel like I haven’t done that in years,” he added with a sad smile. “But if it makes you feel any better, Joe and I haven’t slept together yet – and I can’t imagine we will. At least not in any future I can see us having together.”

Brendon wrinkled his nose – a few weeks ago it would have made him feel better to know that his boyfriend wasn’t fucking Joe Trohman but not now. It was like locking the stable door after the horse bolted. The damage was done. Jon had chosen Joe over him because Joe had something that Brendon didn’t – whatever the fuck that was, compassion and understanding and an apparent
disinterest in sex.

“If it wasn’t for Joe, I’d have probably killed myself months ago. He’s been really good to me. He listens to me, he cares…” He flicked the burned-up end of the blunt down onto the top step and Brendon watched the glowing end die as it fizzled in the rain. Jon stubbed it out with the toe of his shoe and pushed his hands into the pockets of his pants. It was a suitable metaphor for their relationship. “He made me realize I want to live.”

Brendon understood – their relationship was dead and no matter how much he wanted to bring it back to life, it was never going to work out between them. There were too many hurt feelings and bruised egos and painful lies. Building bridges isn’t the hard part, Brendon realized; the hard part was trying to swim against the current when they came crumbling down around him.

“I still love you,” Brendon said desperately – and he fucking did. He loved Jon with his entire being. The rain was coming down hard now. He stepped under the awning to stay dry and kicked his feet against Jon’s. Brendon stepped up against him, their breaths fogging together in the cold. “I’ll never not love you, Jon and I’ll always be here for you, no matter what.”

Jon gave him another sad smile and pulled one hand free from his pant’s pocket. He gripped Brendon’s elbow, moving up his arm and around his shoulder. He rubbed at the space between Brendon’s neck and shoulder blade making him squirm. They shared a smile. After a moment, he felt Jon’s strong fingers hook around his neck and pull him against his shoulder in a loose embrace.

“One goodbye hug won’t hurt, will it?” he smiled against Brendon’s ear. Brendon wrapped his arms tight around Jon’s middle and Jon gasped. “Watch the ribs, buddy.”

“Sorry,” Brendon mumbled and buried his face into the material of Jon’s sweater. He smelled like cigarettes and cologne. He smelled like Joe. Brendon felt his eyes start to leak.

“I love you too,” he heard Jon whisper, the words tickling against his ear. “I hope you find your happiness. You deserve it.” He pulled away – too soon for Brendon’s liking. “I’m sure you’ll find someone who can make you happy – a good looking fella like you, shouldn’t take you long at all,” he smiled, his hand falling heavily from Brendon’s shoulder and back into his pocket.

“Yeah, all the boys in Vegas are just lining up, waiting to date a hooker like me.”

Jon laughed, a genuine laugh that reached his eyes. “Well, you never know… Hey, are you any good at poker? Maybe you’ll win big; make your fortune?”

“Yeah. Maybe.” Brendon smiled but it felt forced – all that awaited him in Las Vegas was a dying father, a hopelessly naïve mother and his homosexually repressed brother-in-law.

After a few more minutes of polite goodbyes, Brendon turned away and walked down the steps out onto the sidewalk. He had a feeling he was never going to see Jon again, so he didn’t look back. He didn’t know what he’d do if he turned to see an empty doorway. At least without looking, he could imagine Jon had stood there and watched him leave. He flipped his hood to the rain and watched his sneakers pound the concrete until he reached the end of the block and had to blink the tears from his eyes.

Brendon felt like the final chapter of his story had just been torn from the book he was reading and now the pages lay shredded at his feet. Jon found his happy ending but Brendon’s was just a rough draft that never made it to print.

Scrapped. Rejected. Abandoned.
Chapter 28

Ryan’s cellphone privileges had been revoked – which was not something he’d taken very well at all. Ryan was fuming, angry with himself but unable to admit it. In rehab, small changes caused massive reactions. Everything was intensified – emotions, memories, relationships - Ryan was still learning how to deal with it and he didn’t like being called on his shit, especially when he didn’t have drugs to soften the blow.

“You said you’d help me out,” he spat at Dr. Stump, standing in the middle of the therapist’s office when he found out the news. “You fucking screwed me, man.”

Patrick simply shrugged and splayed his hands. “The deal was that we help each other, Ryan – and you broke one of this facility’s major rules when you decided to have sex with another patient. I can only sign you off for cellphone privileges if you prove yourself to be trustworthy enough and I’m afraid you messed that up. I’m sorry, Ryan but I’m just doing my job.”

_Goddamn son of a bitch._ Ryan cursed the man silently, even though he knew it wasn’t really Patrick’s fault and that he was the only one to blame for his sudden punishment. It wasn’t fair though; his recent phone conversations with Brendon were the only part of his day that he looked forward to and now he didn’t even have that. The depressing vacation that was drug rehabilitation suddenly seemed a whole lot worse.

He’d been in California for two weeks and during that time had been allowed a handful of phone calls which he used to call Brendon, to make sure the boy didn’t forget about him. The last Ryan heard, Brendon was considering moving back to Las Vegas, but he’d been difficult to get a hold of during the last few days.

Ryan didn’t know whether Brendon made it back to Nevada or not or if he was still with that junkie boyfriend of his – maybe they made the move to Las Vegas together. The city had notoriously cheap rent and good work opportunities for hookers, but Dr. Stump was always hovering while they talked, loosely monitoring their conversation in case Ryan was trying to plan a drug hook-up. There was only so much they could say to each other, but Ryan enjoyed hearing Brendon’s slow, smooth voice coming through the end of his cellphone and the promise he made about a week ago, that the two of them could meet up once Ryan completed his program was one of the major factors keeping Ryan in rehab in the first place.

With his cellphone privileges suddenly retracted, he was about this close from giving up, from throwing his hands up and discharging himself for good. Rehab was a big pain in the ass. He was trapped in paradise with a bunch of self-pitying junkies and Ryan hated everyone there because they all reminded him of himself.

“I thought you were cool,” he mumbled, sitting down on the therapist’s couch with a huff and folding his arms high across his chest, “but you’re just like the rest of them – pretending like you care, when all you really care about is yourself and your job and your goddamn paycheck.”

Patrick sighed and pushed his glasses back up his nose with one finger. “I understand your anger and I understand your disappointment, Ryan, but trust me – I’m doing this for your own benefit. You have to learn that your decisions and actions have consequences. You decided to go against the rules and engage in a sexual relationship with another patient and the consequence of that is that I’m going to revoke your cellphone use until further notice. I’m sorry,” he shrugged again, “but them’s the rules.”
Ryan scowled and he was suddenly reminded of being a teenager again, having to follow his parents’ ridiculous rules and getting punished when he didn’t. Ryan really hated being told what to do, he always had and being told he couldn’t do something as simple as making a phone call really ticked him off.

After finding out he wouldn’t be able to use his cellphone anymore, all he really wanted to do was fly out to Las Vegas, book his usual suite at the Bellagio and pay Brendon tens of thousands of dollars just to eat his ass and suck his dick. He’d kill to be able to do that right now – to feel Brendon’s tight throat around the shaft of his cock and his tongue inside his asshole. He needed a good fuck, especially after his disastrous attempt at sex with Keltie Colleen.

“Trouble just seems to follow you, doesn’t it?” Patrick smiled, sitting down opposite Ryan in his armchair with his legs folded underneath him. “Do you want to talk about it?”

“No really,” Ryan sighed, crossing his arms. He was embarrassed – in fact, he was mortally humiliated - because sex with Keltie hadn’t even been worth it. It had been an awkward, bumbling disaster that Ryan would rather forget, but Dr. Stump seemed keen to drag all the gory details from him: why he’d done it and how he thought he’d get away with it. He couldn’t even get his dick hard for her and it hadn’t helped that she’d done nothing but coo and moan and demand that he fuck her.

“Just shut up for a second, will you?” Ryan told her that day in the bathroom. He closed his eyes, stroking his dick as Keltie sat on the edge of the sink with her knees hiked up. He could smell her – powdery and feminine, that distinct smell of female arousal just under his nose.

“Come on, Ryan – just get hard and fuck me already,” she spat, reaching out to run her fingers delicately up his arm.

“Allright. Fuck. Give me a minute…” Ryan stood there, desperately trying to coax his cock to full erection, but it had been pointless. The doubt had already set in and was niggling at the back of his mind. Keltie had always been demanding in bed – and she’d also been one of his more vocal lovers. She was a few years older than him and it always seemed as if Keltie Colleen got all her moves and dirty talk from watching too much porn and it was a lot harder trying to imagine Brendon in front of him when Keltie’s soft, sweet voice kept whispering out words in his ear.

“Turn around,” he told her, pulling her ass from the edge of the sink and spinning her to face the mirror. “Keep your mouth closed. I want to fuck you from behind.”

Keltie huffed. “Oh, there’s a surprise,” she muttered under her breath, but she stood there nonetheless, blinking back at him in the mirror, brown eyes fixed on his, full lips parted. Ryan looked down to see the arch of her back as she stuck her ass up for him, the curves of her tiny waist and the little dimples at the base of her spine. Keltie was beautiful, there was no doubt about that and she sure had a banging body - but Ryan just didn’t feel anything for the woman anymore. Not even lust.

If he used his imagination and kept his eyes closed – and if Keltie managed to keep her mouth shut for long enough – he’d be able to pretend he was fucking a dude. From behind, it all sort of felt the same anyway, right?

His dick still hung soft between his legs and he looked desperately up at the ceiling and blinked his eyes. He wasn’t usually a praying man, but he muttered a soft litany to himself as he stood there. Please don’t fail me now.

As Ryan reflected, Patrick spoke up again. “I understand that in the past you and Miss Colleen had a…” Patrick drew out the syllable, searching for the correct word, “relationship, of sorts?”
“Yeah. If you could even call it that,” he scoffed. He never had a serious relationship with anyone. Not even with himself. “We fucked around for a few weeks but that was years ago – and I hadn’t seen her until she walked in here the other day.”

Patrick nodded and bit the tip of his pen. Ryan developed somewhat of an oral fixation over the years and after two weeks in rehab, all of his thoughts and fantasies were illuminated. Dr. Stump wasn’t even his type – he was too short, too emotionally secure for Ryan - but it didn’t stop him from wondering what the man would look like with his dick between his lips.

“So, there was some kind of attraction between the two of you then? A physical one?”

Ryan shrugged, his shoulders stiff. Years ago there had been – Ryan was attracted to Keltie because just like him, her dark demons hid behind her bubbly confidence but the other day he hadn’t even been able to fuck the woman without desperately imagining it was Brendon in front of him.

“I guess. I don’t know. She kind of bullied me into it.”

That wasn’t strictly true. He guessed he could’ve said no but as with most of his vices, Ryan had been unable to resist Keltie’s allure. When Ryan wanted something, he worked tirelessly to make sure he got it and Keltie had been relentless in her pursuit of him. Ryan found it quite charming – at least it had given his ego a boost but almost as soon as he committed to the deed, he started to regret it. Keltie had always been a rather demanding lover and two weeks without any drugs or alcohol made Ryan all too aware of his shortcomings. They played on a loop in the back of his head these days like a DVD menu and it wasn’t his white noise of choice but Ryan Ross was a glutton for punishment and he just couldn’t help setting himself up for ridicule. Even locked inside the drug-free walls of rehab, he wasn’t safe from scandal.

“But you know that sexual relations are against the rules of this facility,” Patrick reminded him. “You’re meant to be getting clean and learning how to stay sober and sexual relationships only exacerbate unsolved problems – and that’s what we want to concentrate on today, the unsolved problems. We need to focus on getting better before we indulge our need for a relationship with anyone else.”

Patrick did that a lot - we and our - as if they were both in this together.

Ryan hummed, unable to really look the man in the eye. Sex with Keltie had been some of the most abysmal Ryan ever had in his life – he couldn’t stay hard, Keltie couldn’t stay quiet and after five minutes, she sighed in annoyance, pulled away from him and rubbed herself out as he stood behind her and watched his hard-on diminish between his legs.

Keltie brought herself to orgasm in front of him, knees buckling underneath her as she came and Ryan was embarrassed – not because they’d been caught but because he couldn’t perform. His self-confidence was wavering. He couldn’t get hard for a beautiful woman like Keltie Colleen, because Brendon had completely ruined him.

That’s what he desired now - not the smooth, warm curves of a woman but the rough, strong angles of a man - of Brendon the Hooker – the only person who seemed to understand his needs. In his quieter moments of recovery, Ryan found himself pining after the man and no matter what he did to distract himself, at night his memories always came back to how tight Brendon was, how willing and eager he was to please and how pliant he was underneath him as they fucked – and of course, to that one line that kept repeating inside his head. I want to be your fucking whore.

Only a few hours after they’d been caught at it, Keltie discharged herself from the facility and swanned back to the Hollywood socialite scene. Ryan had been in two minds about Keltie’s
departure. On the one hand he was glad, because it meant he didn’t have to face the woman after such a disappointing attempt at sex but in the back of his mind, he also remembered Keltie’s affinity for selling her kiss-and-tell stories to the tabloids and sure enough, a few days after her dramatic exit, a salacious new headline was slapped all over the front covers of the national press.

**Ross was ‘hopeless lover’ says Keltie Colleen after rehab love affair.**

That’s why he was embarrassed - because now the world would think he was a hopeless lover. Ryan just hoped that the story would blow over by the time he left rehab, because the world thinking he was a lousy fuck was possibly worse than them knowing he was a hopeless drug-addict who’d been found OD’d outside his dealer’s apartment two weeks ago. Ryan took pride in his sexual prowess – it was the only thing he still had going for him and now that had been tarnished too. It was as if Keltie pulled the rug from under his feet – and Ryan thought he’d been making progress. Since the scandal broke, he’d been left feeling humiliated and ashamed – but then he guessed sobriety could do that to a man. Suddenly, he was accountable for his actions and after a decade of brushing all of his responsibilities aside, it was difficult learning how to take accountability for himself.

“I personally believe that sex is another addiction of yours,” Patrick noted with a straight face. “How you deal with it, how you talk about it; it’s all very similar to the way you talk about drugs. You’ve fallen prey to it, Ryan. You use sex as another way to avoid dealing with your real issues.”

Ryan could feel his heart thumping. He’d only been talking to Dr. Stump for two weeks and he already had him pinned. Everything that Ryan did was a way to avoid the past - the drugs, the drink, the just-don’t-give-a-fuck attitude - it was all an act, a façade, a way of hiding the monsters within but he only just admitted to himself that he was an alcoholic drug-addict – the last label he needed to be slapped with right now was one reading sex-addict.

“Aren’t you tired of acting like you’re happy, Ryan? Aren’t you fed up pretending that the real issues in your life don’t matter?”

“Well, you seem to know me better than I know myself, Doc. Why don’t you just tell me what these real issues are?” he air-quoted and then quickly folded his arms, meeting Patrick’s eyes with a disinterested gaze.

Patrick smiled. “I’d rather you tell me.”

Ryan shrugged and Patrick took a deep breath, shifting positions in his armchair.

“There’s a lot of sadness locked up inside you, Ryan and I think sometimes you find it hard to rationalize that sadness because of the way you grew up – because your family has money and people think you lead a good life - but depression and anxiety knows no social class; it can attack anyone, regardless of how much money they have or how famous they are. Just because you’re rich, just because you lead a very privileged life, doesn’t mean you don’t have a right to be sad and the life you lead doesn’t make you happy anymore, does it, Ryan?”

Ryan shook his head and then wiped quickly at the tears leaking from his eyes. He blinked back his emotions and bit down hard on the inside of his lip.

“Tell me the reason for your sadness,” Patrick coaxed. “Talk to me. I’m here to help you.”

“What’s the point?” he mumbled, looking down at his hands. “What’s done is done.”

“Well, the point is that sharing what’s bothering you might help lighten the emotional load. You’re already going through an incredibly stressful time as it is – you’re choosing to stand up to your
addiction and I commend you for that, Ryan, you’re doing really well – but the point of these one-on-one sessions is so you can face your other demons. Generally speaking, happy people don’t become drug-addicts and I think there’s something that you’re not telling me. I think it’s something I could help you deal with.”

Ryan sighed and took a deep breath, rubbing his hands over his face as he tried to keep his emotions inside. Sadness was a very odd thing – for such a paralyzing emotion, it seemed like such a small word.

The memory of Marc Willis had been tumbling through his head now for over two weeks and the story had been on his tongue ever since. Marc Willis was the reason he was in this mess; the reason he grew up lopsided and full of hate was because Marc filled him with it when he was fifteen and the longer feelings stay buried, the harder they are to articulate.

Since he’d been seeing Dr. Stump, they covered all sorts of topics – from how Ryan dealt with his family’s resentment towards him, to the fact that he took drugs to quell his almost crippling anxiety but he was yet to tell Patrick that when he was fifteen, he’d been raped by a man his father still called a friend.

Ryan didn’t know how to word it and he wasn’t sure whether he was strong enough to suddenly admit his secrets to a stranger – not without his meds, anyway – but it hurt keeping it all inside. After ten plus years, Ryan felt like if he didn’t tell someone he’d explode and all that would be left of him was fragments of the man he could’ve been.

His breath shuddered out of him. His words felt like tar coming from his mouth – thick and heavy and unpleasant. “When I was fifteen, I was beaten and raped by a friend of my father’s,” he said into his hands. The words were out and the world kept spinning, even if Ryan’s was quickly unraveling. He sat up, but he didn’t make eye contact with Patrick. He looked off to the side, fixing his gaze on the pattern of the wallpaper.

“I never told anyone before because I didn’t want them to know I was weak. I just let it happen; he told me I wanted it and sometimes I remember that the only person who’s ever told me they love me was the man who raped me when I was fifteen,” he finished quietly. “The next day, he wired me a quarter of a million dollars and told me that no one would ever believe me if I told them what he did – but I kept quiet because I was terrified to admit that it even happened. I guess I thought that if I didn’t tell anyone, I could forget about it.”

A silence filled the room and Ryan looked back down at his hands folded in his lap. When Patrick spoke for the first time, his voice was like honey in Ryan’s ears – warm and soothing, filling the tattered edge of his mind.

“I’m so sorry that you had to deal with this on your own for so long, Ryan. You’re not to blame for what happened, you understand that, don’t you?”

Ryan nodded and bit his lip. He could feel the blood pumping in his head and for the first time in years, he felt calm. Like the eye of a storm, Ryan could feel his life falling apart around him; the weight seemed to have suddenly shifted.

He felt at peace, as if his mind and his heart were in sync – and it was terrifying. That short moment of clarity quickly caved and Ryan felt the first tear roll down his cheek.

“Close your eyes, count to ten, breathe,” Patrick told him. “You’re going to be okay.”

* * *

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* * *
Before Brendon pushed open his parents’ sitting room door that evening, he closed his eyes, took a deep breath and let it out on the count of ten.

He left home at eighteen because he wanted to make something of his life. Las Vegas held few good memories for him and things hadn’t changed much since he’d been gone – his parents were a little older and the Strip was a little brighter. The blinking, neon-encrusted casinos and colorful fountains welcomed him home the previous evening, but he felt grey and empty, like a shadow fading without the sun.

At eighteen, he thought Manhattan could offer him sanctuary from his overbearing parents and his sexually repressed brother-in-law. He believed all the movies that painted New York as a glittering wonderland but he hadn’t taken into account how ugly that city could get - a place where pain and greed flooded the streets, where the rich ruled and everyone else struggled to stay awake in the city that never sleeps. He just swapped one iconic playground for another and the black clouds followed him all the way to Nevada.

It had been raining since his arrival.

Brendon returned to Las Vegas less than twenty-four hours ago but his overjoyed mother already organized a hastily put together family meal to celebrate his return. She was thrilled to have her youngest son back, desperate to know all his stories from the big city and so far, Brendon had been able to distract her with questions about his ailing father and the subsequent marriages of his older siblings. Brendon was definitely the black sheep of the Urie family. He was the only one who was still unmarried, the only one who decided to stray from the church and he could tell it was a sore subject for his mother.

That invisible string that attached the family was taut and fraying in the middle, stretched so tight that even the smallest amount of pressure could snap it. He felt like a stranger in his parents’ home, on edge and cautious. His past was hanging over him like a heavy black rain cloud and he felt like all the things he’d seen, all the shit he’d done was written all over his face for everyone to know.

He’d been upstairs lying back on his childhood bed when he heard his sister arrive with Dallon and when his mother called up the stairs to notify him of their arrival, Brendon felt like an awkward teenager sulking in his bedroom, trying his best to avoid socializing with the people he called family.

He waited for five minutes before he plucked up enough courage to go downstairs. Facing Dallon again after all this time was something he started to dread as soon as he got on the plane in JFK. He could sure see the irony in returning home to get over his break-up with Jon now – he walked out of one messy relationship and straight back to another.

Close your eyes, count to ten, breathe, he told himself before pushing through the door into the sitting room. He was truly dreading this reunion – the questions he’d have to answer and the old ghosts he’d have to dig up. As he stood in the doorway, his mother and sister smiled up at him, both of them grinning from ear-to-ear as Dallon stared at his feet.

“There he is,” his mother beamed. “We were about the send out a search party.”

Nowadays, she looked like a more worn out version of the woman he used to know. She had more gray hairs, more worry lines on her forehead and she was a little thicker around the middle than he remembered but she was still the same naïve and hopelessly innocuous mother who raised him. “I can’t believe it’s been eight years,” she sighed.

Brendon could. Only eight years? It felt more like twenty. He was much too young to feel this fucking old.
“I’m so happy to have my baby boy back. You should come to church with us on Sunday,” his mom said, as if the idea suddenly hit her but Brendon would bet she’d been looking for the right moment to suggest his return to church from the moment he got off the plane at McCarran International. “Everyone will be so happy to see you again.”

Brendon hummed. “Maybe,” he said, “but it’s not really my thing anymore.”

His mother did well at hiding her disappointment, like most church folks did but his sister, Lydia, stood from the couch and rolled her eyes as she walked towards him.

“That’s what Dallon’s been saying for the past year and a half. He doesn’t go to church much at all these days,” she sighed, throwing Dallon a concerned look. Brendon tried to not let that snippet of information affect him – the fact that Dallon stopped going to church meant nothing – absolutely nothing. He was probably over his little gay phase anyway. He was still married to his sister after eight years, after all.

Brendon’s sister had always been a pretty girl and she held on to her youthful looks - probably because she was still childless, which for a Mormon woman approaching her thirties was unusual. Brendon would bet the Weekes family was the subject of gossip amongst their religious friends – married for eight years, no kids and a husband who hadn’t been to church in eighteen months.

Lydia wound Brendon into a tight hug and over her shoulder, he caught Dallon’s eye. “It’s good to see you again, Brendon. You changed so much. You look so different,” she laughed, pulling back to smile at him. She looked back at her husband. “We missed you – haven’t we, honey?”

Dallon’s blue eyes snapped towards her and he opened his mouth to reply but obviously thought better of it. Nonetheless, he nodded his head and stood from the couch, wiping his hands on his pants. His sneakers squeaked across the linoleum wood flooring of his parents’ sitting room.

Dallon hadn’t changed. He was still just as effortlessly handsome as he had been when Brendon first fell in love with him – dark hair perfectly messy, blue eyes wide and unsure. Brendon remembered all those nights he spent in the man’s arms and Dallon’s face right before he came, the way his voice sounded as he climaxed, all strained and desperate.

They could’ve had something. They could’ve made a life for themselves in California, Brendon thought – instead they both spitefully removed themselves from each other’s lives. Dallon seemed to be trapped in an unhappy marriage and Brendon’s life had been on a slippery, downwards slope since he was eighteen.

Dallon hovered awkwardly in front of him, unsure whether to commit to a hug or simply shake hands. “Can’t believe it’s been eight years,” he mumbled, before pulling Brendon into his chest. Around his shoulders, Dallon’s arms were strong and soothing. Brendon’s eyes closed against his brother-in-law’s shirt, inhaling the memory of his scent – and Brendon could feel it, that feeling of comfort thrumming through his bones, a million memories being brought back to life by Dallon’s embrace. It felt like electricity, like everything he could’ve had with Jon. Brendon could feel their old flames reignite.

“We did miss you.” Dallon spoke the words into Brendon’s ear, but loud enough that they weren’t heard by only him. He pulled back quickly, still holding tight onto his shoulders and flashed him a nervous smile. “You grew up so much,” he said, his eyes darting across Brendon’s face, trying to drink him in. Brendon felt naked. “You look good.”

He held back a scoff. Dallon was a fucking liar - he looked like shit and felt infinitely worse.
“Thanks,” he smiled as Dallon let go of his shoulders and immediately shoved his hands into the pockets of a grey hoodie.

“So! Tell me all about New York City. I was always nagging Dallon to visit you,” his sister commented, leading him by the arm back to the couch. She sat down next to him and poked his shoulder. “What’s it like out there?"

“Cold,” he replied. “And expensive.”

His sister was a good woman, she never knowingly hurt anyone and she didn’t deserve to have her marriage ruined by her spurned younger brother, no matter how much chemistry he felt between himself and Dallon. His move from Manhattan was Brendon’s fresh start – another chance to get his life back on track. He was going to be a good person from now on and despite what his mother seemed to think, he didn’t need the Lord on his side for that.

He could get his own apartment and an honest job and he could work hard to patch up his relationship with his family. It wouldn’t happen overnight, but Brendon was determined not to fuck up this time.

When Brendon glanced over at Dallon, he was still stood in the middle of the sitting room, fidgeting on the spot. The dude was wound up like a rubber band, tense and awkward as he shifted his weight from foot to foot. He was certainly agitated about something.

Brendon dropped his gaze down to the front of Dallon’s pants and sure enough, through the material, he could see the clear outline of the man’s semi-hard cock. The fact that he still had that effect on his brother-in-law made Brendon’s lips pull up at the corners in a satisfied smirk and he looked knowingly up at Dallon in amusement. Trying to become a better person was all well and good but sex was the only thing Brendon was good at, the one thing he knew he could use to his advantage. Dallon flushed bright red and quickly averted his eyes.

“I’ll go help your mom with dinner,” he mumbled, sneaking towards the kitchen without another look back at Brendon.

Lydia sighed after him. Even after all this time, his sister seemed just as in love as she has been when the pair first met. “He’s so good. Meeting Dallon truly was a gift from god.”

Brendon smiled through gritted teeth. His poor, naïve sister – she was simply Dallon’s cover for his latent homosexuality. He wondered whether his brother-in-law even loved Lydia or whether he was just stuck in a loveless relationship like him and Jon had been, because he hadn’t expected him to be quite that easy to wind up. Eight years is a long time to live without someone – even the messiest break-ups healed in eight years, but Brendon only said one word to him before he had to run off to hide his boner.

He’d grown used to people desiring him, men like Ryan and Marc Willis and all his other nameless, faceless clients. They all sought something inside him that they didn’t possess themselves – humility or pride, innocence and sin. He was a fantasy to those men - nothing more – but Dallon loved him and for a man who made his living selling his body, for a man who’d run his partner into the arms of another man, true love was about as difficult to comprehend as advanced calculus or rocket science.

His heart ached at the realization. He and Jon had always been on different pages when it came to their relationship, but he and Dallon hadn’t – apart from, he supposed, the fact that he ended up marrying his sister, despite all his heartfelt promises.

Lydia blathered in his ear about New York City until dinner was ready. His eldest brother turned up
with his wife and kids and the tension in the house didn’t go unnoticed by Brendon. He couldn’t help feeling that his family resented him for leaving Nevada and not returning home, even after his dad got sick.

He needed a drink or maybe a joint – he wanted to remind them all of how much dick he had to suck, how many time he had his ass fucked by rough clients to help pay his father’s medical bills. Maybe then they’d show him a little sympathy.

When they eventually sat around the table to eat, Brendon was on edge. His family was tiptoeing around him, he could feel it – they probably all had their suspicions about his line of work for years. Dallon sat down opposite him, silently watching as Brendon ate and they were halfway through his mom’s meatloaf when his eldest brother asked the inevitable question.

“So, did you have a girlfriend back in Manhattan?”

Brendon flushed and the table fell quiet, waiting for his answer. “No,” he said, with a shrug of his shoulder, his smile tightening on his lips. “No girlfriend.”

He heard his sister bite back a scoff. “What about a boyfriend then?” she asked under her breath with her hand covering her mouth. Dallon glared down into his dinner, jaw tense, shoulders drawn up as he pushed his peas around his plate. The silence swelled and Brendon could feel the tension that his sister’s snide comment caused pushing down on him. If Brendon was that kind of guy, he’d have told Dallon to keep his woman in check.

His mother flashed his sister a warning glare but Lydia had always been the most outspoken sibling of his. She sat back in her chair offended. “What? We’ve all been thinking it for years. Brendon’s gay – it’s obvious. He-”

“Lydia,” his mother snapped. “That’s enough. This is not dinner table talk. Brendon would you pass the gravy, please?”

It was an oddly familiar family dinner. In that moment, Brendon felt like he’d never been away. He reached over the table and passed the gravy boat to his mother and then cleared his throat.

“I actually was in a relationship in New York,” he admitted. “His name was Jon, we were together for about six years but we broke up – that’s the real reason why I’m home. So, I guess Lydia’s right; I am gay.”

The room fell silent and Brendon watched his family’s reactions. He wasn’t going to let them make a big deal about this – they were all stiffly religious but they were good people.

“I told you so,” Lydia slapped Dallon’s arm and the sudden contact made him drop his fork onto the plate with a loud clatter. Brendon caught his eye but only for a short second before Dallon looked away. “Wow, Brendon. I’ve been saying that for years. Mom and dad were always hoping you’d come back here with a girlfriend; I was always like if anything, he’s bringing a boyfriend back. Didn’t I tell you he was gay, honey?” She rocked Dallon’s shoulder and smiled as if she just won a contest.

Dallon didn’t move; his whole body was drawn up tight, his shoulders hunched over his dinner plate as the news settled around the table. He was kind of thankful that his sister diffused the tension but now the silence was settling again. Dallon’s hair was hiding his eyes but Brendon could see the way he was biting his lip. Dozy fucker probably thought he was going to out him too.

His mother wiped at the corner her mouth with a napkin. “Wow, honey. Is that the reason you left?
Did you think we wouldn’t accept you?”

He left because he couldn’t stand to watch the man he loved marrying his sister but he wasn’t going to admit that over a family dinner. He nodded and then shrugged. His sister was fidgeting in her chair like a child with something to say.

“I personally think it’s a little weird,” she admitted, fanning her hand across her chest. “I don’t know, but the idea of two men being together like that kind of grosses me out, but only God can judge you, Brendon. We accept you; gay or not, don’t we, Dallon?”

Dallon raised his head, his eyes fixing solidly on the spot just left of Brendon’s face. “Yeah,” he managed, his voice dry and rough coming from his mouth.

“Well, that’s very mature of you, Lydia. I’m glad that your religion acts as a cover for your homophobia.”

“I just said I accepted you. Love the sinner, hate the sin; isn’t that what mom and dad always told us?”

“It’s not a sin though,” Brendon protested quietly, shaking his head and looking down at his dinner.

“Well... it is. I think everyone around this table can agree on that one,” his sister bit. Brendon desperately wanted Dallon to fight his corner – even if he just told his sister to pipe down, he wanted the man to defend him.

Dallon pushed his chair back and stood from the table. Everyone’s eyes shot towards him. Brendon’s heart started thumping inside his chest, anxiously hoping that the man found some balls in the past eight years.

“Does anyone need a glass of water?” he asked with a huge, fake grin on his face.

Brendon squared his jaw and looked down at his unfinished meatloaf. His childhood favorite suddenly seemed majorly unappealing.
On Sunday, Brendon’s parents went to church, leaving him alone in their house for the first time since his return to Las Vegas.

He’d been back in Nevada for almost a week and during that time he hadn’t heard from Jon or Ryan. Every time his cellphone rang, he hoped it was one or the other; Jon calling to say things had already gone to shit with Joe and that he wanted to make another go of it and that he was so sorry, he really did love him… or Ryan calling to say that he was out of rehab early and wanted to meet up in some fancy LA beach house to fuck. That was quickly becoming his favorite daydream; it sure beat living back in the ‘burbs with his parents.

If Ryan wanted to pay him again, Brendon sure as hell wasn’t going to refuse. This time though, Brendon would hold that fucker to his word. He’d make sure he got his full fee up front so that he couldn’t be cheated out of what he’d been promised again. As the old saying goes: fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me. If Brendon learned anything during his time in New York, it was that you can’t trust a rich man with money – after all, why would you trust someone with something that meant so little to them?

Either way, he’d been back home for a week and that had been long enough for Brendon to realize that the thing he hated the most about returning home was feeling so alone.

He wasn’t short of family company; his mother was always fussing around him, making sure he was eating enough and was warm enough and breathing enough. It was a rare occurrence that Brendon was actually physically alone, but mentally and emotionally he never felt so far-removed from a group of people. However much he loved his parents, living back with them after eight years and very little contact was a difficult adjustment and after almost a week, the reality of his situation was just beginning to set in.

He was twenty-six and living with his parents. His heroin-addicted, hooker ex-boyfriend left him for another man and that wasn’t even the least of his worries, not when Ryan Ross seemed to have taken a sudden interest in him. His name was so close to being leaked to the press, Brendon could just feel it and he still chose to spend his mornings pouring over the tabloids to check for any new scandals that rich idiot may have been involved in.

Brendon felt like he was slowly losing his mind. Eight years in New York City had finally broken him and at night, on his old childhood bed, his pillow would grow damp with his tears as he let them silently pour from his eyes as he blinked out of the window. Sometimes, he didn’t even know why he was crying and those were always the saddest of nights. He was crying for Jon and Ryan and Dallon and the man he might have been - because the damage was irreversible. There was no amount of counseling that would help him get over the shit he’d seen...

Brendon’s mom and dad lived in a four-bedroomed, single-family home on the outer suburbs of Summerlin and growing up, the house always seemed so cramped – five growing kids and two adults living in a home that was decidedly too small for seven people certainly caused its fair share of childhood arguments but with just his mom and dad living there these days, Brendon realized just how big the house actually was.

It was a far cry from where he spent his previous six years, holed up in that shithole apartment with Jon, in a room barely big enough for the two of them. His parents’ house felt like a mansion to him and with all his siblings married off and living across the two Mormon-heavy states of Utah and Nevada, the place felt empty. Despite all the space, however, Brendon still felt like he couldn’t avoid
his mother and her constant questions about his life in New York.

The details were always kind of sketchy. He didn’t want to talk about New York because the reality always showed in his eyes. Brendon kept their conversations short and he painted Manhattan as a colorful metropolis, full of opportunity and freedom and all the other bullshit that middle-aged suburban Americans seemed to love so much.

His father was currently in remission after his second course of chemotherapy and if Brendon thought that his mom aged since he’d last seen her, it wasn’t a patch on how his father looked these days. He was drawn and sickly, grey skin pulled over bone and the weight his mother gained, his dad lost. He’d always been a handsome man, dignified and tall and always well-dressed but now a scratchy grey beard covered his usually clean-shaved face and he sat in the armchair, coughing and slowly dying.

He kind of reminded Brendon of Jon - all hollow and beaten down by life, that permanent look of exhaustion constantly flickering on his face.

His father hadn’t said anything about his son’s coming out. He nodded his head and coughed into his fist as they waved Lydia and Dallon off that night and he put his hand on Brendon’s shoulder, gave it a quick rub and said, “We’re glad to have you back, son.”

His mother, however, seemed to have no difficulty finding the words to express his father’s unease at Brendon’s sexuality.

“You father’s disappointed but neither of us is surprised. We all wondered about you, Brendon,” she told him one morning as she cleaned the kitchen. “You’re an adult now, but I have to warn you – no bringing men back to this house, okay?”

“Wow. Okay, mom. God.” Brendon inwardly cringed at the idea of fucking some random dude with his parents sleeping in the next room.

“You father and I can deal with the fact you’re…” she paused - she couldn’t even say it. “A homosexual… so long as you keep it out of our home. Understand?”

“I understand.” he repeated, all hopes for family Thanksgiving dinners with any future significant other dashed in the process.

She hadn’t acknowledged it much further than that but she didn’t have to say anything for Brendon to know that she was disappointed in him. It hurt to be told that his parents would never accept him. Even if they did manage to stitch up old wounds, it didn’t make any difference – his parents made their feelings clear; they didn’t agree with it and they didn’t want to hear about it. Keep it out of our home, his mother said.

When she said that, he wanted to immediately out Dallon, that fucking snake in the grass, fronting like he was ultimate husband material. It was surely a sick twist of fate that after all his lies, Dallon was still a respected member of the Urie’s extended family.

It was infuriating, but mostly it just made him sad. Brendon felt like his heart was in knots – he noticed how many fake smiles he flashed these days and that slow, creeping feeling of dread that struck either his head or his chest or his stomach at night.

His mother only asked about Jon once – not that Brendon particularly minded about that. He didn’t want to let her see just how much their break-up hurt him and in his quieter moments, he often found himself thinking about Jon – about his smile first thing in the morning and the way he laughed when
he was stoned. Thinking about Jon brought on all sorts of feelings of inadequacy and Brendon could never quite shake them from his mind.

“So, this… boyfriend of yours?” she started, looking up at him as she was peeling vegetables over the sink one afternoon. “Was he a nice guy?”

Brendon thought about it. A heroin-addict. A hooker. A cheat and liar – but Jon was still a better man underneath all that than Brendon was. “Yeah,” he decided with a slow nod. “He really was.”

“That’s good to hear.” She paused for a long time before asking her next question. “Why did the two of you part company?”

*Part company* – like it was some kind of business contract. Brendon guessed she wasn’t too far from the truth. He sighed, thinking back to all those little moments he watched Jon and Joe share - all the shoulder rubs and back slaps and coy glances – a perfect picture of two people falling in love. *God, it hurt to think about.* Brendon lowered his gaze to hide the slow, silent tears.

“I guess we both wanted different things,” he shrugged, biting down hard on the inside of his lip.

“Oh, that’s a shame,” his mother remarked absently. She sucked in a deep breath. “Would you grab me another potato from the pantry please, honey?”

And that was that. She hadn’t mentioned it since but Brendon agreed that the less his parents knew about his drug-addicted, hooker ex-boyfriend, the better.

That Sunday morning, Brendon sat back on his parents’ couch and flicked through the TV channels. There was nothing on – a thousand channels and not a thing to watch on any of them, apart from sports he didn’t care for, news he’d rather not know about and scripted reality TV that made his love life in New York look relatively normal by comparison. Eighties sitcom repeats, celebrity gossip shows and crappy made-for-TV movies.

He was just about to switch off the television when his brain processed the words he heard a few channels back. Brendon’s heart suddenly contracted, his stomach tightening and his face flushed at the name he swore he heard – and sure enough, when he flicked back, Ryan Ross’s face stared back at him from the screen. He pushed himself up from the couch cushions and turned up the volume.

The presenters were mocking him. “An alcoholic, a drug-addict… Now a sex-addict too?” one of them jeered. “Is there any addiction this guy won’t turn his hand to?” A chorus of cackles rang out from the TV.

They were talking about a recent indiscretion Ryan faced in rehab involving some Hollywood socialite called Keltie. Brendon barely knew who she was, but he recognized her face from the magazines he read in hotel lobbies while waiting to get fucked. Brendon didn’t know what she was famous for, but if she hung out with Ryan Ross, it probably wasn’t much.

They’d been caught fucking in the bathrooms at their Malibu rehab facility, which Brendon deemed the epitome of a first world problem and now all the news stories were going crazy over the fact that she called him a crappy lay.

Brendon almost wanted to defend him because he experienced enough crappy lays to know that Ryan certainly shouldn’t be considered one of them. This Keltie Colleen chick had been caught with her panties around her ankles, discharged herself and subsequently sold her story to the highest bidder and Brendon suddenly understood why a man as handsome and famous as Ryan Ross resorted to fucking hookers – at least with a hooker he could pay for some kind of discretion.
Or maybe Brendon was a soft touch? A million people in his situation might not have been so discreet, they would’ve gone straight to the press to divulge all of Ryan’s shady secrets - but Brendon hadn’t kept quiet to save Ryan’s embarrassment. He’d done it to save his own, because he was terrified of the people he cared about learning his secrets.

He hadn’t heard from Ryan in over a week and maybe this was the reason why. Perhaps he was lying low after his latest disgrace? Perhaps he’d been banned from making phone calls until he learned how to behave?

Probably not, he reminded himself. In the wake of his sobriety, Ryan probably just opened his eyes wide enough to see that keeping in contact with a male prostitute wasn’t integral to his recovery. Brendon let out a dissatisfied sigh and switched the TV off as the show moved on to its next news story.

He put his head in his hands and thought about Ryan Ross, about that brief moment of his life where he’d been let into Ryan’s world - the fancy restaurant and his wonderful apartment looking over Central Park. New York was a city of dreams and Ryan was certainly living one up there in his multi-million dollar penthouse. Brendon could’ve stayed in that shower forever. If he hadn’t been so worried about Jon’s reaction concerning him not returning home that night, he’d have stayed curled up in Ryan’s bed too. He’d have had breakfast with the man and possibly given him a morning blowjob if he was feeling generous.

He pulled his phone from the front pocket of his pants and brought up the man’s number. One quick text wouldn’t hurt. After all, what the fuck did he have to lose now?

What’s up? he tapped out and then added, Been thinking about you. Hit me up sometime. Brendon.

His thumb hovered over the send button. Ryan was handsome and he was rich; he was everything Brendon ever wanted in a man and the exact opposite of Jon – financially secure, unafraid of intimacy, a confident lover - but he was also a drug-addict who wound up OD’d outside Pete Wentz’s apartment, which really didn’t make him any different from Jon at all. Maybe it was the masochist in him, but he really had lousy taste in men.

He looked back down at his phone, the words still waiting on the screen in front of him. After another moment’s consideration, he decided not to send it. He may as well scratch Ryan’s name from his little black book, because hankering after a celebrity as infamous as him wasn’t going to get him anywhere.

Brendon stood from the couch and wandered into the dining room. His parents’ house felt empty, a cavernous tomb of childhood memories that was ready to eat him up.

He grew up so unsure of himself, so terrified of admitting who he was at his most natural and he could feel that void in his heart widening. For a heart that felt so empty half the time, it sure was heavy carrying it around.

He let his eyes fall on the family pictures on top of the mantelpiece – professionally shot photographs of his nieces and nephews and his brothers and sisters on their wedding days. His gaze rested on Lydia and Dallon’s wedding portrait and his heart clamped up. Behind it, covered in dust was a frame holding a picture of him as a kid – big innocent smile and stupid haircut. The sudden wave of emotion caught Brendon off guard as it spilled from his eyes. He choked back a cry as he looked at his younger self - he hadn’t planned on a life like this. He had a good childhood; he’d been loved and cared for but Dallon made it impossible for him to stay in Nevada. Dark-haired men with fucked up commitment issues - Brendon evidently had a soft spot for them too, if his past relationships were anything to go by.
Brushing the dust from his picture frame, Brendon placed it back on the mantel. He needed to find someone he could buy some weed from, but his contacts in Nevada were non-existent. He was suffering from headaches and restlessness. He found it difficult to sleep at night and often found himself too wound up to think about anyone other than Jon and Ryan and Dallon, and marijuana always helped him relax. It loosened him, transferred that emptiness inside his heart to his head, which was infinitely easier to deal with.

A few moments later, Brendon’s thoughts were interrupted by a knock on the door. The sudden noise startled him and initially he hung back in the dining room, gutlessly hoping whoever it was would just give up and go away but at the third knock, Brendon walked out into the hallway and towards the front door, pushing his eye against the peephole.

Motherfucking Dallon – twisting his fingers and biting his lip. He looked every inch the guilty, sexually repressed Mormon boy that Brendon could’ve ended up. He wrapped his hand around the doorknob and pulled open the door. He’d almost forgotten what his sister said about Dallon not going to church these days. Their eyes locked through the screen door and Brendon tried hard to ignore the little jump inside his stomach.

“Hey,” Dallon greeted him, from behind the screen, awkward on the doorstep. “You got a minute to talk? The family’s in church for at least another two hours,” he said, looking at his watch. “I thought we could catch up? Maybe I could take you for lunch or something?”

Brendon resisted the urge to roll his eyes and instead flicked open the lock on the screen door and stepped back to let him in. “Sure,” he said. “Let me just grab my shoes.”

“What’s it like being back?” Dallon asked after a pause, as Brendon rooted around in the closet under the stairs for his sneakers.

“As good as can be expected,” Brendon answered into the darkness. “Which is to say; pretty shitty. My family hates me, so…”

“They don’t hate you,” Dallon protested weakly.

Brendon found his shoes and slipped his feet into them. “You’re right,” he shrugged, avoiding eye contact. “They don’t hate me, but in the words of your wife, they think I live a life of sin.”

He glanced at Dallon as he tied his laces. The older man looked away and shoved his hands into the pockets of his pants.

“And I was dumb enough to think you’d stick up for me the other night - you know, after I came out and my sister said all that shit? I honestly hoped you’d fight my corner.”

Dallon looked down at his feet. “Things are complicated between Lydia and I. The baby issue is a big one right now. She wants kids; I don’t. She’s still upset that I’ve not been to church in a while – she says I’m showing her up, that people talk about us. About a year ago, I suggested we should take a break, if only for a couple of weeks, but she was having none of it. Your sister’s a Mormon girl through and through. She thinks being married is the be all and end all.”

“Yeah, that’s crazy. She almost acts like she has no idea her perfect husband has been lying to her for the best part of a decade.”

Dallon’s cheeks flushed and the silence swelled. Getting up from the floor, Brendon looked up at his brother-in-law for the first time since he entered the hallway. “So, why did you stop going to church? I’m assuming that’s where you’re meant to be now. My sister said you hadn’t been for about a year
“Yeah…” he shrugged, trailing off. “You know how it is.”

“Praying to a god that doesn’t exist? Yeah, I know how that is.”

“Well, I wouldn’t quite say he doesn’t exist, but…”

“I stared enough demons in the face back in New York to know that God doesn’t exist, Dallon. You’re just kidding yourself. You and the rest of my crazy fucking family.” Brendon sighed and turned away so Dallon couldn’t see his face. Another silence descended and he could hear the other man fidgeting on the spot.

“I missed you,” Dallon whispered. “I missed you so much, Brendon, you wouldn’t believe. The reason I stopped going to church was because I realized how messed up it was that I was praying for your return – for purely selfish reasons, so that I could see you again, say sorry…”

Brendon had to bite down on his lip to stop himself from welling up. “This is the last thing I need right now, Dallon,” he sighed. “New York was a tough city, I’m glad to be out of it, but it’s no better coming to live back here.”

“Well, I’m glad you chose to come home,” Dallon said quietly, rocking on his heels, his eyes still glued to the toes of his sneakers. “I missed you and so did Lydia – and your mom and dad; we all missed you.” After a quiet moment, Dallon tipped his head towards the door. “D’you want to go for a drive? There’s a good sushi place down the way; if you like sushi and don’t mind eating lunch with me, I’ll pay for the two of us.”

Brendon was reminded of all his clients in New York – those sad, closeted bisexuals who’d pay for his company over lunch. “You don’t need to bribe me to spend time with you, Dallon,” he said, stepping towards him. Dallon’s collar was crumpled. Brendon reached up to straighten it. “I’ll come willingly,” he breathed, letting his palm drag down his brother-in-law’s chest. Brendon saw the Adam’s apple in Dallon’s throat bob, he heard him swallow and quietly clear his throat.

“You will?” he managed to choke out, reddening. He may not have been able to get what he wanted with Jon, but he knew he could with Dallon. Brendon let a smile pull at his lip and watched Dallon squirm under his touch.

“I always did, didn’t I?”

Dallon nodded barely, just the once and let his eyes slip closed. He was almost keening into the palm of Brendon’s hand – the dude looked like he hadn’t been touched like this in years. Brendon let his hand slip back up the man’s chest, up his neck and around his jaw. When he saw the tears leak over Dallon’s eyelids and heard a shuddery exhale of breath, he pulled back.

“Are you going to take me for a drive or what?” Brendon asked, smile still playing on his lips.

Dallon sniffed. “Yeah,” he said, quickly blinking away his tears. “Let’s go.” He swung his keys around his finger and walked towards the door. Brendon followed him, because he was certain that Dallon would be the only member of his family to lend a sympathetic ear to his problems – not that he could ever divulge the man all of his secrets. There were some things – like his life as a Manhattan escort and his subsequent affair with a billionaire socialite that simply shouldn’t be shared.

When they sat down at the sushi restaurant for lunch, Brendon gazed briefly over the menu. It seemed to be a recurring theme, this – feeling awkward and out of his depth whenever anyone offered to buy him a meal and he sat there, looking at the pictures on the menu card. Brendon already
decided he’d do what he usually did in this situation and let Dallon choose what they ate.

“So, what’s it like in New York?” Dallon asked, once the waitress filled their water glasses.

“Expensive,” Brendon answered.

“Yeah – and cold, you said that the other night. What were you doing out there?”

Brendon paused – some months, he sent thousands of dollars to his parents to help with his father’s medical bills and even though his mom constantly told him they’d still to be able to make payments without his help, he knew they wouldn’t. He wasn’t going to admit he earned that money sucking rich dick on the Upper East Side, but he thought about his answer enough during the past few days for the lie to roll easily off his tongue.

“I was doing a few jobs, waiting tables, working at a bar – you earn some major tips working in Manhattan. I did some busking on the weekends when I was free and people are always keen to give you money if you’re out in Times Square. It’s like they just throw it away half the time.”

Anyone with any kind of life-experience would question how a man without a proper career was able to send thousands of dollars to his parents each month, but not Dallon. Dallon just smiled at him, a soft look of fondness crossing his face.

“So you carried on with the music thing? Your mom and dad said you were working on it out there. I always told you, you were pretty talented.”

The truth was that he hadn’t picked up an instrument in over eight years; those dreams died the second he found himself stood on a street corner, pulling men’s dicks to climax for twenty bucks. “Yeah,” he sighed, the conversation dying quickly in the air.

Dallon took a sip of water and looked down at the table. “Your ex, what did he do?”

Brendon made a noise that sounded like umm and looked around desperately. “He was a, uh. A chef,” he said, eyes setting on the sushi chef working in the background. “He had a really good job; he earned good money which was why I was able to help with dad’s treatment.”

Dallon looked up at him with a smile. “Lydia thought you were selling drugs to have that amount of money each month.”

A nervous laugh escaped Brendon’s lips. “Nah, nothing like that. I made an honest living. Jon too.” He felt his face flush with the effort of his lie. “Besides, drugs dealers are just the worst.”

“Speaking from experience?” Dallon asked, raising an eyebrow.

He shrugged. Of course, he was speaking from experience – there was Joe and Pete; the two dealers who’d been vying for Jon’s heart. If Brendon’s type was the broken, then Jon’s was men who promised they could patch him back together with narcotics and for that reason alone, drug dealers really were the worst.

“I think people expected you to be home a lot sooner after your dad got sick, Brendon.”

Brendon detached his gaze from Dallon’s and blushed – he was ashamed that he left it such an embarrassingly long time to return home and visit his dad. Every month, Brendon and Jon struggled to make ends meet and every month, Brendon put off a trip back to Vegas – but they were each their own boss, so to speak and they could work as much or as little as they wanted. Jon worked to fund his various addictions and just enough to pay rent. Brendon worked to support his parents and pay
off Jon’s debts. If he really cared about his family that much it wouldn’t have taken him long to save up some extra cash for the trip – he would’ve had enough money in a few short nights.

“I know there’s no excuse,” he admitted, “but I guess I thought my money would be better off going straight to dad instead of paying for a trip out here. Plus, I was with Jon – he wasn’t the kind of partner you introduce to your parents and I was kind of worried about seeing you again, if I’m honest. I didn’t know if you’d want to speak to me again after what happened before I left.”

There was a pause and Dallon frowned. “When you left, I wanted to follow you.”

“Why didn’t you?”

“Because I was scared,” he stated simply with a shrug. “I thought about you almost every day though. I prayed that you’d come home or… I don’t know, call me – or write me.” He shook his head and rubbed his finger over a water stain on the table. “I guess I was always worried about you and how you were getting on. I hated to think you didn’t come home because of me, because of what happened…”

“You married my sister, Dallon,” Brendon spat, glaring over at the older man. “You promised me all this shit and then you married my goddamn sister. I’d have preferred you to leave me for another man; at least that way I’d’ve know you were being honest with yourself.” He shook his head in disbelief and looked despondently around the restaurant. Looking back at Dallon, he said, “At least that way I wouldn’t have to admit that I lost my virginity to my fucking brother-in-law.”

“Alright! Alright…” Dallon hissed, glancing over his shoulder.

“No one’s listening in on us, Dallon – and trust me, no one here gives a fuck about your sexuality. The fact that you’ve been married eight years and hiding it from your wife though?” Brendon took a sip of water. “Now that’s gossip.”

Dallon rolled his eyes. He was such a handsome man, Brendon thought in that moment. He had a few more lines since the last time he’d seen him, but he aged exceptionally well - if anything Dallon was more handsome than before. They would’ve made a good-looking couple - if Dallon managed to pull his thumb out his ass and come out the closet, that is.

“So, what are you?” Brendon asked, nodding his chin at Dallon. “Bi, gay, straight? What?”

“I don’t know,” he muttered. “I’m still confused, okay? It’s not easy dealing with this.”

“All you have to do is grow some balls and leave her. It actually is easy – but you’re a coward, Dallon; even eight years later, you’re still a coward.”

“I love your sister, okay? I do, she’s a good person and I’m really fond of her…”

“But?”

Dallon let out a heavy sigh and looked back down at the table. “But for years, I thought that living a lie would be easier than actually admitting the truth – and now you’re back and I’m not so sure anymore,” he finished, blue eyes nervously looking up at him. “I thought I had my shit together until you came home – and I know I’m a coward. I tell myself that every single day. It’s exhausting Brendon, pretending to be this person I’m not, being told I should hate myself, that what I feel deep down is wrong and a sin and…” he broke off, shaking his head slowly. “They say it’s immoral. I always envied you, y’know? Getting out of Vegas, starting a life for yourself in a new city, being able to just cut off all ties with the family and live the life you wanted to.”
Brendon laughed through his nose and shook his head. If only Dallon knew the full story. He left a complete train wreck behind him in New York, thinking that if he left the city he’d escape his feelings too, but it was all the same shit, just on a different day.

“I just did what I had to do,” he replied as the waitress returned to their table with their order. Dallon looked every inch the broken man he was and Brendon felt sorry for him – he failed at trying to fix Jon and he definitely hadn’t hung around long enough to patch Ryan back up, but he knew he could help Dallon; his sexually-repressed, do-gooding brother-in-law, who spent his entire life pretending to be someone he wasn’t. It wasn’t Dallon’s fault that he’d been raised by a family who couldn’t accept him, in a religion that constantly warned him of the abomination of homosexuality. No wonder he was so fucked up.

Brendon broke apart his wooden chopsticks and followed Dallon’s lead – he didn’t know the correct sushi etiquette, but between mouthfuls, Dallon assured him that it was the best sushi in town. Brendon was skeptical – after all, how good could sushi really be in the middle of the desert?

“So, have you ever told anyone else?” he asked, once the waitress had been around to check if everything was okay. He knocked his foot against Dallon’s under the table when he didn’t immediately answer.

“You mean, about us?”

“About us, about you…” Brendon shrugged. “Has there been anyone else?”

“You’re the only one,” he admitted, blushing. “Pretty pathetic, I guess – thirty-two and I’ve only ever slept with two people.”

“And they were related too, which is pretty creepy.”

Dallon huffed and looked down at his plate. “Please don’t hate me, Brendon – when your sister told me you were coming home, it felt like my whole life caved in. I spent eight years trying to forget about you, about how you made me feel and now you’re home and you’re here and I have no idea how I should react to that.” He looked up at him as if Brendon might know the answer.

After eight years apart, Brendon didn’t know how to react to Dallon either. Brendon’s life had spiraled out of control in all sorts of directions – the hooking wasn’t even the worst of it – but Dallon’s seemed to have been on pause since he left. He was no more at ease with his true sexuality, he was living a lie being married to his sister and he still didn’t have the balls to take charge of his life.

“So, what’s your life plan? Stay married to Lydia and keep lying to everyone around you? What on earth would the family say, Dallon? Their perfect little son-in-law is actually a massive queer,” he goaded. “It must be a full time job living this lie; it’s enough to drive a man crazy.”

“I know,” he agreed. “Trust me, I know – and I’m not queer.”

“But you’re not straight either. You fucked me for a year and a half – and you loved it.” He saw Dallon’s Adam’s apple bob in his throat. “You loved every single second of it,” he whispered, his voice low. “You got to come inside my ass. I sucked your dick and I swallowed your come – does Lydia do that for you? I’ll bet I can suck dick better than her…” Dallon’s eyes were closed; his head dropped forward and his hair hiding his face. His knuckles were white around his glass of water.

“Brendon,” he started, his voice quiet and choked. “Maybe this wasn’t such a good idea.”

“Bullshit,” he smiled. “I bet you jerk off and think of me – about my tight ass and my throat. I had a
lot of practice at sucking dick when I was in New York, Dallon. You look like you’re in need of a little something that’ll help you loosen up a little.” He reached across the table to brush his knuckles against Dallon’s.

Dallon snatched his hand away and sat upright, shoving his hands into his lap. His face was bright red. Brendon would bet he had a boner under the table. “Are you done?” he snapped. “Did you want to order any more food, because if not, I’ll get the check and then I’ll drop you off at your parents’ place before church finishes.”

“No. I’m good,” Brendon shrugged. Dallon mumbled a quiet acknowledgement and pushed his chair back from the table, wandering off in the direction of the cash register to settle the check. He adjusted his pants as he walked.

Brendon watched after him for a few moments before leaving the table and walking towards the door. He wanted Dallon to love him – he wanted so desperately for someone to love him and Dallon was wound too tight to even respond to his advances. He leaned against the brick wall of the restaurant. The Las Vegas suburbs were a depressing place to be and for the first time in his life, Brendon felt truly lost.

His parents hated him, his first love was living a lie that dangerously involved his sister and he moved back to a city where he didn’t know anyone anymore. Back in New York, all he had were a ton of bad memories and an ex-boyfriend who’d fallen in love with another man right under his nose – not to mention the fact that he was about this close to being exposed as Ryan Ross’s secret lover. When that shit hit the proverbial fan, Brendon wanted to be as far away from his parents as possible. They’d never forgive him and neither would Jon and he fucked up so irrevocably bad that the damage was irreversible. He touched his hand to his forehead and let out a shaky breath; the tears slipping quietly from his eyes, his stomach sinking heavily inside him. He felt like he was about to have a nervous breakdown.

“Hey,” he heard Dallon’s voice next to him, snapping him out of his daze. “What’s up? Are you – are you crying?”

“No,” he snapped, but he was and it was useless trying to hide his tears. He wiped the heel of his palm over his eyes and sucked in a shaky breath. “Just give me a minute. I’ll be fine.”

Dallon hung next to him for a few moments, uncomfortable at his side and silently watching him try and regain his composure, but after a second, he spoke up. “Well, okay… I’ll go wait in the car.”

Dallon was sat in the driver’s seat with the ignition running and when Brendon closed the door and buckled up, he hooked his arm over the back of the passenger seat to reverse out from his parking space. As he did, Brendon watched him, clean shaven jaw and perfectly messy hair, his cold blue eyes hidden behind a pair of sunglasses. He reached up to touch his arm and this time, Dallon didn’t pull away.

“I missed you too,” he said, barely pushing the words out of his mouth. “I missed us.”
His brother-in-law looked at him through the dark shades of his glasses and nodded, pulling his arm away to hold the steering wheel. “I never stopped loving you, Brendon,” he admitted as they pulled out of the parking lot. “You meant more to me than anyone ever has. You still do. What we had, it felt real.”

Brendon felt the tears build up behind his eyes and he wiggled his nose to relieve the tickle. “I used to be your angel,” he reminded him, nervously sliding his hand against Dallon’s thigh.

The man laughed – quiet, barely more than a breath. “You still are.”

He took one hand from the steering wheel and linked his long fingers with Brendon’s and they drove in silence, locked together like that until they pulled into the driveway of Brendon’s family home.
Chapter 30

What’s up? Been thinking about you. Hit me up sometime. Brendon.

Four sentences, eleven words – that’s all it had taken for Ryan’s feigned indifference towards Brendon the Hooker to go flying out of the window when he regained access to his cellphone after one long, phoneless month.

He was halfway through his rehabilitation program and had been at the clinic in Malibu for six weeks – his longest stint in rehab and officially the longest he’d been without any kind of drugs since he smoked his first joint with Gabe when he was thirteen, down on the jetty of his parents’ mansion on Long Island.

Ryan was proud of himself – getting clean felt like a small price to pay for a clear head and a new perspective and during his time at the facility, he had a chance to talk through a lot of his issues with Dr. Stump. He’d been holding so many emotions back and for so long that it felt good to finally share his problems – all about Marc Willis, his unwitting father’s best friend and the fact that what happened to him when he was a kid truly ruined his ability to function as an adult.

Patrick was a sympathetic friend and once Ryan started talking, he hadn’t been able to stop. He told Patrick everything there was to know about the man who held him down on his couch when he was fifteen and raped him – all the way up to the day he’d been sat in his parents’ living room all those weeks ago, with busted knuckles and blood under his fingernails.

“Sometimes I worry that he’s done it more than once, not just to me, but to others,” Ryan admitted during one session. “I wouldn’t even wish that on my biggest enemy.”

“It’s still not too late to file a report,” Patrick told him, pushing his glasses up the bridge of his nose. Patrick also told him that once he made peace with his demons, it’d be easier to lead a drug-free and happy life.

Ryan said, “I’ll never forgive him, if that’s what you’re suggesting.”

“I’m not suggesting that you forgive him, Ryan – but you should learn to forgive yourself,” Dr. Stump told him that afternoon. “You didn’t deserve it and it wasn’t your fault. You’re not to blame for what that man did to you when you were young – he is – and as I said, it’s still not too late to file a report against him.”

Ryan frowned at the prospect of going to the police. He hadn’t explicitly named Marc Willis in front of Patrick and despite the amount of time he spent thinking about it, he still didn’t want to go to the cops and claim he’d been molested ten years ago. The world knew enough of his secrets and this was the one he was most protective of, most ashamed of - even if Patrick did constantly remind him that it hadn’t been his fault.

He grew up with a victim complex – he attributed all of his failings to the events that happened when he was fifteen and Patrick was slowly teaching him that he needed to accept his past and make steps to move on, because otherwise, it would eat him up inside and staying clean would be almost impossible.

“Taking drugs to forget about your past is like pulling the weed without killing the roots; it’s not tackling the main problem. Yeah, it helps for a little while but weeds grow back if you don’t deal with them correctly – and they multiply and grow back quicker until one day, you’re overrun.”
Patrick shrugged his shoulders as if he just thought of that analogy off the top of his head.

“So you’re going to help me with my weed problem?” he asked, smiling over at his psychiatrist before their session ended.

Patrick laughed and Ryan had taken it as a small victory. “Yeah, and your coke problem.”

Dr. Stump was always positive, always smiling, always doling out good advice and it was hard for his sunny outlook on life not to rub off on Ryan. He was feeling positive for the first time in years and for that, he would be eternally grateful because he was the one man working tirelessly to make sure Ryan was coping.

He wasn’t going to lie, the last six weeks had been difficult – an emotional roller coaster for someone as usually impassive as Ryan Ross. It hadn’t been easy admitting all his shortcomings to a virtual stranger - all while trying to beat his addictions but halfway into his program, Ryan was optimistic about his recovery and he owed all that to Dr. Stump – the dude knew what he was talking about and Ryan developed somewhat of a fondness towards the man. He was a diamond in the rough; a prince among thieves and Ryan truly respected him.

However, when Patrick told him a month ago that his cellphone privileges were being revoked, he thought the man had meant for a few days; he hadn’t expected his psychiatrist to actually stick to his guns and ban him from using his phone for a whole goddamn month. After all, no one else ever said no to Ryan and meant it.

It had been an exceedingly tough four weeks – and yet another reason why his fancy Malibu rehabilitation facility reminded him of being trapped in paradise. There were plenty of activities to take his mind away from being so cut off from the outside world – massage therapy and acupuncture, hypnotherapy and spiritual counseling, all the hippie, mumbo-jumbo crap that a lot of his rich, junkie co-patients bought into, tai chi and yoga and meditation - but for the first week, without access to his cellphone, Ryan felt like he was missing out on something. He kept remembering that the world was still turning outside of his safe, rehab bubble – and that people were still living their lives without him, people like Gabe and his parents and Brendon...

“The world’s still going to be there when you get your phone back,” Patrick smiled. “Nothing will have changed too much, I assure you.”

But it was Brendon he worried about the most. Brendon, with his tight throat and perfect ass and handsome face, dark brown eyes and full lips – the most perfect specimen of a man he’d ever seen. Ryan had painted his picture behind his eyelids numerous times, blurring out any imperfections, making him flawless, but he realized that the longer that he spent in rehab, the more likely Brendon was to forget about him. Over time, he’d grown to realize that Brendon most likely moved on - and wherever he was, Ryan was probably better off without him.

Ryan accepted this fact. Grudgingly.

Dr. Stump knew all there was to know about Brendon – well, everything apart from the fact that he was a hooker, that is - and he constantly reminded Ryan that he first had to concentrate on his relationship with himself before rushing headlong into anything else.

Ryan was no dummy, he knew Patrick was right about Brendon but it hadn’t stopped him from lusting after the dude for the past four weeks. His experience with Keltie the previous month only solidified the fact that he really wanted to keep Brendon a part of his life – he’d been caught in the man’s web and even Patrick couldn’t help him out of this one.
By the time Ryan got his cellphone back he hadn’t had any contact with anyone in a month – not even his parents. The rich junkies he shared the facility with had become a sympathetic network and Ryan would listen patiently to their stories of addiction during group therapy sessions, silently thankful that he’d been born into such a privileged family because some of the stories he heard were truly harrowing.

Through their recovery, many of his fellow patients claimed to have found God. Ryan would promise himself that he’d never become one of them – some religious nutjob, harking on about the Lord, our Savior and absolving their sins.

They just swapped one addiction for another; they swapped their heroin and meth habits for God and the Bible but they still neglected to live in the real world. They continued to bury their unsolved problems, dilemmas and insecurities in something they thought could save them, an outside force, which meant they could still blame their addictions on something or someone other than themselves. They never learned to accept responsibility for their actions – which was something Ryan himself was coming to terms with, but at least it kept their days filled.

Studying the Bible and raving about the eternal afterlife was certainly safer than shooting smack, he figured, but he didn’t need redemption from the Lord. He needed it from his family and his friends and all the people he wronged during his years as an active drug-addict. If the people he loved were able to forgive his sins, then that was heaven enough for him.

Patrick told him that he should view his time in rehab as a line in the sand – whatever happened before was in the past. It was the future he had to concentrate on now – taking each hour one at a time.

When Dr. Stump handed him his cellphone early one evening and said he had an hour to do what he wished with it, Ryan sat there on the couch in Patrick’s office, sifting through hundreds of texts and missed calls from various people in his life – dozens from Gabe, filling him in on each minute detail of all the parties he was missing out on and all the celebrities who were asking after him. There was a photo sent through to his cellphone a few weeks ago of William and his daughter, both of them smiling at the camera. *Hope you’re feeling better soon, Ryan!* read the following message and despite Ryan’s dislike of kids and the idea of settling down to raise a family, it brought a genuine smile to his face. When he happened across Brendon’s message, sent almost a month ago, he read it over and over again in a daze.

*What’s up? Been thinking about you. Hit me up sometime. Brendon.*

No matter how many times he read over the words he didn’t know quite how to take it. Brendon was a hooker, after all and Ryan was the son of a billionaire - perhaps the reason he contacted him was simply because he needed money. Maybe that’s what *hit me up sometime* meant? But maybe, just maybe, there was no hidden motive. Maybe Brendon had just been feeling lonely enough to miss him.

Ryan clutched his phone in his hand and felt the excitement surge through his body. Four weeks of trying to convince himself that the boy with the never-ending throat and the sinful ass meant nothing to him had all come undone in a matter of seconds. Brendon truly got under his skin and Ryan felt a little calmer in the knowledge that the man evidently cared enough to send him a text – a whole month ago but nonetheless, it was something to cling onto.

Ryan glanced across the office at Patrick, who was sat at his desk writing and ignoring him as he typed out a quick reply, reading over his words several times before he decide to send it.

*Still remember me? I’ve not forgotten you. Still in NYC? RR.*
He wasn’t going to get hung up on this, he told himself – if Brendon replied, that was cool. If he didn’t then oh well, he was just going to chalk it up as a loss – there were thousands of Brendon Uries out there in the world who would no doubt do just a good a job at satisfying him sexually. New York and LA were full of hot, gay dudes, all aching to bed Ryan Ross. He was scrolling through the rest of his messages when Brendon’s reply beeped through.

**Vegas**

Ryan couldn’t help feeling a little disappointed with such a brief reply but he wasn’t going to let that deter him. He was Ryan Ross, after all.

_Come to LA_, he wrote, following his text with a winking face. It was kind of a dumb message to send, seeing that unless Brendon wanted to check himself into a rehabilitation facility that cost ninety grand a month, they wouldn’t be able to see each other, but he was keeping it light and flirty, he told himself as he waited for Brendon’s reply – nothing wrong with light and flirty. It had been a long time since he’d done anything light and flirty.

When Brendon’s reply didn’t come after five minutes, Ryan grew agitated. He didn’t like being ignored – especially by someone lower down on the social hierarchy than him. Brendon should want _him_ just as much as _he_ wanted Brendon. He wanted to hear his sweet, hot voice floating through his cellphone again but Dr. Stump was _right_ there and Ryan didn’t want him eavesdropping in on what would most likely be an awkward conversation.

Perhaps he was approaching this from the wrong direction, he wondered. Maybe he needed to be less Cocky Billionaire and more Concerned Acquaintance? He typed out another message and sent it without reading it through.

_Hope you’re doing good. I’ve been locked up in rehab without a cellphone but I’ve been thinking about you too. Take care in Vegas. If you need anything, let me know. No strings, I’d just like to help you out._ **RR.**

Sure enough, Brendon’s reply flashed on his cellphone almost immediately.

_Call me, x_

Ryan felt his heart jump into his throat at the one lone “x” at the end of his message.

The prospect of talking to Brendon again after so long rattled his nerves. He didn’t even know what the hell Brendon was doing with himself these days – they hadn’t spoken in over four weeks and the last time they’d seen each other had been almost two months ago – when Brendon spent the night in his bed and then disappeared come morning to go running back to his junkie boyfriend. It was unsettling to think about how many men had come and gone through Brendon’s life since they’d last seen each other – probably hundreds, Ryan guessed, biting at his lip.

He glanced back up at Patrick, still engrossed in whatever he was writing and his thumb hovered over the call button. He knew this was a bad move, he _knew_ that no good could come of him contacting Brendon the Hooker after so long, but he pressed call anyway and slowly brought his phone towards his ear.

On the third ring, Brendon picked up and he could hear the loud thump of a bass line pound through his phone - Brendon was at a club and Ryan felt a small twinge of jealousy prick in his veins. He wished he were partying in Vegas with Brendon Urie on his arm.

“Hey!” Ryan heard him shout over the music. “Hold on just a sec.”
Ryan bit at the inside of his cheek. He wondered what kind of club Brendon was at; if it was some high-end, exclusive Vegas nightclub or some sleazy dive bar, just off the wrong end of the Strip. Maybe he was working, waiting to be picked up by a man who’d pay to fuck him? Ryan felt the arousal stir inside his pants as he listened to the music through the phone - muffled voices and drunken cries. He missed it – that hedonistic rush he’d get from partying on drugs, making eyes at some cute guy or girl from across the dance floor… He knew that he was certainly in a better place than Brendon right now, but he still envied him being able to go out and do what he wanted – drink and party, get high and socialize with people other than preachy religious wackos or recovering heroin-addicts.

Ryan closed his eyes and tried to forget about the fact that all he’d need to do to see Brendon again was check himself out of rehab and hop a private plane to Las Vegas. He could be partying with Brendon in less than two hours, he thought – and you’d probably be dead of an overdose within four, he reminded himself as the beat of the bass subsided.

Soon all Ryan could hear on the other end of the line was static and then Brendon’s voice right in his ear, sweet, low and utterly irresistible. “Hey, you,” Brendon sighed. “Long time, no speak.”

Ryan felt the smile pull at his lips. It felt like the storm inside him was finally over. Brendon was his sunshine, peeking out through the rain clouds - and in that moment, Ryan realized that he needed both the sun and the rain if he was ever going to grow into a man.
During the month that he’d been back in Las Vegas, Brendon’s life had fallen spectacularly and irrevocably apart.

If he thought things were bad when he left Manhattan, it had nothing on what he faced since he’d been home – disappointed parents who admitted they’d never be able to truly accept him, a sister who was so disgusted by his lifestyle that she refused to even talk to him and an emotionally crippled brother-in-law who hadn’t lived an honest day in his life since Brendon left Nevada eight years ago.

Dallon was a mess of emotions and lies and living his entire life as a repressed and closeted homosexual left him a little high-strung. He didn’t relax, he was always on edge and Brendon often considered rolling the guy a joint and teaching him how to smoke so that he’d learn to chill out for once in his life.

Brendon had been smoking a lot of weed - and he started drinking. He’d never really been much of a boozer – a few beers here and there when he and Jon could afford it, but it had never become a habit and he was by no means a practiced drunk.

He started frequenting a dive bar called Spencer’s, which was far enough from the Strip that it only attracted local drunks and men cruising for an easy fuck. The place was dark and seedy and it made Brendon feel like he belonged.

Spencer’s offered cheap liquor and over-priced drugs - if you happened to ask the right guy working the bar, and since he started drinking there, Brendon hadn’t failed to notice the same two, barely legal boys who stood against the back wall of the bar every night, smoking, hips pushed forward and lips parted until some sleazeball went back there to talk to one of them.

Brendon would watch these exchanges from afar and on several occasions he’d been tempted to go up there himself, disappear out the back door with them and give those boys a harsh dose of reality. This is no way to live your life, he’d shout at them. You’re young; you’re worth so much more than this. I’m proof that you don’t want to make the same mistakes I did. He wanted to be the warning he needed at their age, but he always stayed put on his barstool.

The boys would come and go with various men and each time they returned to the bar, their eyes were a little more glazed and their limbs jerked a little more. They each possessed the same gaunt look he recognized from Jon and Brendon guessed they were probably sucking dick for drugs, which was something Brendon never had to resort to himself, but the boys always looked a little less alive after they returned to the bar – and Brendon sure knew that feeling.

“What’s up, darlin’, d’you want a piece of that? You come in here every night and stare at those boys but I ain’t ever seen you leave with one.”

Brendon pulled his gaze away from the young hustlers at the back of the bar and towards the man who just pulled up a barstool next to him. He offered a weak smile but he didn’t answer him. He didn’t want to be bothered right now. He wanted to sit and wallow in his own distress in peace.

He figured this man to be some kind of bar manager. Brendon had seen him swanning around and shouting orders at the bar staff for a few evenings in a row now - the dude had a pretty unusual fashion sense and it had been the first time he so much as looked at Brendon. He was tall, over six feet, but he had a handsomely androgynous face and bright blue eyes that almost reminded him of
Dallon’s. Tonight, he had framed them in smoky make-up and Brendon found it difficult not to stare at him. The guy was wearing what Brendon could only describe as a kimono.

“D’you mind if I join you?” he asked, but the man already sat down and put his elbow on the bar, propping up his chin in his hand and Brendon didn’t want to piss off the bar manager this early in the evening.

“Not at all,” he sighed, looking down into his drink.

The man snapped his fingers at the guy behind the bar. “Ian,” he barked, “get me a gin and tonic – and don’t fuck it up with lemon again, else it’ll be coming out of your paycheck.” Brendon noticed the weary sag of poor Ian’s shoulders. “And for yourself, handsome? This one’s on the house. What can I get you?”

Brendon nodded a thank you and held up his glass. “Same again,” he smiled at the curly haired bartender. He was acknowledged and another drink was presented to him in a flash – double whisky, Coke, no ice. “Thanks for the drink,” he said after his first sip.

The man made a noise of indifference. “It’s fine,” he shrugged, looking over the top of Brendon’s head. Brendon followed his gaze toward the back of the room just in time to see one of the boys disappear into the bathrooms with a man old enough to be his father. He sighed after him.

“So, what’s up with you, huh? You’re new around here - kinda cute too, I must say. What’s a guy like you doing in a place like this?” The man wrapped his hand around Brendon’s shoulder and shook him. Brendon took another sip of his drink so he wouldn’t have to answer. After a moment, the man said, “You don’t talk much, do ya? I’m Spencer, anyway. I’m the owner.”

In turn, Brendon introduced himself, offering the man his hand. He had soft skin, manicured nails and a weak handshake – as if he didn’t really want to touch him.

Spencer looked to be Brendon’s age; no older, and Brendon was surprised that some dude in his mid-twenties, wearing make-up and women’s clothes managed to own and operate a such successful but drug-ridden gay bar without the cops busting him.

“How long have you owned this place?” Brendon asked.

“Since my dad died - four years ago. The thoughtful fucker left his shitty bar to me as his final fuck you – as well as all his debts, the bastard - but I turned this place around, I got out of the red within six months and now this sad little dive bar is my empire,” he said, with a flourish of his hand across the bar. “I am the queen; Ian to my left here is a mere court jester or a monkey, always aching to please me. Ain’t you, baby?”

Brendon heard Ian the Bartender direct a curt fuck you Spencer’s way. Spencer feigned offense and leaned forward too far into Brendon’s personal space. He pointed towards the back of the bar. “And my beautiful boys at the back there, each of them aching to get fucked by a nice, hard, young dick – mouths of sin, I’m telling you. I’ve seen you looking,” he whispered. “Which one d’you want?”

Brendon felt his throat tighten. He raised his eyes quickly and caught Ian looking between him and Spencer as he polished glasses behind the bar. He felt the color rise on his cheeks and his mouth go dry, but he forced the words from his lips with an awkward smile. “I’m afraid you have the wrong end of the stick. I’m not interested in either of them.”

“Why not? What’s wrong with them?” The man clutched at his chest in mock offense.

Brendon thought about his answer. “I usually go for dudes more in my age range.”
Spencer’s blue eyes twinkled. “Oh, well my luck might be in, huh?” he teased, pushing playfully against Brendon’s shoulder. Brendon couldn’t decide if Spencer was handsome or pretty – he liked tall men but it had been a long time since he looked at a guy in that way. When he was with Jon, he’d sworn he only had eyes for him. “You’re not even a little curious?” the man probed.

“No. I don’t fuck hookers. Plus,” he added, turning to look at the lone boy outside the men’s bathrooms. “They look kinda young.” Maybe this was how Jon got his start in Manhattan, sixteen years old being pimped out by some crazy guy in his twenties.

“They’re both eighteen, I can assure you – and I don’t like my customers branding those boys hookers; they’re masseurs.”

Brendon rolled his eyes. “Sure they are,” he said under his breath.

“Oh, you’re no fun,” Spencer pouted, pushing Brendon’s shoulder roughly. “They’re good boys, they’d love to take care of someone like you. They might be able to help you loosen up some. You look real tense.”

Brendon pulled away from the hard dig of Spencer’s fingers in the hollow of his collarbone and felt his lips twitch. This dude was a little full on. If he had been sat in a bar in Manhattan doing this, he’d most likely have been punched out by now. He shrugged him off and when Spencer dropped his hand, he took another sip of his whisky to try and hide his discomfort. He found it more embarrassing to be mistaken for a trick than he did a hooker.

“Is there anything else I can sort you out with while you’re here, Brendon?” Spencer offered. He leaned close against Brendon’s shoulder and he could smell him – the distinctly masculine scent of cologne and pot wafted into his nose and it immediately reminded him of Jon. He found himself leaning surreptitiously closer so he could get another whiff.

“I’m good,” he said, raising his glass at the man. He still had half his drink left.

“I mean, do you like a good time?” Spencer pressed his index finger against his nostril and sniffed, flashing Brendon a grin.

Brendon smiled; unable to stop himself from recalling the last time he’d taken coke – in Ryan Ross’s incredible hotel suite the first time they met, where Ryan pushed the drug up Brendon’s ass with his fingers. He felt a sick thrill run through his body. Cocaine always made him feel a little light-headed, it always made his heart race and his skin burn but at this point in the game, he felt like he had nothing to lose. What harm would a little bit of coke do on a Thursday evening, anyway?

He nodded his chin at the man sat beside him. “How much?” he asked, his interest in Spencer’s offer quickly peaking.

“Why don’t you follow me out back and we can strike a deal?”

He quickly considered this stranger’s offer. Over the last couple of weeks, Brendon’s life had quickly gone from bad to worse. He smoked weed just so he could fall asleep at night and he started drinking to numb his emotional turmoil. When he wasn’t pining after his lost relationship with Jon, he was dreaming up a future with Dallon and during all that, he was trying his best to avoid his judgmental parents and forget about Ryan Ross. He started staying out all night simply so he didn’t have to talk to them and he was lonely, but after two weeks of sitting on a lonely barstool in a crappy Las Vegas dive bar, someone reached out to him. He felt like he’d been taken under Spencer’s wing - being offered coke and hookers. Now that truly was acceptance.
With one final wary glance towards Ian the Bartender, Brendon slipped off the stool and onto his feet and followed Spencer’s lead into a small storage-cum-office area, littered with boxes. The desk in the far corner was littered with junk – weighing scales, empty Ziploc’s… baking powder?

He wondered briefly if this Spencer character was running some drug-enterprise from the back office of his dead father’s Vegas bar, but he tried to put the thought to the back of his mind. Whatever the dude was doing, it was none of his business.

Spencer flipped the lock on the door and approached the desk, clearing a small space so that Brendon could lean against it. His eye make-up was messy and smudged in the florescent lights of the backroom and he could see a fine regrowth of stubble on his jaw.

“You’re very handsome. Under the bar lights, everyone is, but you look alright even in this lighting.” Spencer looked him up and down.

Brendon always thought himself to be a good judge of character. Over the years, he learned to trust his gut and Spencer made him feel uncomfortable sat at the bar – now he was locked in a backroom with a guy who seemed to be involved in some drug dealer shit and fuck – he thought he left all that behind in Manhattan.

“Thank you,” he nodded. He’d been drinking for a few hours now. His responses were slower than usual.

“So, what’s your story, Brendon? Are you queer or are you just a lonely guy with a girlfriend who’d never divulge you your homosexual desires? We get a lot of them around here too, believe me.”

“No, I’m gay. Out and proud,” he assured the stranger. His eyes glanced quickly around the small, windowless room. There was no escape. How did he keep getting himself into these less than ideal situations? “What’s your story?” he asked, nodding at Spencer’s kimono.

“You mean this old thing?” he asked, raising one arm and twirling on the spot so that the silk fabric of the outfit moved around his ankles. “I just got back from Tokyo the other week; I had it specially made. I just like the fabric,” he shrugged. “Ian from behind the bar bitches at me about cultural appropriation. He studied social sciences at a college in Reno, so of course, he’s the expert – a privileged white boy from Eugene, Oregon,” Spencer mocked, pulling a keychain from his pocket and searching through it, “always ranting on about social justice like he’s somehow a victim.”

Spencer leaned up against the desk next to Brendon and reached behind him for a blue lockbox. Brendon caught another whiff of his cologne and inhaled slowly though his nose with his eyes closed until all he could smell was Jon.

Locating the correct key and pushing it into the lock, Spencer looked at him and smiled. “Fuck that, I say. I can wear whatever the fuck I want. Right?”

“Sure. If it makes you happy.”

Spencer nodded happily and pulled a small Ziploc of cocaine from the box. “But if you’re wondering – male pronouns, please. People always told me I looked like a girl, so I started dressing like one when I was seventeen. My dad lost his shit. He wouldn’t talk to me if I was wearing a dress, but that’s pretty much all there is to it - I just like it,” he said with a shrug. “And why should we stop doing the things we like just because other people are too small-minded to get it, huh?”

Brendon was starting to regret his decision to follow Spencer into the back room. A conversation about cultural appropriation and gender identity was the furthest thing from his mind right now. He
wanted a quick line of coke and to carry on with his evening.

“This is from my personal stash,” Spencer proudly informed him, shaking the bag in Brendon’s face, “and the first line’s on me – but only because you’re so cute. Are you single, Brendon?”

“Just recently, yes.”

Spencer pouted. “An attractive guy like you, I’m surprised you’re not taken already.” Spencer paused and then tilted his head to the side. “Would you like me to suck your dick?”

Brendon spluttered in surprise; he’d given that line so many times before that he’d lost count - but no one offered him a blowjob in a long time. He wasn’t sure how to react to flirting – to real, honest flirting with someone who wasn’t paying him money for his company.

“Oh, I’m sorry. Did I offend your sensitive morals? I thought you were fair game seeing as you obviously came back here to do a few lines of coke with me - my mistake though. Your loss if you don’t want a blowjob,” Spencer remarked, bristling slightly beside him. He quickly changed the subject. “This shit is more than ninety percent pure - some of the best stuff I’ve ever tried. It makes me really horny too, so watch out.” The man reached out to poke Brendon’s waist and tickled him. Spencer was coming on pretty strong and Brendon wasn’t used to having someone pay him so much attention. He pushed Spencer’s hand away lightly and smiled.

“You’re quite the flirt, aren’t you?”

Spencer shrugged his shoulders and made a face. “I just enjoy the company of handsome men and you’re really cute - but I bet you know that already. I bet I’m not the first guy to tell you you’re really good looking. What do you do for work, are you a model?”

Brendon felt the blush rise on his cheeks at Spencer’s compliments, but he scoffed. “I’m currently unemployed,” he admitted with a grin. “My family is from here, I was living in New York for a bit and I just moved back, so things are a little rocky right now. Still trying to find my feet.”

“D’you need a job?” Spencer offered.

“Behind the bar? I have no experience.”

There was a pause and Spencer rubbed his chin and hummed. “I’ve got a few personal jobs you could possibly do for me. I’m always looking for handsome young men to run a few errands for me when I’m too tied up with this place. I’ll give you my number before you leave tonight. I’ll sort you out. There’s plenty of work in Las Vegas,” he said, giving Brendon’s thigh a quick squeeze. “So long as you don’t mind compromising your morals.”

Brendon had no morals left to compromise and he wondered what personal errands this dude Spencer wanted him to run. Looking glumly around the small office space, he figured it was something to do with drugs – maybe he needed delivery boys, maybe Spencer was a Vegas drug lord operating from the backroom of his crappy dive bar.

“Now, do you want a bump and a blowie or not, because I don’t make that offer to all our customers.”

“Sure,” he shrugged, because he had no desire to upset the man who just offered him free coke, oral sex and a job all within half an hour of meeting him. That and the fact that he hadn’t been touched in months – and now a virtual stranger had come onto him and offered him his first blowjob in years.

His stomach started to flutter as he watched Spencer’s face moving towards his. He stayed still as the
man’s hand hooked around the back of his head and pulled them together - and then the scent of Jon filled his lungs and suddenly he was all Brendon could think about. The memory of Jon completely consumed him.

A moment later, Brendon could feel his eyes slip closed as Spencer’s lips pressed against the sensitive skin on his neck, trailing his wet tongue along his jaw as he pressed gentle kisses against him. Brendon’s tipped his head back and he fought hard to keep the tears out of his eyes, but he desired this for so long – his first, real sexual encounter since Dallon was going to happen with a stranger in the backroom of a dive bar.

He knew it was the wrong thing to say at that moment, but he couldn’t keep the words off his lips. “You smell like my ex,” he breathed.

Spencer pulled back and looked at him. “Do I kiss like him too?”

Their eyes locked for a second before their lips joined, pressing forcefully together. Spencer tasted of mouthwash, which was another memory that reminded him of Jon. He opened his mouth and Spencer’s tongue pushed forward. Brendon looped his arm around the man’s neck and pulled him against him. The scent was intoxicating and after so long, the personal contact felt electric.

Despite his usual reservations about sex, Jon had always been the more dominant kisser. He’d always been keen to take the lead and Brendon had always been a more than willing follower. Some evenings, Jon would kiss him until Brendon’s cock got hard inside his pants and it was always then that he’d pull back, turn over on the mattress away from him and ignore him for the rest of the night. Yeah, Jon was kind of a dicktease on occasions, but with his eyes closed, Brendon could almost imagine that Spencer and Jon were the same person.

After a minute, Spencer’s hands started to wander, down Brendon’s chest and towards the buckle on his belt as he tried to yank it open. He pulled away and opened his eyes to find Spencer’s face a little too close to his. He nodded down at the Ziploc of coke still clasped between the man’s slender fingers and tried to look suggestive. He couldn’t do this sober. “Maybe we should take a bump, hmm?”

Spencer’s lips pulled into a side smile and he pushed up from the desk, dumping the contents of the bag on top of a small rectangle of mirror. “This is strong shit, mind you. So don’t take more than you can handle, because I’m not scraping your ass up off the floor when you can’t walk in an hour.” Spencer cut himself a fat line, pulled a straw from the deep pocket of his kimono and snorted the whole thing up one nostril. This dude was obviously a veteran. He nodded down at the white powder and sniffed. “Your turn,” he said.

In the time it took him pull a five dollar bill from his pocket and cut himself a generous, but not greedy line of coke, he decided that he didn’t care about the consequences of his actions this evening – his parents already hated him, Dallon was still a gutless little pussy, he lost the man he always considered his soulmate and even Ryan Ross was ignoring him nowadays – that text he sent about a month ago, had gone unanswered.

Brendon didn’t care. He had nothing left to lose.

He pushed the rolled-up bill to the inside of his nostril and faltered slightly before snorting the line – he was really going to do this. It was too late now. Spencer was watching him; he didn’t want to lose face. In the next second, he snorted up the powder and when he straightened up, he blinked at Spencer, felt the drip and broke into a wide smile.

“Wow,” he laughed, the weight he’d been carrying around on his shoulders for months suddenly
seemed to have lifted. He sniffed and rubbed his nose. “That shit’s good.”

“Straight from Columbia – well, via Mexico and Texas – but probably better than the shit you get on the East Coast.” Spencer leaned forward to take another line, a distinctly smaller one this time but when he drew back, he looked a little dazed. Brendon didn’t have time to speak before Spencer’s lips were back on his and he was stood between his legs, pushing Brendon back against the edge of the desk.

He wanted something like this for so long that it hurt – his muscles ached. He could smell Jon in his mouth again; he could taste his minty fresh tongue against his and then a hand pressed against his crotch, squeezing at his hardening dick. Brendon keened at the friction, arching himself into the man’s palm.

He could really feel the coke kicking in now; his nerves felt charged, this type of sexual contact after so long felt like sunshine on his skin after a long, dark winter and when he felt Spencer’s mouth travel down his neck and along his collarbone, Brendon bucked up his hips, screwed his eyes closed and imagined it was Jon’s mouth working him.

Spencer’s hands made quick work on his zipper, opening his pants up and yanking them down all before Brendon could really get his head in the game. The coke made him a little bleary, it was making his heart pound, it was making his head spin – Spencer’s fingertips felt like fire against his skin.

He kicked his pants off from around his ankles and pushed the silk folds of Spencer’s kimono off his shoulders as Spencer tugged at the tie around his middle. It fell to the floor at his feet. Underneath the beautiful material, Spencer was wearing a grubby t-shirt and a pair of baggy old boxers – it wasn’t exactly what he expected and through his high, Brendon had to bite back an amused smile.

"Something funny?"

Brendon shook his head and bit his lip.

“So, you want me to suck your dick?”

Spencer kneeled down between Brendon’s legs and looked up at him with a coy smile. He pushed his hand inside his underwear and Brendon could see him jerking his dick. Spencer was hard; there was a wet patch of pre-come staining his boxers.

He spent his whole adult life perfecting the blowjob – he could deep throat even the biggest of dicks with ease because he learned to bypass his gag-reflex and he’d always taken pride in the amount of men who complimented the way he gave head. As a hooker, it was one of his greatest achievements – all the men who branded him the Best Dick Sucker in the World, but no one ever returned the favor. Until now.

“Yeah.” The word left his lips as a moan.

Spencer’s mouth closed around the head of his dick and sucked and Brendon tried not to think about it as simply a series of carefully practiced motions. Brendon always gave the same type of blowjob – suction around the head, tonguing down the shaft and over the balls and then back up again so he could deep throat it. Spencer seemed to be following a very similar pattern and he tried not to think of it as a sex act with a stranger – he tried to convince himself that there was attraction and desire, need and yearning.

It was everything he always wanted with Jon and more recently, everything he longed for with
Dallon – someone who wanted to make him feel good, someone who would put his needs first for once. Spencer’s mouth around his cock was warm and wet and he tried to shut down his mind and concentrate solely on the feeling inside his dick and balls, but his mind was too riddled with painful memories – of Jon and Dallon and suddenly Ryan.

Brendon bit his lip as Spencer went down on him. He felt his cock hit the back of the man’s throat and groaned at the tightness. He heard him gag around the head but Spencer didn’t pull back and Brendon thrust forward slowly as Spencer swallowed his dick to the hilt and palmed over his balls. Brendon’s fingers clawed at Spencer’s shoulder, up into his soft locks of hair and then pushed down on his head forcefully as he let the drugs fill his brain with images he could get off to.

The thought of Jon scudded around his mind; his ex-boyfriend on his knees in front of him, finally giving into Brendon’s carnal desires – but he probably would’ve had to pay Jon for an act like this; like all his other dirty tricks, because he sure as hell knew he wouldn’t have done it willingly.

Brendon’s thoughts moved to Dallon – his sexually frustrated brother-in-law, who was constantly complaining about his life as an unhappily married, unsatisfied loser. Brendon could always feel the sexual tension between them when they were together, but neither of them acted on it yet.

Dallon was probably a lousy dick-sucker anyways, he thought when Spencer pulled off and started jerking him with his hand, his cock and Spencer’s lips both slick with saliva. Jon and Dallon were doing nothing for him right now, but what about the other man in his life?

Ryan Ross. Brendon would bet Ryan would be a more than willing sexual counterpart. The man was a great fuck and he made Brendon come several times the last time they met up. Ryan would let him act out his fantasies – he was probably used to getting blowjobs from some of the most beautiful people in the world and Brendon liked to think that he’d be as enthusiastic giving head as he was receiving it.

Ryan would be more than eager to satisfy him and Brendon pictured him kneeling between his legs, his dick between Ryan’s pink lips as he sucked around the head. The fantasy built quickly behind his eyelids and Brendon could feel his balls tighten. Spencer’s mouth was working him again, he was sliding his dick down the back of his throat, gently pulling at his balls and with the image of Ryan Ross in his head, he felt his stomach muscles clench and his thighs shake and then he felt his toes curl up inside his sneakers as he quickly pushed Spencer back and came with a grunt in his own hand.

Spencer had only been sucking him off for two minutes. He looked a little disappointed sat between Brendon’s legs.

“I’m sorry,” he mumbled. He’d come prematurely; even when he was seventeen, he used to last longer than that, but it had been a long time since he had an orgasm and it had been years since he had his dick in anyone else’s mouth. In the foggy aftershocks of climax he realized it had been almost a decade since someone last performed oral sex on him.

“Don’t worry,” Spencer sighed. “It happens to the best of us.”

Dick, Brendon wanted to bite, because that was pretty bitchy.

“It’s been a while, that’s all,” he said, his palm still full of come as he looked around the office for something he could use to wipe his hand off.

“I can tell,” Spencer told him with a slight roll of his eyes, pushing up to his feet and throwing a
clean dishcloth into Brendon’s lap. He could feel the blush rising on his face at not just the whole premature ejaculation thing, but at the memory of his fantasy – of world-famous billionaire Ryan Ross on his knees for him, just begging to suck him off. Brendon apologized again and wiped off his hand.

Spencer looked at him with an unamused expression painted on his face and folded his arms. He shrugged. “It’s fine.”

“I can return the favor?” he suggested.

“You’re goddamn right, you can.” Spencer pushed his underwear down and kicked them from around his ankles without even a second’s consideration. Sitting down in his desk chair and parting his legs slightly, his pink cock bobbed against his thigh. It was of average size and totally unremarkable. Brendon had definitely seen bigger and he’d definitely seen smaller. Hard, Spencer was just shy of six inches – which was actually a perfect size for easy deep throating.

He moved between Spencer’s legs and brushed his fingers up the man’s thighs. Gripping the base of his cock and lowering his mouth to lick around the head, Brendon felt like nothing changed. He was still lurking in dark places, sucking off scrupulous men who didn’t love him. Whether he was sucking off a married man in a fancy hotel room or engaging in hot shower sex with the son of a billionaire or repaying an embarrassingly quick blowjob from a cross dresser he just met in a bar, it didn’t matter – it was all the same thing.

“Wow, I almost feel like paying you for that,” Spencer smiled as he pulled his underwear back on and picked up his kimono from the floor, brushing it free from dust. “That’s the best blowjob I’ve gotten in a long while.” Brendon laughed and shrugged, looking away as Spencer stepped into the folds of fabric. He sure wouldn’t refuse payment right now. Not if Spencer offered.

“Another bump?” the man suggested.

Brendon was smart enough to accept his offer and an hour later, they were both sat at the bar together, shouting conversation into each other’s ears over the loud dubstep playing over the sound system. The music was so loud, it shook the walls and Brendon cast his eyes across the bar to see it had filled up quickly. The lights were down and strobes flashed across the room, catching on the sweaty bodies as they moved on the dance floor.

After his blowjob, Spencer was being an incredibly generous man and Brendon was a few good lines down and a few drinks deep when Ryan’s name flashed up on his cellphone. The coke made his eyes dry and they bugged out of his head as his high swelled inside of him.

Still remember me? I’ve not forgotten you. Still in NYC? RR.

Brendon’s heart started to thump hard inside his chest. Ryan Ross was the very last person he expected to hear from that night, especially after he just indulged himself that fantasy that made him blow his load too quick. If he’d have been sober, he’d have probably ignored Ryan’s out of the blue text message and deleted his number – but Brendon wasn’t sober. He was drunk and he had some pure, Columbian coke pumping through his veins. He typed one word with a shaking hand and pressed send before he could change his mind.

Vegas

What the hell was Ryan Ross doing contacting him after all this time? It had been weeks, months even, since they last talked. Was he out of rehab already? Was he interested in meeting up and hanging out, maybe hiring Brendon to fuck him? Maybe he wanted to fly him to LA;
first class, private jet.

*Fuck!* This coke was making him feel invincible!

Ryan’s reply flashed up on Brendon’s phone. *Come to LA,* it said, followed by a little winking face. Brendon felt his heart begin to race inside his chest and he pushed his cellphone back into the pocket of his pants to stop him from texting back something silly. Ryan wanted him to go to LA.

Ryan *Ross* wanted *him,* Brendon Urie, to go to LA.

He scrubbed his hand over his face and remembered to blink his eyes - the coke was beginning to make him feel a little jittery. His life was already in enough of a mess without Ryan Ross trying to make contact with him again. He had a hard enough time trying to forget about the man in the first place and now here he was, sending him flirty, winking texts from California. The last Brendon had heard the dude was still in rehab. Maybe he just got out; maybe he wanted to party? Brendon felt his phone vibrate against his thigh.

_Hope you’re doing good. I’ve been locked up in rehab without a cellphone but I’ve been thinking about you too. Take care in Vegas. If you need anything, let me know. No strings, I’d just like to help you out. RR._

Brendon read the message four times and frowned. The guy sounded sincere enough, but Brendon was way too high to sit there and have a back and forth text conversation with Ryan Ross, so he messaged back quickly.

_Call me, x_

He looked around the bar despondently. The young hookers disappeared long ago and now the place was packed with all sorts, from twinks on molly to older bears and transvestites. This place sure drew an eclectic crowd, Brendon thought as his phone started ringing in the palm of his hand. He let it ring three times before he answered it.

The music was too loud for proper conversation with Spencer, let alone with Ryan through his crappy cellphone. Shouting a greeting and making an excuse to the man next to him that he needed to take a call, he slipped from the barstool and pushed out the back door and into the crisp desert night. The sudden fresh air made him realize how high he actually was.

“*Hey,* you. Long time, no speak,” he sighed. After a pause, he asked, “How are you?”

“Fine,” Ryan replied – and he sounded like he was telling the truth. “I’m doing pretty well actually – and yourself?” Ryan’s voice was almost wary.

Brendon leaned back against the brick wall of the bar, tipped his head back and laughed quietly up at the light-polluted sky - through his cocaine high, he’d almost forgotten what a pile of shit his life turned into. Brendon could now understand all Jon’s excuses for taking drugs. They numbed real life; they helped him forget – and that was all he currently longed for.

“*Ryan Ross,*” he sighed slowly, shaking his head. “Why are you calling me after all this time?”

“You just asked me to,” Ryan bit, the animosity clear on his voice. “And besides, I was just replying to your text,” he added.

Brendon had forgotten about that stupid text. “I sent that about a month ago. I thought you’d forgotten about me.”
“I wouldn’t forget about you,” Ryan assured him. “I can’t.” Lowering his voice, Ryan said, “I’m still in rehab in Malibu. Christ, man, it feels like a prison and the cellphone use here is… iffy,” he sniffed. “But it’s only another six weeks to go until I finish my program. I mean, it sucked because I haven’t been able to talk to you, but I haven’t been able to talk to anyone else either and I think it’s really doing me some good. You know, I think I’ll actually stay clean this time.” Ryan laughed, but it sounded fake.

“That’s good to hear,” he remarked absently. *The tough old life of a billion dollar trust-fund kid.* It must be nice to afford all those fancy trips to rehab, he thought.

“Yeah, my doctor – he’s awesome, by the way – he’s really helped me come to terms with some pretty tough shit over the last few weeks. I’m telling you, man; kicking drugs is just the worst and having a supportive network around you really helps. I wouldn’t have been able to get this far without all the help I’m getting.”

Brendon smiled faintly and thought of Jon – the boyfriend who had to seek support from another man when he was coming off heroin because Brendon simply hadn’t been there for him.

“But I still want to see you again… Maybe when I get out?” Ryan finished wistfully.

“Well,” Brendon sighed, looking at his sneakers kick up parking lot gravel, “you should hit me up in Vegas when you get out.”

Ryan laughed. “Fresh out of rehab and straight on a plane to Vegas?” He whistled, “My dad’ll be pissed.”

“Well then, maybe I can meet you in LA?”

“Or somewhere other than LA. Los Angeles sucks. I want to go north after I get out of here. Somewhere quiet, just to disappear for a while.” When Ryan spoke again he broke Brendon’s silence. “So… what’s up, man? Vegas treating you better than New York?”

“Not really,” Brendon laughed and he could already feel his emotions unraveling. “Living back with my parents again after all this time sucks. They’re kind of conservative; respectable Mormon folks and they didn’t know I was gay. I came out – and now I wish I hadn’t. They don’t want a gay son, my bitch sister won’t even talk to me, my boyfriend left me for another man; some frizzy-haired, tatted-up motherfucker, a fucking snake in the grass—”

“Wait. Your boyfriend left you?” Ryan interjected, quickly cutting Brendon off. “You’re single?”

“Yep.” Brendon sucked the word into his lungs. “I sure am. I’m newly single; back on the market – I’m a total free agent.”

That last bump of coke he’d taken inside the bar with Spencer was starting to fade. His face was burning up and he couldn’t keep still. He fidgeted with the buttons of his shirt and bit hard at his lip, waiting to see how Ryan would take the news of his break-up with Jon.

“Can I see you?” Ryan whispered down the line.

“I can’t come to LA, Ryan. I haven’t got a ride.” Brendon humored him, but he could get to LA easily if he really wanted to. Los Angeles was less than three hundred miles away and there was nothing but desert between them. He was sure he could hitch a ride with someone.

“Okay, but… will you wait for me?” the man asked quickly. “If I stay here in rehab, it’s only another six weeks. I want to do this to prove to myself and my family that I can stay clean, but until I get out;
will you wait for me?"

Brendon thought back to the blowjob in the back of the bar with Spencer – someone he didn’t know and wasn’t attracted to, but someone who offered him comfort and release in his time of need. “I wished you called me a few hours ago, Ryan.”

“Why? What did you do?”

“You want me to tell you what I did?”

“Yes.” Ryan voice hissed through his cellphone as a whisper.

“I met a guy in a bar and I let him suck me off. We took coke together and I sucked his dick and he said it was the best blowjob he’d gotten in a long time.”

Brendon heard Ryan curse under his breath. “I wish you were here sucking my dick. I want you to wait for me, Brendon – don’t fuck anyone else. If you need money to tide you over until I see you, then I can help you out, just let me know. Anything you want, I can sort it out for you.”

“I don’t need your charity, Ryan,” he heard himself snap. His muscles were burning from the effects of the cocaine. He was getting anxious for another hit – he would walk back in that bar right now and use his charms to get that shady-as-fuck Spencer to share his stash with him, but he was still too proud to accept help from a billionaire.

“It’s not charity, dude - I’m not giving you my old junk that I don’t need anymore. I’m just saying; if you need me to help you out while you wait for me, I can.”

“It doesn’t work like that, Ryan. You can’t put a hold on me until you decide to check yourself out of rehab. You’re not my fucking sugar daddy and you’re certainly not my boyfriend. I’m a whore, Ryan. Why do you care if I fuck other men?”

Ryan couldn’t answer.

Brendon felt the tears well up behind his eyes. His emotions were all over the place this evening – he wanted to just go home, pull the comforter over his head and sleep for a week. He felt lost in his hometown and just as hopeless as he’d ever been. It was all a novelty to Ryan – the idea of fucking a whore. When he was bored, Ryan would still have his fabulous life in the 90210 and Brendon would be left with nothing – even less than what he had now.

“You don’t even realize – I lost everything because of you. Now I have nothing; my whole life’s gone to shit and it’s all because of you.” He only just managed to stop his voice from cracking.

“Brendon,” Ryan muttered. “I’m sorry, I…” he trailed off and then sighed. “Look, I’ve realized a lot of things about myself these last few weeks. I’ve realized that I’m not a nice person when I’m high; that I’m selfish and inconsiderate and difficult to get along with, but-”

“Yeah, no shit, Sherlock.”

“But the important thing now is that I really want to be a good person,” he continued, without acknowledging Brendon’s interjection. “I want to get clean and stay sober and I accepted responsibility for all my fuck-ups and I’m sorry. I can’t do anything about the past but apologize and so I’m sorry about your relationship. I’m sorry I treated you badly the last time we saw each other and I’m sorry you’re not in a good place right now. I want to make it up to you,” he explained. “Wait for me. I’ll be out of here in six weeks and then I’ll come to Vegas or I’ll fly you somewhere where we can get together in private. We can talk – I think we’ll both be in need of a hug by then, huh?”
Silent tears started to build behind Brendon’s eyelids and when he blinked, they spilled down his cheeks. He wiped them away with the sleeve of his jacket. “Yeah,” he sniffed – but his voice broke. “I could really do with a hug right now.”

There was a pause on the other end of the line. When Ryan spoke his voice was quiet and it was warm. “If I was there with you, I’d give you a big hug. I wouldn’t let you go.”

It made Brendon smile at least.

“Wait for me?” Ryan repeated, but it wasn’t a demand this time, it was a request. “Please.”

“How much are you going to pay me?”

“How much d’you want?”

Brendon considered Ryan’s question carefully. “A grand a week until you get out of rehab and then another four when we meet up. I’ll spend the weekend with you, but I’ll want the money up front this time. Don’t try and fuck me out of my fee again.”

“Ten grand, it’s all yours, dude – just don’t fuck anyone else. Promise me.”

Brendon rolled his eyes and felt a smile pull on his lips. Ryan seemed quite taken with him. It was actually kind of adorable. “I promise you. I won’t fuck anyone else, Ryan. I’m your fucking whore. Remember?”

He heard Ryan swear. "You're going to be my next downfall, Brendon. I can feel it."

He felt the sting of excitement prick inside his stomach – there was something illicit and exhilarating about winding Ryan Ross up over the phone. The dude had been locked up in rehab for six weeks - he was probably frustrated as fuck and it gave Brendon a cheap thrill to know that Ryan had suddenly become so reliant on him. It comforted him to know that someone needed him, even if that someone was just another junkie in recovery.

Maybe Brendon’s life was his own self-fulfilling prophecy – maybe it was never going to get better until he stopped being so negative about it? Maybe he needed to stop making the same mistakes and falling for the wrong men over and over again?

He scrubbed his hand over his face to relieve the ache from the drugs and sniffed up his emotions. He was a man in charge of his own destiny; he was still young and reasonably attractive and if Ryan wanted a whore, then Brendon could certainly be one for him. It was, after all, the only thing he was good at.
Chapter 32

It was 6AM on a Sunday, three days after Brendon’s phone conversation with Ryan Ross, when he returned to his parents’ house, drunk and still coming down from an all-night coke binge. He’d been actively avoiding his mom and dad for the last week and during that time, he hardly spent more than a half hour in their company.

Things were tense between him and his parents so Brendon had chosen to spend the majority of his time at Spencer’s – much to the delight of the man himself. He found Spencer Smith to be an exceptionally generous guy – especially when Brendon let him cop a feel and flirtatiously tease him as they sat at the bar together.

It wasn’t that Brendon was using Spencer for free drinks and cheap coke – not really, he genuinely liked the guy – but it certainly helped that the bar’s owner seemed to have a soft spot for him. He flirted accordingly and Spencer had become more than willing to get Brendon high in the evenings.

They hadn’t done anything else since their backroom blowjob the other night – Brendon had promised Ryan Ross that he’d remain celibate after all - but Brendon figured Spencer wanted to take it further. In the early hours of that morning, before Brendon decided he had enough booze for one night and needed to return home, Spencer suggested they go back to his place together. He’d been almost tempted, but turned down the invitation gently.

In the taxi back to his parents’ house, he tried to sober up a little. He hadn’t felt quite this drunk while he sat at the bar but the fresh air seemed to have gone to his head, and when he stumbled up his parents’ driveway, he realized he was much drunker than he’d been in a long time. It took him several attempts before he could even open the metal screen and he dropped his keys on the doorstep as he tried to push open the front door. He cussed out loud and when he was finally inside, he leaned up against the wall and tried to gather his senses.

Ryan Ross called him three days ago, but hadn’t been in contact since. Brendon started to wonder whether Ryan would just ignore him now until he got out of rehab and show up in Las Vegas out of the blue. He only had six weeks to wait and then he’d have ten grand in his pocket. Ryan wasn’t going to screw him out of his fee this time. He was going to make certain of that.

Brendon pushed up from the wall with a huff and kicked off his shoes so he could climb quietly upstairs. He was desperate to make it up to his room without waking his mom and dad – he really didn’t want a lecture, not in his current state, but as his foot pressed against the second step, he heard his father call his name from the sitting room.

“Brendon. Get in here, please.”

His dad’s stern voice cut through the stillness of the hallway like a bullet and it was the last thing he wanted to hear after admittedly, one too many bumps of coke that night. He was drunk and still coming down from his high and he briefly thought about ignoring the man and just carrying on up the stairs, but instead, he mumbled a quick jumble of curse words under his breath, sighed heavily and shuffled to the sitting room to see his father sat in his favorite armchair, wrapped in a bathrobe.

“Where have you been?”

Brendon could clearly hear the accusatory tone in his father’s voice. “Out,” he shrugged.

He was reminded of all the similar conversations he had with Jon – after he returned from an evening
of being fucked by Ryan Ross, making out with him and letting the man bring him to orgasm. Living back with his parents was kind of like living with Jon again – the lies and the suspicion, anyway.

“Until six in the morning?” his father questioned.

Yes, dad. Welcome to fabulous Las Vegas, he wanted to drone. This is the real city that never sleeps. “I guess I lost track of time,” he lied.

“You have no business being out until six in the morning, Brendon.”

Brendon looked at the ground and sniffed hard, trying not to slur his speech. “I’m sorry. I didn’t think you’d be waiting up for me – besides, I’m an adult now. I can stay out until six in the morning if I want.” He was in no mood to be scolded by his father for staying out past his curfew so he turned from the door of the sitting room and moved back into the hallway. His father called him back and Brendon felt his muscles tighten in annoyance – the longer he was forced to make conversation, the more likely his father would be to figure out he was high. Brendon just wanted to go to bed, but he returned to the doorway and looked at his dad.

“Not while you’re living under our roof, you can’t. This isn’t a hotel – and if you’re going to be staying here much longer, then your mother and I expect rent.”

“Well, that sounds exactly like a hotel to me,” Brendon bit, watching the silent fury at being back-talked spark in his father’s eyes. He sighed – his father was frail and old and Brendon felt bad for upsetting him, but why couldn’t his parents just accept him for who he was? “This is just a transitory period for me,” he said, and he couldn’t help but snidely add, “Don’t worry, I don’t plan on hanging around. Give me five or six weeks, at most and I’ll be out of here.”

He saw how his words hurt his father. The realization suddenly dawned on the man that Brendon would rather be almost anywhere other than holed up in his childhood bedroom in Summerlin.

“You should think about getting a job,” his father suggested lightly, scraping the dirt from underneath his fingernails. “What were you doing back in New York?”

“Making ends meet,” he said. Brendon had forgotten which lies he’d spun to which member of his family. His father hadn’t talked to him about New York since his return home and he didn’t seem that fazed by getting a solid answer from his son. He nodded and a silence descended over the dark living room.

All Brendon currently wanted to do was to have a quick smoke out of his bedroom window to mellow out his coke comedown and to pass the fuck out. It had been a long night. When he woke up tomorrow morning, he’d take the day one hour at a time. He hung at the doorway to the sitting room, hoping to be dismissed.

“I’m concerned about Dallon,” his father announced after a pause. He looked over the top of his spectacles at his son and then glanced back down at his fingers and continued to clean dirt from under his nails. “He’s been acting a little… off lately. It’s not like him and I know the two of you have been spending some time together; I was just wondering if things were okay with him and Lydia?”

Brendon breathed a laugh in disbelief and shook his head. “You’re concerned about Dallon?”

Why? What about me?, he wanted to shout. I feel like I’m suffocating here. Why aren’t you worried about that? Why aren’t you playing your role as a parent and giving me some support?

His father looked him in the eye and said, “Dallon’s been more of a son to me than you have these
past few years, Brendon.”

Brendon felt like he’d just been punched in the guts. Over the last few months, the people he cared about all said some pretty spiteful things to him, but this one just about topped the list. He didn’t even have a chance to rationalize his father’s words before the emotions escaped from his eyes and he let loose a teary bark of laughter. The sitting room fell into silence again. His father obviously felt no need to apologize.

“I helped you out as best I could when I was in New York – and God knows I worked hard for that money. I’m sorry if that wasn’t good enough.”

Brendon’s tears retreated almost as quickly as they started. He didn’t want his father to see him cry, but his blunt statement left an ache inside his chest. No one wanted him – not even his own parents. He looked down at his bare feet and flexed his toes. He wondered what state the Urie family would’ve been left in if he and Dallon escaped to California together when he was eighteen.

“Dallon’s everyone’s favorite, huh? Everybody just loves Dallon. Wow, Dallon’s just so amazing. I wish I could be Dallon and have everyone blindly kiss my ass.” He shook his head and let out a sad laugh through his lips. His father frowned at his language. “He’s not the man everyone thinks he is, y’know?” he added, catching his father’s gaze.

“Dallon is a good man, Brendon. He always put this family first and I’m very fond of him. Jealousy is an ugly trait – and something you evidently need to work on.”

“I am not jealous of Dallon,” Brendon scoffed – but that was a lie because he was jealous. Dallon successfully fooled everyone around him that he was a good, honest man – and that was definitely a talent that Brendon was envious of.

His father sighed. “Go to bed, Brendon – and don’t come back here in this state again. You may be an adult, but you are still our son and while you’re living in this house, you will follow our rules or find someplace else to live, that means no drinking, no smoking, no sexual activity – and no mention of it either, it upsets your mother. She wants another grandchild, you know? She’s-”

“Why does she want another grandchild? She’s got a son right here who needs taking care of and she doesn’t give a shit.”

“And no cussing!” his father warned. “That’s another of our rules you’ll abide by while you live here – and I don’t know what your mother’s said to you, but I do not agree with your lifestyle at all, Brendon. Homosexuality is a sin and you’ve shamed our family.” He eyed his son over the tops of his glasses.

Brendon could feel these emotions boiling up in his veins. He needed to get the fuck out of Las Vegas. He suddenly felt like he was watching Jon falling out of love with him again, except this time, it was his own family who were regarding him with such apathy. He was filled with a renewed sense of jealousy and resentment, of hatred and anger.

“Fuck you,” he spat, and watched his father’s face ignite in anger. “Fuck the both of you. In fact, fuck this whole goddamn family – Mr. Dallon Weekes included. I am your son,” he hissed. “You’re meant to love me no matter what. How can you just sit there and say those things and not feel guilty about it?”

“Brendon, be quiet, you’re going to wake your mother…”

Brendon was becoming a little hysterical. “I am not a bad person, dad. I refuse to believe that I’m a
I was a bad person because of who I choose to love – but at least I’m being honest with you, at least I’m not hiding who I really am because I’m too scared to come out. I came back to Las Vegas because the man I loved left me for someone else and I had to leave New York because it hurt too much knowing he didn’t love me back – and it’s all the same feeling once you strip it away: man, woman, gay, straight, somewhere in between – it’s love and it sucks but we keep doing it because life’s a whole lot easier when there’s two of you. Right?”

He paused for a second and rubbed the sleeve of his jacket over his face to dry his eyes. His nose started running. He sniffed hard and steadying his voice, he said, “Every time I think about Jon, it hurts because I know I failed him – not just as a partner, but as a friend too. I thought I fought so hard for him – but I didn’t. I pushed him away. It’s no wonder he left me…” He let out a shaky laugh. “And now he’s got someone and I don’t and my whole family thinks I’m a bad person because of something I can’t even help.”

Brendon wiped his eyes free of slow tears. “I came back here because I thought you’d support me, but none of you do. I almost single-handedly paid your medical bills and I worked so hard for that money, so don’t you dare sit there and tell me that Dallon is a better son than me because he’s not your son. I am – and you can’t love me because I’m gay.”

“That’s not true, Brendon. We love you very much, both myself and your mother – but I think we both know that only the Lord can judge you.”

“Yeah, well, for a religion that was meant to be about love and respect and tolerance and understanding, you guys sure skewed the meaning.” He tipped his head back against the wall and blinked up at the ceiling. “I’ve been through so much crap, dad, you wouldn’t even believe. I need my mom and dad – I’m burned out. I need a hug. Something…”

“Go to bed, Brendon. You’re intoxicated.”

Brendon bit hard on the inside of his lip and turned into the hallway before his father saw his expression crumble.

He needed to get the fuck out of Vegas.

Later that morning, a knock at the front door had woken him up from a fitful sleep. He didn’t know how long whoever was down there had been knocking, but he pushed his tired, aching body up from the mattress and stumbled blindly towards the sound, out of his bedroom and down the stairs.

Brendon had fallen asleep in his clothes after his conversation with his father and he passed out almost immediately, but his sleep had been scattered with anxious dreams and he didn’t feel at all refreshed. His face was sore from too much coke and his stomach was feeling unsettled from all the free alcohol Spencer supplied him with the previous evening.

For a few seconds, Brendon couldn’t remember what day it was – or why his parents weren’t answering the door themselves, but of course – it was Sunday, his mom and dad were at church and the knock at the front door was Dallon, shuffling on the doorstep and hauling all his issues on his shoulders like a modern day Atlas.

Brendon groaned when he saw him. If there was one person he had less patience for than his parents right now, it was his repressed brother-in-law, Dallon. He really didn’t have time for that man’s woe-is-me pity party. He was hungover and strung-out and the memory of his father’s words earlier that morning had settled uneasily inside his chest.

Behind the screen door, Dallon smiled at him. “I thought we could maybe grab some brunch?” he
suggested. “Somewhere on the Strip – my treat.” Brendon let him in, but didn’t answer him. He was too hungover to even think about brunch, much less joining Dallon in a busy casino for a Vegas brunch buffet. He wanted to catch up on sleep and be left alone.

“You look exhausted,” Dallon pointed out. When Brendon ignored him, he sighed and looked around the hallway. “Your dad said you’ve been spending a lot of time out of the house, coming home real late. He’s concerned that you’re drinking too much.”

“Did my father put you up to this?”

Dallon shook his head with honest eyes. “I’m just worried about you is all. You seem… different than before.”

“Did you really expect it to go back to how it was? When I was seventeen, before you married my sister?”

Dallon shrugged. “No. I guess not. I think, sometimes I find it hard to accept that you had your own life out in New York. I thought about you almost every day, Brendon. I feel like I’ve been stuck on pause since you left.”

Brendon tried not to get swept away by Dallon’s words but it was difficult. Dallon was a good-looking man but he’d been beaten down so hard by life. Why couldn’t he fall for someone stable, someone who’d take care of him? Why did he have such an affinity for broken men?

“Well, nothing seems to have changed much since I’ve been gone. I never felt more unwelcome in a place, Dallon. My parents hate me, my sister doesn’t talk to me and you’re the son my father wishes I was.”

“Your parents don’t hate you, Bren; they’re worried about you. Your dad was asking me the other day if I knew whether you’d been taking drugs in New York or not, because you seem so…” He struggled to find a suitable adjective. “Distant.”

Brendon rolled his eyes and leaned against the bannister. “They’re worried about you too. My dad said you’ve been acting a little off recently. He wanted to know whether things were okay between you and Lydia.”

Dallon looked at the floor and reddened. He’d always been such a handsome man and in the dusty morning light, Brendon could see his true age, all his hardships etched across his face. They could’ve had a really good life together if they left Nevada when Brendon was younger, but Dallon had chosen to struggle through a complete sham of a marriage instead of admitting they were in love.

“Things haven’t been okay between Lydia and I for years, Brendon. I pretend like I’m happy because I really do care about her, but I’m not in love with her. I realized that when you came back.” Dallon raised his watery blue eyes to look at him and Brendon felt the twist inside his stomach tighten. Maybe Dallon truly still loved him? “I want a divorce – or at least some kind of separation. I’ve been wanting that for ages but I know it’s going to break her heart.”

Brendon huffed out a breath and watched Dallon’s feet shuffle. He wanted to say something cruel and cutting. He wanted to hurt the only man who seemed to truly care about him, but he stayed silent. No good could ever come from mean words.

“I am so sorry for hurting you, Brendon,” his brother-in-law whispered, almost choking on his apology. “I know this is all my fault and I am so sorry. I regret the decisions I made back then every single day.”
Brendon felt his vision cloud and - fuck, when had he become such an emotional wreck? Jesus, he needed to get a grip. He wasn’t going to let Dallon make him cry.

His brother-in-law looked apprehensively around the hallway and Brendon noticed just how tightly he was wound - his shoulders stiff and pulled together, his hands always fumbling, feet always dragging. Dallon’s height only added to just how awkward he looked stood there in front of him and Brendon wondered if he’d been walking through life like this for the past eight years – and why nobody else had noticed.

In their truest forms, they were two lost souls who had been cut up the exact same way.

“Well, anyway,” Dallon sighed, changing the subject, “brunch runs until 3PM at Caesar’s Palace. If you wanted to go down, I can pay, it’s-”

“What the fuck do you want, Dallon? Seriously. Why are you here?” Brendon held his gaze purposefully. He wanted to know where he stood with this man. He’d driven his relationship with Jon into the dirt before he realized there was no love left between them and he learned two harsh lessons in the middle of it – that picking at a scab doesn’t let it heal and that people never change.

Dallon’s mouth moved as if to answer, but fell closed again after a short second. He shook his head and seemed to be considering Brendon’s question for the first time.

“I don’t know,” he mouthed, his blue eyes wide, the lines on his forehead creased. He sniffed and then looked away, past Brendon and up to the light filtering in through the window on the landing. Dallon’s eyes glazed with tears and Brendon had never been able to support Jon, but perhaps he could learn to support Dallon. When his brother-in-law looked back at him, his shoulders sank; his face appeared a little softer.

“I want you, Brendon.”

Brendon felt his heart surge right into his throat. “In what way?” he mumbled, eager to finally cut through the bullshit after a long four weeks back in Nevada.

“In every way – like we once were. As my friend, my confidant…” He paused, struggling to get the words out, looking down at the space between them.

“Say it,” Brendon prompted. “I want to hear you say it.”

Dallon stayed quiet for a few more seconds, but Brendon could only imagine how loud the thoughts must’ve been spinning through his head. He looked up, locking his gaze with the younger man. “I love you, Brendon. No one’s ever compared to you – I want to share my life with you. I want to be with you, to be able to fall asleep next to you and wake up beside you. I can’t live this lie anymore, Brendon; it’s killing me.”

Brendon felt his lips twitch and he turned away down the hallway, all the time hoping that Dallon would follow him. “You shouldn’t say that if you don’t mean it, Dallon. Do you really think that we have anything in common anymore? We’re practically strangers now. It’s been eight years. You married my goddamn sister – you turned what we had into a crappy joke.”

“Don’t say that; what we had meant everything to me.” Dallon followed him into the kitchen. “Brendon,” he sighed, “I spent the last eight years trying to convince myself that what I feel for Lydia is love but it’s hopeless now. I always thought – where’s that fire? Where’s that passion? Where’s that feeling that Brendon used to give me? The little jump I get in my stomach every time I think about you. I never felt it with her and I gave up on my marriage years ago, but I stayed because
your family was my only link to you. You’re my angel, Brendon. You’re always going to be.”

Brendon spun around to face him, his heart tightening as he heard Dallon use his old pet name. “You broke my heart, Dallon. You married my sister. You blew your chances.”

“I let you walk away once, Brendon, I’m not about to let it happen again. I love you.”

“So what? What do you plan on doing about it, dude? You’re going to leave Lydia? You’re going to tell her you’re gay and you’ve been in love with her brother all this time? Are you finally going to man up and admit to who you really are; because from where I’m standing, Dallon, you’re a pussy – and you’re a coward and I left one of those back in New York last month. Let me tell you, I have no desire to get involved with another one.”

Dallon stayed quiet and for a moment, Brendon thought he was going to cry but he shook his head and blinked back the tears from his eyes. Dallon looked at a loss for words. “But I love you,” he said eventually – as if love could splinter through all the past heartache, as if love was all he needed to patch up old wounds.

Brendon leaned forward, goading. “Well then, prove it,” he spat. “Make me feel indispensable.”

Dallon took the bait with surprising audacity, crossing the kitchen and closing the distance between them. Brendon tensed up when he felt the man’s hands either side of his face, cupping his jaws, gripping tight and pushing him back against the worktop. Brendon closed his eyes in anticipation of a kiss but Dallon’s lips lingered on his, his body pressed against him. Brendon’s fingers twisted to hold the taller man’s wrists.

“It’s always been you, Brendon,” Dallon told him. “Believe me when I say that you’re everything I ever wanted.”

Brendon shook his head sadly and forced a smile. “No, I’m not,” he sniffed. “I fucked up, Dallon. I fucked up so bad in New York and now I don’t know what to do.”

“We’ll figure something out, angel. We’ll get through it. Okay?”

Brendon nodded and felt Dallon’s lips press gently against his. The kiss was cautious and wary, as if Dallon was testing the water between them but he couldn’t help but arch into the older man, pulling him close with his arms around his neck to feel the pounding of Dallon’s heart. He slowly opened his mouth against him, their tongues coming together, wet and slow.

His parents made him feel like an unwanted stepchild, but this felt like he was finally home – after all those years of running, Brendon felt like he finally finished the race. This was it – the divine reward that his parents always talked of. This was it. Dallon’s tongue pushed desperately into his mouth and Brendon felt himself melt against him, kissing back and pulling their bodies flush.

He needed this for a long time. The shared kiss with Dallon made him feel alive, after so much time spent resigning himself to a half-life of sadness and regret. Dallon still cared about him and Brendon was desperate enough to want to hold onto that. He gripped Dallon’s hips, arching against him as he felt his brother-in-law’s dick grow hard as it pressed against his belly.

Brendon was the one to pull back first, lips bruised from the kiss, his mouth raw with stubble burn. He looked up at Dallon’s dazed expression and a silent moment passed between them. Dallon grabbed his hand and led him back out into the hallway, and when he started to climb the stairs, Brendon willingly followed after him, that rolling sense of excitement and anticipation rolling like a slow tide through his stomach.
Chapter 33

Chapter Summary

I made this post, as a quick reference for those readers unfamiliar with Lake Tahoe.

It had been three days since he last talked to Brendon – three days since the man promised to remain celibate and Ryan was desperate to talk to him again. He couldn’t get the guy out of his head and his every waking moment was consumed by thoughts of Brendon the Hooker and how heated the sex would be when they met up again.

Ryan would jack off to images of the beautiful boy on his hands and knees, open and ready and eager for his dick and over time, he created an almost faultless image of the man who was currently keeping him sane.

It seemed dangerous to place so much blind faith in a man who made a living hustling his ass on the streets of Manhattan, even Ryan was aware of that – but he convinced himself it was something to cling onto and for a recovering drug-addict, putting his faith in a human being, for once, was surely more acceptable than relying on cocaine and alcohol and numerous anti-depressants.

“So, do you plan on meeting up with your friend, Brendon, when you get out of here?” Patrick asked him the previous day.

Patrick knew everything about Brendon, apart from the fact he was a hooker and Ryan admittedly made their relationship out to be more than it actually was, because he felt silly admitting to himself that a man he met only three times in his life made such an impression on him. He embellished a few details and exaggerated the few facts he knew about the man. He was worried that if he didn’t, Dr. Stump would try and warn him off meeting the dude.

He hadn’t talked to Brendon since Thursday and he was hankering after some attention from the man. Brendon was newly single after his pathetic, junkie ex-boyfriend had run off with another man and he was living a mere three hundred miles away in Las Vegas. Ryan couldn’t wait to see him again - to be able to feel the touch of another human, to be able to lose himself inside someone who was dependent on him.

“Brendon’s living in Las Vegas now. I want to take him someplace nice when I get out,” Ryan informed Patrick. “My parents own a house on Lake Tahoe and it’s beautiful up there. I think it’s best I stay out of Manhattan for as long as possible.”

“Tahoe is beautiful at this time of year, I’m sure,” Patrick had nodded. “I just hope Brendon’s as much of a support as you hope he’s going to be.”

“He will be,” Ryan had replied. He’d better be, he thought. Ten goddamn grand he’d agreed to pay him the other night, so he’d better act supportive.

Ryan’s parents’ house on the shores of Lake Tahoe had always been his favorite place to visit before he discovered drugs. His father bought it for his stepmother as a wedding gift and Ryan and his siblings spent many a summer playing on the clear waters, and although he hadn’t been up there for quite a number of years, Ryan hoped it’d remind him of his carefree childhood.
They called it the Cabin because of the warm, wooden interiors, open fireplaces and vaulted ceilings but it was actually a sprawling, seven bedroomed home set on over three acres. There was a boathouse and a private jetty and during the long, winter months, surrounded by snowy mountains, Ryan would even consider it romantic.

Nowadays, the house went largely unoccupied - his father visited once a year on his annual hunting trip but Ryan hadn’t been up to Tahoe since he was fourteen years old. He figured Brendon would be keen to get out of Vegas, anyway. After swapping one shitty city for another, he was probably in need of an escape to the mountains – to reconnect with nature, to appreciate the world’s beauty.

Ryan was six weeks clean and he was proud of his progress – knowing that his perfect guy was waiting for him to complete his program was only spurring him on to keep at it. He now shared even his most personal issues with Patrick, he attended group therapy every day, he shared his feelings with his fellow junkies and he’d been making use of the facility’s gymnasium – he lost a bit of the coke-bloat he gained over the years and he knew that in six weeks, he was going to be looking great for Brendon Urie. The man wouldn’t be able to resist him!

He was becoming more and more positive about life on the outside every single day.

It still scared him when he thought about returning to New York – all of his friends were rich drug-abusers, none of whom had been quite as dependent on powders and pills as he had been, but he wondered if any of them would change their lifestyle to accommodate him.

“Don’t count on it,” Patrick told him earlier that afternoon. “Many recovering addicts find it very difficult to stay away from old habits without cutting ties with their old lives – that’s why so many fall off the wagon after rehab, because their friends and family don’t understand addiction. First, it’s a puff on a joint, then a swig of beer and before they know it, they’re shooting up in a subway station bathroom.” Dr. Stump informed him sagely, pushing his glasses up his nose. “Getting out of here and assessing which things trigger you into wanting to use again is going to be tough – really tough, make no mistake about it - but hopefully we can adequately prepare you for that before you leave.”

“Can I just pay you to come back to Manhattan with me when I go home?” Ryan asked with a smile. “I can smuggle you out of this place, you know? Sneak you out in my pocket. What do they pay you here; whatever it is, I’ll double it.”

Patrick wore a silver wedding band, Ryan was pretty certain that he wasn’t in the least bit interested in him, but it was fun to flirt with the guy. Ryan liked watching him blush.

Patrick laughed, but he shook his head. “You’ll do just fine on your own, Ryan. I have faith in you – and so should you. You’ll be able to show all those people who doubted you and you’ll soon realize that it’s not so bad being sober. Take it from me; I haven’t had a drink since I was sixteen,” Patrick informed him. It didn’t surprise Ryan. As sweet as he was, Patrick looked like a bit of a square.

“I’m from Chicago and I fell into a bad crowd for a few years back in my youth, but I chose to knuckle down and study hard and now I’m here, talking to you,” he splayed his hands in front of him and smiled. “I very much enjoy what I do, but I could just as easily have taken the wrong road and started getting into trouble like a lot of my friends did. I chose another path – and that’s all life is, Ryan. Choices and decisions, a network of pathways that’ll eventually lead to the same place – we don’t always pick the right ones, but I believe in fate and I believe that good people are rewarded with great lives. We get out of life what we put into it, Ryan. Don’t ever forget that. Don’t ever give up.”

Ryan hummed quietly in agreement. We get out of life what we put into it – it seemed an incredibly simple sentiment to live by.
Later that afternoon, Ryan had spoken to his father for the first time in six weeks.

It had been Patrick’s idea and Ryan was skeptical at first, simply because the only person he really wanted to talk to was Brendon. No doubt a conversation with his father after a month and a half with no contact would stir up some emotions he wasn’t yet fit to deal with.

“Your parents are concerned,” Dr. Stump told him. “You should call your father and tell him how well you’re doing. I know he’d like to hear your voice. I hear he calls the facility quite often to check on your progress.”

That news rather surprised Ryan. All this time, he’d been in rehab and the only pain he truly thought about was his own. He’d forgotten how addiction affected those around him – his selfless stepmom and long-suffering father, the two people who, for all intents and purposes, brought him up right.

This doesn’t just affect me, he realized. My addictions are so much more than a guilty conscience and three months in a Californian rehab center. They were real and they were ugly and it was a good thing his father shipped him off to rehab when he did because if the drugs didn’t kill him, they’d kill his relationships with the people he loved.

Watching their youngest son try and destroy himself must’ve been difficult for the Ross family to witness. He’d been a terrible son, a frustrating brother and a less than reliable friend over the years. Ryan had a lot of bridges to rebuild – all of them from the ground up and with his bare hands. It was going to be no easy task.

He was ashamed of how selfish his addictions made him and he owed his father a phone call at the very least. On the thirteenth ring, George Ross’s voice resonated through his cellphone happily. “Ryan! Hey, wow, great to hear from you, son. How are you? How’re things?”

“Hey, dad. Things are shaping up to be pretty good, actually. I’m feeling okay,” he replied, holding the phone between his ear and his shoulder as he twisted his fingers. He suddenly remembered his little indiscretion with Keltie – where they’d been caught coming out of the bathroom together after an admittedly lousy attempt at sex and Keltie immediately discharged herself and called him a hopeless lover. Ryan just hoped that whole thing had blown over in the press by now, because the last thing he wanted to discuss with his father was his love life. It had been a month, but he knew how much the tabloids loved to drag him over the coals.

“And how’s rehab treating you; are you following the rules finally?”

Ryan felt his mouth pull up at the corner. “Yeah. Rehab’s fine. I’ve been talking to this amazing guy – I guess you’d call him my shrink. He’s awesome,” he sighed, casting a look over his shoulder to see Patrick sat behind his desk, trying to battle a pleased grin off his face. Ryan chuckled to himself and turned back around. He’d always been a charmer and most people took the bait, Dr. Stump included. “He really helped me through a lot of issues. He made me realize I have a lot to give the world. He made me want to live my life again.”

“Well, I’ll be damned. My son is finally sounding positive. I told you rehab would do you some good. I’m proud of you, Ryan.”

Ryan smiled. His father was proud of him, which was an emotion he never displayed in front of his son before. At the back of his mind, even when he was on drugs, he always felt like he was the disappointment of the Ross family. He was the liability, the wild child, the black sheep and his siblings always surpassed him in every single way imaginable.

Maybe what he needed all this time was to hear a familiar voice, showing him some genuine support.
He could feel the color rising on his cheeks.

“How’s the family?” he asked, picking some dirt from underneath his thumbnail. These were the things he was becoming interested in now – not just how long it’d be before he could have his next hit.

His father exhaled a breath. “Good,” he mused, “the family’s good. Jacob is currently in Bulgaria with his European children’s charity, helping rebuild schools in Vratsa, so he’s happy enough. He did a shoot with People magazine out there which went to print last week.”

Typical Jacob, Ryan thought – the do-gooding Ross brother who never did anything without making sure the whole world was watching and listening.

“How’s William?”

“I gave William some paid leave – hell, the guy needed it. I think he took his wife and daughter to Disneyland.”

Ryan actually cooed. His father was right – William sure as hell needed the time off. “That’s nice – William’s a good guy… And how about Shane?” he asked curiously. The last time he spoke to Shane he’d been standing in that drug-dealer Pete’s dismal hallway the day he OD’d and ended up in the hospital. Shane quit on him that day. He said he was tired of his shit and he quit on him.

George Ross sighed. “Shane’s fine. He took a few weeks off after – you know? – after you went to rehab but he’s still on the payroll. He does odd jobs for Jacob when he’s around, drives Pamela around every now and then. He asks about you,” his father chuckled. “So, tell me… How are things there in California? You pulling through?”

“Yeah. I’m thinking about going up to the Cabin once I get out of here,” he said. “Stay out of the city. Reconnect with nature for a month or two.”

Fuck Brendon in front of the fireplace, he added silently. Perhaps fall in love…

His father hummed. “Good idea. I’ll make sure it’s ready for you before you leave rehab – and you spend as long as you need up there. It’ll be good for you to stay out of Manhattan for a bit.”

Ryan nodded in silent agreement. That was the one thought keeping him sane – the fact that in six weeks, he’d be on the shores of Lake Tahoe with Brendon Urie. That boy had an ass to die for… He was going to call Brendon after he got off the phone with his father and demand a picture of it.

“Well, I’m currently in Las Vegas with Marc Willis – he’s getting a divorce, by the way, did you hear? We’re attending the RECon Convention together…”

Ryan’s mind totally shut down. He heard his father’s words slip further and further away and he tried
to keep control of his body and brain. *His father was in Las Vegas with Marc Willis. His father was still hanging out with his rapist* and he felt his blood turn cold, his body breaking out into a sweat as his mouth went dry.

Ryan could feel himself fading to gray. The walls were closing in on him and Marc’s sick voice was there in his head, telling him he wanted it, telling him he asked for it. The bile rose up his throat and Ryan felt like he was going to faint. All he could think about was Marc, Marc, *Marc*.

He heard his father’s voice grow a little louder in his ear and tried to filter his words. George was just repeating his name over and over again, asking him if he was still there, if he was okay.

“Why are you in Las Vegas?” he heard himself ask.

“I told you, son - we’re here for the RECon Convention. I get invited every year – I’m actually the guest speaker this year, last year it was Trump. Marc’s tagging along because I think he’s feeling a little down since his old lady filed for divorce. He’s actually pretty cut up about it and so I took him golfing this morning, tried to cheer him up some. He asked all about you.”

Ryan felt the tears spring immediately to his eyes, imagining his father teeing off with Marc Willis, joking and laughing and complimenting his backswing. Reality once again began to fade to gray. He needed to remove himself from this situation as quickly as possible, Patrick could help him through this, he thought – but the shock already set in and he felt the stomach acid rising up into his throat.

“I have to go,” he mumbled, just catching his father’s confused reply before he cut off the connection and let the hand holding his cellphone drop heavily into his lap.

“Everything okay?” He heard Patrick’s distant voice in the background and for a few moments, Ryan saw his life in perfect clarity. Marc Willis was the reason he was here. Marc Willis was the reason he grew up intent on destroying himself – and his clueless father was gallivanting around Las Vegas with the man without a clue what happened between them.

Clutching his cellphone in his fist, he smashed it hard against the corner of the glass coffee table in front of him. When it eventually fell apart, his hand was covered in blood – and it was the sight of ruby red dripping over his wrists that pulled him out of his panic.

But it was too late for justifications then, because three burly security guards and several suited doctors were already bursting through the office door, holding him back and manhandling him out of the room as Ryan’s vision went black.

* * *

Sex with Dallon had been a predictable disappointment. Brendon hadn’t really expected it to be anything more than mediocre, but after the deed, the reality of what they’d just done sat uncomfortably in the center of his chest. His heart felt like a gaping wound.

“I’m sorry if that wasn’t good for you,” Dallon had whispered, kissing Brendon’s shoulder as they lay together. “It’s just Lydia and I haven’t had sex in over six months.”

Brendon baulked at the image – of Dallon having sex with his sister Mormon-style, missionary position with all the lights off.

When they pushed through his bedroom door together, their lips joined in a hurried kiss – all tongue and saliva and desperate, raw aggression. Dallon only pulled away to yank Brendon’s t-shirt up and over his head and Brendon knew he looked good naked, better than he did when he was seventeen, anyway. Men didn’t pay thousands of dollars to fuck someone who was out of shape.
Dallon’s eyes dragged over his body, drinking in the sight of his bare chest and low slung pants and Brendon couldn’t stop himself from shivering when he felt Dallon’s fingertip run down the center of his ribcage and down to his navel, stopping at the buckle of his belt.

“You’re beautiful,” Dallon told him, pushing their foreheads together lightly and then pecking his nose. Brendon replied by pushing the older man’s hoodie off from around his shoulders and made quick work on the buttons of his shirt.

Dallon clumsily unbuckled Brendon’s belt, popped the top button of his pants and unzipped him. “You’re so beautiful to me,” he repeated – and Dallon almost sounded like he was in a daze.

As they slowly undressed each other, Brendon could feel his heart in his throat. He wasn’t sure that he wanted to fuck his brother-in-law. It was, after all, a pretty shitty thing to do and he kept glancing nervously up at Dallon every few seconds to assess his reactions.

Dallon apparently only slept with two people in his entire life and Brendon had no high hopes regarding the man’s sexual prowess. Someone like Ryan Ross knew how to fuck – simply because he had enough sex to know what works and what doesn’t. *Ryan Ross* – the name spun through Brendon’s head like a tornado. He was meant to be keeping his dick in his pants for Ryan Ross. So much for promises he made while he was high as fuck on coke…

Every time Brendon heard a noise escape Dallon’s lips, he expected the man to chicken out, to pull away and leave him hanging – maybe that’s what he’d been hoping for. Brendon always had difficulty saying no, but when he walked the man back against the edge of the bed and pushed him down to sit on the mattress, Dallon yanked the zipper of his pants and shoved them around his ankles. Brendon pulled them all the way off and kneeled between the man’s knees in a position he was all too familiar in.

The man’s cock strained inside his underwear and Brendon had taken the initiative to push his face against the material and inhaled the man’s instantly recognizable scent straight into his lungs; the wet patch of pre-come staining Dallon’s briefs tasted salty against his tongue.

As he tongued at him through his underwear, Dallon’s hands moved tenderly over his shoulders, rubbing comforting little circles into his skin.

It hadn’t taken much to get the man groaning – a stream of real, deep moans that resonated from deep inside his chest - and when Brendon pulled away and glanced up at his brother-in-law, he had his head thrown back and his eyes closed. Brendon slipped his hand inside Dallon’s underwear and squeezed around the shaft of his dick.

Dallon’s cock was like him – long and skinny. He was uncircumcised, which was something Brendon always found fascinating as a teenager, there was something sexy about it, something that almost bordered on a kink for a little while and seeing Dallon naked and hard in front of him suddenly brought back an onslaught of memories – of the two of them sucking each other off underneath the covers of Dallon’s old dorm bunk, laughing and teasing and exploring each other’s unchartered bodies. Brendon pushed those memories to the back of his mind as he pulled the man’s underwear off and he directed Dallon’s cock into his mouth with no encouragement.

Brendon was also aware of his fellatio skills – he knew how to give *really* good head and he certainly improved since he’d last seen Dallon. It hadn’t taken him long to hiss through his teeth for Brendon to stop.

“Who’s the better dick sucker, huh? Me or Lydia?” he goaded, sticking his tongue out and hitting the pink head of Dallon’s dick against it. Brendon moved his mouth around it once again
and *sucked*, hollowing his cheeks as he palmed Dallon’s balls.

“Please, Bren. *Stop,*” the man pleaded above him.

But Brendon didn’t stop – he deep-throated Dallon’s dick right to the hilt, taking his entire length into his mouth and still managing to stick his tongue out far enough that he could lick his balls.

“Darling, please... Stop, I’m gonna- I can’t hang on much longer.”

Neither of them had lube or condoms and it had been a while since anyone fucked him, but they managed with nothing more than a lot of spit and willpower. Brendon was a pro at taking cock and over the years he realized that the human body was capable of some amazing things – taking a dick without proper lubrication was one of them and after some careful self-preparation, Dallon fucked him in his childhood bedroom – for all of thirty seconds before he came, without warning, inside Brendon’s ass.

The older man pulled out almost immediately, leaving Brendon feeling empty and unsatisfied and while Dallon collapsed back on the pillow with a sigh, Brendon remained on his hands and knees, hoping to earn some relief. His cock was still hard between his legs as he watched Dallon recover from his orgasm and when he felt the come begin to dribble out of him, down his taint and to his balls, Brendon actually felt like crying.

He’d chosen to flop down on the bed in resignation. He was nothing more than a convenient whore to *anyone*. The only man who’d ever seen him as anything more than two holes they could fuck was Jon. Closing his eyes, Brendon suddenly understood why his ex-boyfriend had grown to resent him so much.

“I can’t believe we just did that,” Brendon mumbled monotone into the pillow. He was ashamed of himself. He should’ve had a little more poise than that.

“I know.” Dallon breathed a quiet laugh and reached his hand out to stroke through Brendon’s hair. He didn’t say anything else and Brendon was almost drifting off to sleep before he offered to repay the orgasm.

Dallon wasn’t a very confident lover; he was clumsy and unsure and back when Brendon was a teenager that had been kind of endearing. Dallon was heavy-handed and as the man tried to stroke him back to erection, Brendon found his mind wandering to other things – to Jon and Joe asleep in each other’s arms back in Manhattan, to Ryan Ross out in California, residing in his rehab paradise, with only the promise that they’d meet up when he got out to carry him through the days.

He promised Ryan that he wouldn’t fuck anyone else until they saw each other again – the man agreed to pay him ten grand to remain loyal and Brendon only managed to stick to his word for three measly days.

As Dallon’s uncoordinated hand jerked him off, Brendon reluctantly decided that sex with his brother-in-law had definitely not been worth it, but now Ryan Ross was the very least of his worries – he just fucked his sister’s husband and with that realization fresh in his head, his erection flagged in Dallon’s hand.

“Did you want me to stop?” he asked after a few more moments of unsuccessfully trying to revive Brendon’s boner.

He nodded, swallowing the guilt that was burning his throat. Dallon’s hand fell away and he curled it under his chin as they blinked at each other.
“I’m sorry,” Dallon whispered. It was the saddest thing he heard anyone say in a while.

“It’s fine,” he replied, unable to keep contact with the older man’s concerned eyes. Things were far from fine – he just fucked his sister’s husband and that made him a really bad person.

“Did you want me to leave?”

Brendon sniffed and considered the question carefully. Despite everything, he didn’t want Dallon to leave. Not yet. “No,” he replied, shaking his head. “Can we just sleep next to each other for an hour or so?”

That’s what he really wanted – human contact, comfort without the expectation of sex – all the things Jon always wanted from him.

Dallon’s mouth pulled up slightly at the corners, a semblance of a smile flickering on his lips. “Okay,” he nodded, his long arms wrapping around Brendon’s shoulders and pulling their naked bodies together. He threw the blankets over them and within five minutes, Brendon could feel his body slowly giving into sleep, the warmth and comfort of another man beside him lulling him into the deepest sleep he had in months.

He’d woken up to find himself softly nuzzling against Dallon’s shoulder, pressing soft, feather-light kisses against the man’s warm skin. He’d woken up to find himself hard under the covers and without much preamble, he straddled Dallon’s barely awake body and rocked against him until he stirred.

They kissed, slow and gentle and Dallon’s dick quickly sprung to life between his legs. Brendon reached around and directed the man’s cock back into his ass – he was still loose and wet enough that it slid in easily.

They didn’t talk, they kissed and Brendon set the pace, fucking himself slowly back and forth as Dallon gripped his hips and keened underneath him.

“Oh, angel,” Dallon sighed right before he came, “I love you so much. You believe that, don’t you?” His arms wrapped tight around Brendon’s shoulders, Brendon’s dick caught between their bodies as he humped desperately against the man and then – finally, after what felt like eternity, Brendon came with Dallon’s proclamation of love soft in his ear.

He never doubted Dallon’s words. They crashed around his head like a storm – loud and destructive and not at all comforting, despite their beauty. They lay together for a few moments, breathing and trying to recover until Dallon shifted underneath him.

“I should go,” he said – Brendon pulled off and sat back on the bed, watching the man in front of him.

He knew the drill. Dallon was married – to his sister. He knew that despite how much he wanted the two of them to stay twisted together inside the safety of his bed, it wasn’t going to happen. Maybe this is how Ryan had felt when he begged him to stay that morning?

“Sure,” he yawned, feigning indifference. “You don’t want the ol’ ball and chain cracking the whip, huh?” He watched as Dallon moved from the bed and started to pick through his clothes on the floor.

“I’m sorry about earlier,” he said, looking back over his shoulder to hold his gaze.

“About… y’know?”

“For spooging too quick and not making me come?”
Dallon reddened. “Yeah. That.”

“It’s fine. It happens to the best of us.” Brendon had been there himself – three days ago in the back room of Spencer’s bar. He knew that Dallon was probably feeling a little embarrassed, but he wondered what other thoughts had been racing through his brother-in-law’s head since they awoke – guilt, regret, shame? He stretched on the mattress, arching his back just so, to catch the man’s eye.

After Dallon put his clothes back on, he stood in the middle of the bedroom and scratched his head, his eyes glancing desperately at the door for an easy escape route. “I meant everything I said, Brendon. I was thinking, maybe sometime this week we could get a hotel or something, maybe I could stay the night?” Brendon snorted and Dallon obviously read his doubtful expression because he quickly added, “That’s a pretty dumb idea though, right?” He laughed and took another step towards the door, wrapping his fingers around the handle. “We should still hit up the breakfast buffet at Caesar’s Palace one day soon though. The spread they put on is actually pretty phenomenal.” A pause. A sigh. “I really should go. Lydia…”

“Don’t hang around for my benefit,” Brendon told him, pulling the blanket up over his head. “I’ll see you round.”

When he heard the door of his bedroom close a few moments later, he cursed himself for being so swept away by Dallon’s sweet words and handsome face. He’d always been a sucker for a broken man – only for the fact that he desperately wanted to be the one to piece them back together and Dallon was the definition of broken. He was trapped in an unhappy marriage, he was still blindly in love with his clueless wife’s brother after all these years and the only person in his life that understood him was Brendon – and Brendon was a whore, making promises he couldn’t keep and desperate to escape his past.

He couldn’t be the one to ease Dallon’s woes; he had enough of his own to deal with. He wasn’t Dallon’s savior, he couldn’t whisk the man away from his loveless marriage to LA or San Francisco and he certainly knew that Dallon wasn’t the Superman he’d been hoping – they were both just as lost as each other and trying to find that light at the end of the tunnel would be like the blind leading the blind.

Dallon evidently found what he’d been looking for within Brendon, just like so many other men before him.

He was wide awake, his head filled with uncertainties when he heard his parents return from church. He didn’t want to talk to either of them – not after the conversation he had with his father earlier. He’d shower, get dressed, make himself look good and he’d go to the bar. Spencer would probably be more than willing to front him some coke and get him drunk enough that he’d forget this whole sorry mess.

“Brendon,” he heard his father’s voice shout up the stairs. The tone startled him and he jumped quickly from the mattress and pulled on his clothes. “Come down here, please. We need to talk.”

Fuck. He didn’t expect his parents to understand what he’d been through but he really wished he could catch a fucking break…

As he descended slowly down the stairs, he prepared himself for the reprimanding his mom and dad would probably give him for staying out all night and sleeping too late and drinking too much and breathing too much. They were both sat on the couch together, hand in hand, when Brendon appeared in the threshold of the doorway. His mother was teary-eyed, she couldn’t meet his gaze and his father’s expression was stony. He stopped, he looked at them and before his father even said anything, Brendon knew what was coming.
“We’re going to have to ask you to leave,” his father told him, looking him straight in the eye. “This isn’t working out. You need to find somewhere else to stay.”

“You’re throwing me out?”

“You need to leave,” his father nodded. “Today.”

Brendon turned away from the sitting room before he said anything he knew he was going to regret. He didn’t have any tears left to cry and he didn’t have any fight left inside his bones. He climbed back up the stairs, looked dismally around his bedroom and shoved the few clothes he’d brought with him from New York into his duffle bag.

He could hear his mother crying from the sitting room when he opened the front door and slammed it behind him, without another word to either of his parents.

Brendon was at the very end of his rope – he burned his bridges in Manhattan, his parents disowned him and the only person who seemed to truly love him was his sister’s less than dependable husband. He was at the end of the street before he pulled his cellphone from his pocket and scrolled through his contacts. He dialed the number of the only man he knew could help him out in his desperate time of need – Ryan Fucking Ross. He certainly wasn’t too proud to ask for money now; he had nothing and no one else he could turn to.

But Ryan’s phone didn’t ring. There was no dial tone, nothing. The line was dead.
Chapter 34

Brendon had seen his fair share of shady hotels during his time as a hooker, but none that quite compared to the Whole Year Inn, which was located where the glitz and glamour of the Strip ended and the ghetto began.

This was the Las Vegas the tourists didn’t see – the substandard motels and sleazy strip clubs, the boarded-up buildings and empty lots and alleyways littered with needles and crack pipes. There were no glittering casinos or five-star hotels here, but it was the Vegas reality for a lot of people - the alcoholics and the junkies, the hookers and the strippers and the gangbangers - the people who lost everything to one addiction or another.

Brendon felt as if he didn’t really belong in such a desolate place. He may have ticked all the right boxes but he had a good heart and he figured that set him apart from the other guests at the motel – but then again, maybe they were thinking the same thing.

His room at the Whole Year Inn smelled like bleach undercut with damp. An air-conditioning vent chugged noisily above a window that looked out onto the scummy parking lot and on arriving, Brendon precariously checked the bed sheets, which didn’t look like they’d been changed after the room’s pervious occupant checked out. Under the bed lay discarded vials of crack and empty condom wrappers, the shower was moldy, the carpet was threadbare and on the door to the room, were no less than four locks and dirty boot imprints from some long forgotten guest.

This wasn’t a motel for tourists – not even the most stringent of travelers. This was a straight-up crack motel. People lived here – pimps and hookers and tweaking. The place sat almost directly opposite the Stratosphere and it advertised adult movies, color TV and rather depressingly, both hourly and monthly rates. When Brendon checked in, they’d taken his cash without an ID, given him his key and told him to find his own room. It made the hostel he’d been staying at in Manhattan following his break-up with Jon look like Caesar’s Palace. He could hear gunfire in the distance and the pillows smelled musty.

It shared a parking lot with a strip club, a shooting range and a rundown wedding chapel – it was the definitive sleazy Vegas motel and as Brendon lay cautiously back on the grubby mattress that evening, he blinked up at the mold-speckled ceiling and tried to weigh up his options. He never quite understood why anyone would want to kill themselves – not even under the most desperate of circumstances but looking around his dismal new home, it all suddenly began to make sense to him.

What did he have left to live for? Jon hated him enough to bring another man into their bed right under his nose. His life in New York had completely fallen apart and he returned to Nevada in hopes of rekindling some kind of relationship with his family. He made the mistake of fucking his brother-in-law behind his sister’s back and his parents had as good as disowned him for his sexuality – and now he couldn’t even get a hold of Ryan Ross and that man was his only lifeline. He sighed into the pillow and curled up under the comforter.

Perhaps Ryan blocked his number? Perhaps he changed his mind about wanting to pay a hooker ten grand to sleep with him when he got out of rehab? Brendon certainly wouldn’t blame the guy – but when they’d last spoken, Ryan seemed so intent to see him again. He didn’t know what could’ve changed so much in such a short space of time that he would’ve changed his mind. Brendon decided to chalk it up as a loss and not get too hung up on the frankly inconsistent promises of an erratic billionaire. He knew he couldn’t pin all his hopes on a virtual stranger.

Ryan couldn’t save him; he was too busy trying to save himself.
After his parents kicked him out, he caught a bus down to the Strip and considered his options - calling Ryan was evidently out of the question. He could’ve gone to the bar, sought Spencer’s help and paid the guy back with grateful blowjobs, but he was tired of having to use his mouth and his throat to get what he wanted from other men. Becoming Spencer’s little boy toy didn’t seem like a very appealing option.

He thought about calling Dallon, the man who just a few short hours prior sighed his name and told him he loved him as he came - the man who just so happened to be married to his homophobic sister. Brendon didn’t know what Dallon could do to help him out of this jam, lend him money, perhaps? Lay down on the mattress with him and give him a cuddle, tell him it was all going to be okay?

Brendon hadn’t called Dallon and instead booked three nights in the cheapest room he could find in Vegas – twenty-five bucks a night including tax for this dump, was twenty-five bucks too much in Brendon’s humble opinion. He ought to be paid for staying in a place like this.

After he checked into the room, he’d been left with less than twenty dollars to his name. He walked to a nearby CVS, bought a packet of condoms and a bottle of lube and was halfway to a renowned cruising hotspot before he turned around and returned to his room. He couldn’t go back to that, hustling on the streets and standing on a street corner. He may have been desperate but he still had at least some dignity left.

He lay in bed, ate Hot Fries from the vending machine and watched Cops reruns until he fell asleep.

That night he slept sporadically. When he hadn’t been awoken by his dreams, he’d been kept awake by the sounds of his neighbors fighting, loud music and police sirens. He really couldn’t hack another six weeks of this. He’d be dead by the time Ryan got out of rehab and paid him his money – and that was if the guy even still wanted to see him again. Brendon wasn’t going to hold his breath.

When dawn had finally broken across South Las Vegas Boulevard, Brendon pushed up from the bed, stepped under the freezing cold stream of the shower and tried to wash the grime from his body. He could still smell Dallon on his skin.

He needed a job, he thought, as he tried to lather the complimentary shower gel between his hands. He was pretty certain that Spencer would help him out, but Brendon didn’t have any skills. He never had a proper job – not one he could put down on a résumé anyway - and for a man of twenty-six that looked pretty suspicious. He dipped his head under the pathetic trickle of water and sighed in frustration. He really didn’t want to have to resort to hustling his ass on Las Vegas Boulevard – but then again, this was Sin City. Perhaps that was his only choice…

He dried himself off with a scratchy bath towel and stepped into his jeans. They were beginning to smell kind of funky – he really wished that his parents let him do his laundry before they kicked him out. He felt like going back there and storming through the front door. He wanted to grab his father’s shoulders and shake him. He wanted to scream. I compromised all my morals so that you could pay your medical bills and this is the thanks I get? This is how you treat your own son, after everything I’ve done for you?

When he next checked his phone, it was almost 8AM; he had five missed calls and his heart thumped behind his ribs, hoping that it was Ryan calling him back, offering to wire him some money – but no such luck. It was Dallon – he probably just been informed that the Uries kicked their youngest son out of the family home with nowhere to go. He deliberated calling him back; he didn’t want to become dependent on the man, but beggars can’t be choosers, he told himself as he brought his cellphone to his ear and waited for Dallon to answer the phone.

“Brendon, hey – what’s up? I’m glad you called me back. I thought you were ignoring me.”
Brendon paused, answering cautiously. “I was in the shower.”

This brother-in-law laughed, quietly and under his breath. “Oh yeah? I’d’ve liked to have been there for that.”

He felt his eyebrows draw together in confusion – perhaps Dallon didn’t know about his parents asking him to leave – and where had this newfound confidence come from? Dallon wasn’t usually this assertive. Maybe getting some ass the previous afternoon brought out his flirtatious streak.

“I was wondering if I could tempt you with breakfast this morning? How about it?” the man suggested when Brendon decided to remain silent.

Brendon didn’t want to deal with the hustle and bustle of the Vegas Strip, not even this early on a Monday morning, but he couldn’t remember the last time he had a proper meal and his stomach had been growling for some decent food since last night.

“Fine – but I want to go somewhere quiet. Somewhere away from the Strip.” He gave Dallon the cross street of a nearby IHOP and told him he’d meet him there in half an hour.

“For sure you want to eat at an IHOP?” Dallon asked skeptically. “It’s kind of the ’hood down there, isn’t it? Come on,” he cajoled, “I promised I’d take you to the buffet at Caesar’s Palace. I’d like to treat you this once.”

“I just want to go somewhere quiet, Dallon. We need to talk.”

Dallon quickly fell silent – as if he suddenly realized they had serious issues to talk about and that it wasn’t just gallivanting around town for overpriced breakfast buffets and secret rendezvous when his wife was in church. He became a little flustered, the confidence he displayed a few moments ago disappeared. “Well… fine. If you say so - but at least let me pick you up. I can be over at your parents’ place in ten minutes.”

So, he’d woken up to five missed calls simply because Dallon was desperate to see him. The guy had no idea his mom and dad disowned him after coming home from church yesterday and that he was now living among junkies and dealers in the worst area of Las Vegas.

“I’ll meet you there,” Brendon repeated. He didn’t want to have to explain all that over the phone.

“But be ridiculous,” Dallon pressed. “I can pick you up. Lydia left for work about fifteen minutes ago; she doesn’t usually get home until gone five and I’m free all day – we can spend some time together. I’ll be over in a few minutes.”

“I said I’ll meet you there; what are you, fucking deaf?” he snapped, hanging up on Dallon without giving him another chance to argue.

Brendon made sure he was a casual ten minutes late to the restaurant, despite it being just a block away. Dallon was already sat at a booth in the far corner when Brendon arrived, his nose buried in the oversized menu and his hand wrapped around a steaming mug of coffee. He approached quietly and slipped into the bench seat opposite him. Dallon’s eyes lit up and he gave him a wide and genuine smile, which Brendon attempted to return.

“Good morning, my angel. I was worried you were going to stand me up.”

Brendon opened the menu in front of him and looked down at the pictures, but didn’t take in any of the information. He wished Dallon would stop calling him his angel – it wasn’t doing anything but enamor him towards the man and that was going to be hugely problematic if he continued to use his
When Brendon didn’t answer, Dallon bristled slightly. He raised his menu between them and spoke his words behind it. “I still don’t know why you wanted to meet up here though. There’s an IHOP a few blocks from your parents’ place; you can walk to it in less than ten minutes.” He couldn’t ignore the snarky edge to his brother-in-law’s voice.

“My mom and dad kicked me out last night.”

That caught Dallon’s attention. He dropped the menu back onto the table and gaped at him. “Are you serious?” he hissed, his voice barely audible above the clatter from the kitchen. Brendon nodded. “They kicked you out?” he repeated, his eyes wide. Brendon could see the cogs of his mind turning. “Why? They don’t know about what happened between us, do they?”

That was an incredibly typical reaction from such a spineless coward as his brother-in-law – to think about his own ass being on the line before asking where Brendon was staying and if he was okay.

The waitress came around to top up Dallon’s coffee and poured a fresh mug for Brendon, cutting momentarily through the tension. “What can I get you two gentlemen? Have you made up your minds?” she smiled, taking out her notepad and holding her pen over the paper. Dallon looked a little ruffled; his face turned red and he looked back down at the menu and pointed to the closest item.

“I’ll get the chocolate chip pancakes,” he said, without raising his face to look at her.

“Alrighty! And for yourself, sir?”

“I’ll get the same,” he shrugged, handing her back the menu, immediately regretting his decision as soon as she walked off. Like, what was he, five years old?

Dallon waited for a second before speaking up again. “Did you tell them about us?” His brows were knotted, his shoulders pulled up towards his ears. He was leaning forward in his seat in anticipation of Brendon’s answer.

“Don’t be so stupid. You think I had time to drop in a quick by the way, the son-in-law you love so much is actually a massive queer?”

Dallon flushed, his whole body stiffening as he sat back in the booth and rubbed his hand over his forehead. He didn’t try and argue Brendon’s point. “So, why did they throw you out?” he asked after a moment.

Brendon shrugged and tried to sound indifferent to the whole situation. “You tell me – because I’m gay? Because I don’t fit in with their stupid religious ideals? They told me it wasn’t working out and they said I had to leave immediately. I’m checked into a motel a block away.”

Dallon’s eyes cut to the side. “You got a room?”

“Yup – a motel room all to myself.” He was just waiting for Dallon to suggest they go back there for a sly fuck before he went crawling back to his wife.

“What’s the motel called?”

“It’s called the Whole Year Inn – it’s a straight-up crack motel; you should see it, it’s a shithole.”

“Oh, man,” Dallon sighed, putting his head in his hands. “I can’t believe they kicked you out. I had no idea. Did you want me to talk to them? Maybe I can convince them to let you move back in?”
“Why the hell would I want to go back and live with those homophobes anyway? It’s obvious, they don’t want me there. I’m the bad son they wish they didn’t have – and you know what? I worked hard to try and save my dad’s life; I sent thousands of dollars so he could pay his medical bills, it caused arguments between me and my ex,” he cried, jabbing his finger on the tabletop as he tried to contain his emotions. “Now I kind of wish I hadn’t bothered.”

“Don’t say that. Your parents love you.” Dallon whispered. He tried to reach his hand across the table to cover Brendon’s, but Brendon pulled away.

“Well, they got a seriously fucked up way of showing it. They kicked me out with nowhere to go and now, I’m sharing a motel with fucking junkies and I got less than ten dollars to my name. The room costs twenty-five bucks a night, Dallon. On Wednesday, I’ll be homeless and that’ll officially be the absolute lowest I’ve ever been in my life – and that’s saying something. I didn’t think it could get much worse after I left Manhattan and now, look at me. Fuck, Dallon, why can’t I just catch a goddamn fucking break, man?” His voice cracked and he dropped his head into his hands to hide his tears.

“Do you need money? I can help you out with money. Lydia doesn’t have to know. You can pay me back when you get a job – or whenever, I mean, Lydia and I are kind of struggling for cash right now, but I could lend you a couple hundred dollars until you get back on your feet?”

Brendon shook his head inside his hands and blinked down at the table. “I don’t think I want to do this anymore, Dallon. I can’t carry on like this; what the fuck have I got left to live for?”

Dallon made a grab for his wrist and pulled his hand towards him. “Don’t.” He said. “Don’t say that.” When Brendon looked up at him, his eyes were watering and he looked just about ready to cry. He let Dallon’s fingers link through his on top of the table. “You’re the bravest person I ever met in my life. I curse myself every single day for letting you go; you left, you made a life for yourself, you lived the life you wanted to because you weren’t scared like I was – and you can’t imagine how much I admire that. Just… don’t do anything drastic. I know things are tough, but we’ll get through it – together. Please. Promise me?”

“Two chocolate chip pancakes!” the waitress enthused as she returned to the table. They snatched their hands away from each other quickly and both straightened up in their seats as she placed their breakfasts in front of them. She must’ve noticed the tense atmosphere because she walked away without asking if they needed anything else. Brendon stared down at the plate of food and despite how hungry he’d been feeling before he sat down, the sticky-sweet smell of pancakes and syrup wafting into his nose made him feel a little queasy.

He forced himself to eat, only because he didn’t know where his next meal was coming from. The doughy pancakes got stuck to the roof of his mouth and eventually he pushed them away, half eaten and excused himself to the bathroom to throw up, but all he ended up doing was dry-heaving over the toilet bowl.

When he washed his hands and looked at his reflection in the mirror, he looked terrible – tired eyes and a drawn-out appearance. He had that permanent look of exhaustion etched on his face, the one he’d grown so used to seeing in Jon. Maybe they switched roles since he left New York? Maybe Brendon had taken on all of Jon’s pain in exchange for his happiness? He splashed water on his face and returned to the restaurant.

Dallon already paid the bill and was waiting outside for him. When he approached the older man, he pulled Brendon against his chest for a hug. Brendon let his arms dangle awkwardly by his side, refusing the mimic Dallon’s tight embrace. He felt a kiss press against the top of his head and then his brother-in-law pulled back slowly.
“You’ll be okay,” he encouraged, rubbing at Brendon’s arms. “If there’s one thing I know about you, it’s that you’re a fighter. You’ll get over this. So will your parents.”

Brendon rolled his eyes – for a man in his thirties, Dallon sure was dull on occasions. “That’s easy for you to say,” he mumbled as they fell into step towards the car. After a pause, he huffed out a breath and said, “I wish you hadn’t married her, you know? We could’ve been happy together. We could’ve done all those things you promised me – moved to California, made a life together. You picked living a lie with Lydia over being happy with me – and that’s the real kicker, Dallon. That’s the one thing I don’t think I can forgive you for.”

Dallon looked down at the ground and scuffed the toes of his sneakers through the gravel of the parking lot. He rubbed at his nose. “You and me both, Bren,” he sighed. “You and me both.”

Dallon offered to drive him back to his motel and after a short minute of protest, Brendon got reluctantly into the car and they drove in silence towards the Whole Year Inn. Brendon knew how this would go – they’d pull up outside his room, Dallon would comment about what a dump it was and Brendon would invite him inside to stave off the loneliness for just an hour longer. They’d probably end up in bed together and Dallon would tell him he loved him, Brendon would only choose to believe him because it was easier than accepting the alternative – that he was totally alone and he was dispensable to everyone he let himself get close to.

“You coming in?” he asked, turning toward Dallon once they pulled into the parking lot. His brother-in-law paused, looking dismally through the windshield and up at the peeling paint, barred windows and scrupulous characters hanging around outside.

“Listen, Bren. Why don’t you come and stay with Lydia and me for a few weeks – just until you get a job - you shouldn’t be staying in a place like this, you might get mugged. I’m sure Lydia would prefer to have you staying with us than to know you were living like this.”

Brendon rolled his eyes again and opened the passenger side door, cursing that ridiculous suggestion under his breath. Dallon talked too much and it was giving him a headache – he could currently think of nothing worse than shacking up in the Weekes’ spare bedroom while trying to conduct a homosexual affair with his sister’s husband.

“Are you coming in or not?” he snapped, climbing from the car and shutting the door behind him. Dallon was still gripping hard at the steering wheel when Brendon turned back to look at him. He watched the man’s eyes slip closed quickly and noticed his lips moving in silent litany – perhaps he was praying. Brendon scoffed to himself. Good luck with that, he thought as he slipped his key into the lock.

Dallon followed him inside a few moments later, car keys jangling from his fingers as he looked dubiously around the shabby little room. Brendon was thankful the man decided to take up his offer; he didn’t know what he would’ve done if his only lifeline had driven away.

“This place is terrible, Bren. You’re so much better than this-”

Brendon crossed the room quickly, tired of hearing such useless protests and walked straight into Dallon’s arms, connecting their lips. The other man faltered for a second, his hands awkward by his side as Brendon’s slipped around his middle and pulled their bodies together roughly, but after a moment, the man dropped his keys to the bed and Brendon felt his fingers in his hair, sliding around the back of his neck as their tongues moved together.

They made out like that, only breaking the kiss so they could fall to the unmade bed together. When they reconnected their lips, Dallon kept making these desperate little moans right at the back of his
throat and Brendon let them spur him on, shifting on top of him and between Dallon’s legs as they thrust against each other, still fully clothed, but both hard inside their pants.

Dallon was the first one to pull away. He held Brendon’s face in his hands, looked deep into his eyes and said, “I’m in love with you, my angel. Don’t do this if you don’t feel the same way about me.”

Brendon broke eye contact and pulled Dallon’s hands away from his cheeks. He directed them down to the zipper of his pants and the older man slowly undressed him. Soon, they were both naked, their clothes piled together at the foot of the bed.

He didn’t know whether he was in love with Dallon or not. He guessed Dallon was his only friend, the only person who he could trust to be there for him and he supposed he loved him for that reason. Dallon had been his first, the first man who ever had his heart and the one who he undoubtedly loved before love became how much money he had in his back pocket at the end of the night. He loved Dallon, but he wasn’t in love with him.

He desired the contact the man was offering him though, those fleeting moments where they could both get lost in each other, where they were both fragile and lonely enough to let the other in. Brendon knew Dallon would fuck him up – probably more than Jon had done, but right now, the promise of intimacy was enough to make the fallout worthwhile.

Dallon kissed him, his warm, wet lips pressed a trail from his mouth to his jaw to his neck and down his chest and Brendon’s dick twitched at the contact. He closed his eyes to block out the less-than-romantic surroundings and let his hand push through Dallon’s soft hair, pushing him down, further and further until his lips were in line with his cock. Brendon could feel his heart inside his throat.

The older man teased him. He didn’t close his mouth around the head of his aching dick for a long time. Instead, he let his tongue trail up and down the shaft, licking up over the slit and then around his balls. Brendon couldn’t believe Dallon was actually doing this – confidently taking control, turning him on like no man had done in a long time. Well... apart from Ryan Ross.

Brendon sucked in air through his teeth when Dallon raised his legs up over his head and dropped his face between his ass cheeks to lick around his hole. No one had rimmed him when he’d been in New York, his arousal was more often than not completely forgotten and Brendon’s mouth fell open in a loud groan as he felt the man’s tongue slip in and out of him, licking a trail up from his asshole and over his balls - and then he finally closed his mouth around the head of Brendon’s cock.

The contact was fleeting. Dallon pulled away after a few seconds. “Is that okay?” he asked breathlessly. “Am I doing it right?” His palm gripped around the shaft of Brendon’s dick and he jerked him gently. When he opened his eyes, Dallon was watching him, biting his lip. He couldn’t remember the last time anyone asked how sex felt for him.

“You’re doing great,” he smiled, feeling a little dizzy. He could definitely fall for Dallon if he kept sucking him off like that. Their lips joined again in a slow kiss and Brendon could feel himself arching up into Dallon’s hand, could feel Dallon’s grip still tight around his cock. He brushed the pad of his thumb over Brendon’s already leaking slit and Brendon cried out at the friction.

“I’ve got lube,” he gasped into Dallon’s lips, “and condoms. In the bag, over there on the desk.” He nodded towards the other side of the room.

Dallon smiled knowingly at him. “So, you evidently wanted this as much as me?” He nuzzled his nose into Brendon’s neck for a few moments before climbing off the bed. Brendon wasn’t going to tell him he only bought lube and condoms because he’d been thinking about wandering down to the Strip last night and baiting some old pervert into fucking him for cash. His brother-in-law returned
with just the bottle of lubricant, clutched tight in his hand like he was trying to suddenly muster up some courage.

**So, Dallon wanted to bareback** – Brendon didn’t really see what harm it could do; they hadn’t used protection when they fucked in his parents’ house yesterday afternoon. Any damage had already been done and soon Dallon was lying beside him again, lubing him up and teasing him open and it took all of Brendon’s strength not to come immediately after he felt the tip of Dallon’s finger brush against his prostate.

“Oh, wow,” he panted. “Where did you learn to do all this?”

“I watch a lot of videos online – they’re my only release,” Dallon smiled, kissing the red head of his cock and licking away the precome. Brendon tried to imagine his brother-in-law hunched over a computer, beating off to gay porn on the internet while Lydia slept upstairs.

Dallon prepped him for ages; stroking and coaxing and stretching until all Brendon could feel was the delightful slide of his fingers inside him, his ass open and ready to receive his dick – but still the older man continued to tease him, three fingers of one hand inside his ass, fucking him gently and the palm of his other wrapped around Brendon’s cock.

“Are you ready?” he asked a little while later, pulling his fingers out and leaning over to kiss him.

“I am so ready. I’ve been ready for the last ten minutes, Dallon.”

Dallon smiled against his shoulder and Brendon raised his legs to his chest, tensing when he felt the sharp sting of Dallon’s cock against his hole. The first inch always hurt, no matter how much time he had to prepare but it sure beat the rough, careless fingers of one of his many New York tricks.

They both groaned together when Dallon slipped all the way inside – one strong, fluid motion that sent sparks straight to Brendon’s head. Dallon leaned over him, slipping both his arms around Brendon’s shoulders as he moved his hips. He was slow and gentle and the friction on his dick trapped between their stomachs made Brendon’s jaw shake. He hadn’t had sex like this in years.

“I missed you, darling,” Dallon told him, his mouth pressed up against Brendon’s ear as he thrust into him. Brendon groaned, letting his eyes slip closed and his grip tighten around Dallon’s ass, his nails digging into his cheeks as he felt the familiar knot of arousal form in his stomach.

His toes curled as he wrapped his legs around the man on top of him, pulling him closer so that he could feel his balls against his ass. Dallon moved his hips in slow circles – and perhaps this wasn’t just a fuck? Perhaps his brother-in-law was making love to him? Perhaps all he needed all this time had been right where he left him in Las Vegas.

“Tell me you love me.” The words fell from Brendon’s mouth in a moan. “Fuck me and make me believe it.”

“I love you,” Dallon cried into the pillow. “I love you, Brendon. I love you…” His thrusts picked up, becoming harder and more desperate, making the bed creak and knocking the headboard into the wall. If his neighbors were in, they’d know he was being fucked… It sent a small, sick thrill into the very pit of his stomach.

Brendon’s hand snaked between their bodies, grabbing a hold of his dick as Dallon sat up between his thighs and held his legs open. Dallon’s face was a picture of pure animalistic lust, a fine sheen of sweat on his forehead, his hair hanging limp over his eyes, his chest flushed red and blotchy.

Brendon jerked himself off in time with Dallon’s movements and he felt the man release inside him a
few minutes later. He allowed himself to follow shortly after; his come splattering over his chest and stomach. They gazed at each other in a daze for a few moments, breathing heavily as they both came down from their orgasms and when Dallon pulled out slowly, Brendon quickly closed his legs and tried to hide his gratification.

“Did that feel good? Did I redeem myself after yesterday?” Dallon curled into his side, hooking one of his long legs over Brendon’s hip. Brendon laughed, he could feel his cheeks ache with the effort to stop smiling. He could feel Dallon’s come seeping out between his ass cheeks.

“You sure did. That was the nicest sex I’ve had in a long, long time.” He turned his face towards Dallon’s and was greeted with a smile. Dallon pecked his nose and Brendon suddenly felt his emotions well up inside him – guilt and shame and regret. The dizzy satisfaction had been nice while it lasted. “Stay with me,” he choked. “I don’t want you to leave.”

The older man’s smile faltered and his blue eyes blinked. “Okay,” he nodded after a pause. “I’ll stay. You should get some sleep.”

Brendon wrapped his arm around Dallon’s waist, burying his face into his chest and inhaling the scent of skin, sex and sweat into his lungs – it was a scent that was so typically Dallon and it comforted him enough that he felt himself relax against the warm body next to him. He fell asleep to the sound of Dallon’s heartbeat in one ear and the resumed fight from the room next door in the other.

When Brendon woke up, Dallon was gone, his spot on the bed cold and empty. He was alone once again.

His muscles ached and he felt groggy from too much sleep. Brendon had no idea what time it was, but the room was already growing dark – and the nights were always the longest part of his days.

He sat up on the mattress and blinked around the room, rubbing his eyes free of sleep. On the bedside, folded inside a handwritten scrap of paper was a stack of bills. He reached out to grab for them and unfolded the note. His bleary eyes scanned over the words.

Shhhhh! Don’t tell Lydia…

In his other hand, Brendon clutched tight at the money his brother-in-law left him, counting it through quickly – three hundred and twenty dollars.

He fell back against the pillow and felt his eyes fill with tears. He may have been desperate to leave his old life behind in New York, but even the man who swore he loved him treated him like a whore – disappearing into the night, with nothing more than a couple hundred dollars on the dresser to remember him by.
On Tuesday, the morning after they first had sex at the motel, Dallon knocked on the door at just gone 9AM.

Brendon had been nursing a coke hangover after one too many lines with Spencer Smith at the bar the previous night and he’d only been asleep for a couple of hours when his uninvited visitor woke him up with a jolt. He could reach the door from the bed if he clambered to the end of the mattress, and he tried to force his mind and body awake as he reached over and flipped open the locks. Swinging the door open, he collapsed back on the pillows with a sigh.

Dallon entered cautiously, looking around the room for a few moments with a creased brow. He was feeling way too peaky to deal with Dallon – the man never arrived with anything other than misery and Brendon was still pissed that he disappeared the day before, no goodbye but a hefty wad of money on the bedside.

He turned his face into the pillow and said, “You should’ve called me to tell me you were coming over. I’d’ve told you not to bother.”

He felt a little cruel saying it and when he raised his head to look at his brother-in-law, he was stood at the foot of the bed, avoiding Brendon’s glare. He kept his eyes on the floor as he scuffed his feet across the worn-out carpet.

The previous night, after Dallon’s departure, Brendon walked the short distance to Spencer’s and he stayed there until almost four that morning – he guessed that was one good thing about living in this motel, how close he now was to his favorite dive bar. He accepted every free drink that Spencer offered him, drowning out his secret sorrows until he was inebriated enough not to care. He flirted with the man, stroked his hand down the surprisingly solid muscles of Spencer’s forearms, knocked playfully into his shoulder and eventually gripped his thigh under the bar until the man suggested that Brendon should follow him out into the office for a few lines of coke.

Brendon had been prepared to suck the dude’s dick for the drugs, but Spencer hadn’t suggested it. They took the night no further than a lot of uninhibited flirtation but after the high wore off, Brendon could tell that Spencer was pushing for more. He’d been wearing a pair of brightly pattered Palazzo-style pants, paired with a low-cut white blouse which showed a sparse area of chest hair and as they sat together, talking fast and pounding shots, Brendon briefly wondered how much his parents would freak out if they discovered he started dating someone like Spencer.

Spencer was a trip, that was for sure. Brendon wasn’t particularly attracted to him but the man’s sky-high confidence and just-don’t-give-a-fuck attitude was actually kind of charming. Spencer was generous with his money, he was always offering to buy the attractive patrons drinks and he was also exceptionally generous with his drugs – not that Brendon was using him for the free booze and coke; he’d have hung around the guy even if he had to pay – just maybe not quite so frequently.

Briefly that night, Ryan Ross crossed his mind – and so had his promise to him a few days prior; that he wouldn’t fuck anyone else until they met up after Ryan’s stint in rehab. When Spencer invited him back to his place early that morning, Brendon had a hard time saying no. He hadn’t said no to Spencer because he wanted to remain faithful to Ryan. He said no because he was worried that Dallon would be able to tell the next time they fucked – which he figured was inevitable. Brendon returned to his motel room alone, stripped off all his clothes and immediately passed out in bed. During the first few seconds of being woken up, he wondered where the hell he was. Until reality hit him.
“Lydia would kill me if she knew I was here,” Dallon sniffed, breaking the silence.

“Why? Is she worried that I’m a bad influence on you? Does she think you’ll catch the gay if we spend too much time together?” Brendon shot his brother-in-law an unamused look from the bed. He turned over on the mattress and pulled the sheets up to his chin, mumbling under his breath, “Fuck… Sorry, Lydia – too late.”

“Do you want me to leave?” the older man asked – and no, Brendon didn’t want Dallon to leave. Not now that he was here.

He squared his jaw. “I found the money you left me. What am I now, your fucking whore?”

Dallon frowned and shook his head in confusion. “What on earth are you talking about? Don’t say things like that. I left you money because you said you were broke. I thought it might help you out.”

Brendon snorted. His brother-in-law was so naïve, so ridiculously, unfathomably naïve that he hadn’t even considered that it wasn’t particularly appropriate to sleep with your wife’s younger brother and then disappear without a word, after leaving a couple hundred dollars on the dresser.

“You think you can fuck me and then pay me? And all this fucked up ‘don’t tell Lydia’ bullshit? I’m just your side bitch, am I, your dirty little secret? That was hush money, was it?” he barked, his voice once again, giving under the weight of his true emotions.

Dallon’s face ignited in embarrassment. He shifted on his feet at the end of the bed and pushed his hair out of his face. “Bren, angel…” he sighed, “I didn’t mean it like that. I just wanted to help you out, that’s all. The money should tide you over for a few weeks but it was all I could afford to give you. I wish there was some other way I could help you out, but Lydia will only nag me if she knows I’ve leant you that much.”

Dallon’s loyalties still lay with Lydia. Brendon sat up in bed, the covers falling around his waist. He was naked underneath them and he couldn’t help but notice the way Dallon gawked at his bare chest. “You came back here yesterday morning and you knew you were going to fuck me. That’s the reason you offered to drive me back here, it’s the reason you followed me into the room and you got what you wanted and as soon as I was asleep, you disappeared.”

“You were sleeping!” Dallon cried, splaying his hands in front of him in frustration. “Jeez, you don’t look like you’ve had a proper night’s sleep in months and I wanted to leave you rest. Why the heck would you jump to that conclusion – you think that’s what you are to me? A whore? My side bitch?” He scoffed, “Crap, Brendon, you know how I feel about you.”

Brendon fell back down against the thin pillows and bit down hard on his lip. He let out a shuddery exhale. “Yeah, well. FYI, Dallon, that’s what someone usually does to a whore – fucks them and then leaves the money on the side – and considering you’re so eager to tell me you love me when your dick’s inside my ass, you sure as hell found the door quick enough yesterday.”

His brother-in-law detached his gaze and looked back down at the floor. He huffed like a scolded teenager. “Yeah, well. Like it or not, I’m still married – and Lydia only asks questions if I get home late and as they say: happy wife, happy life.”

Brendon rolled his eyes so hard they hurt at the back of his sockets.

“I just thought the money would help you out. If you don’t want to accept it, then whatever, I’ll take it back – at least then I won’t have to lie to Lydia about where that three-hundred and something dollars went.”
“I thought you’d be an expert at that by now – lying to my sister,” Brendon bit petulantly. “You’re a better liar than I ever was, I’ll give you that.”

Dallon seemed to stiffen slightly. Brendon could see that their petty argument was irritating him. He bit back. “I’m not proud of who I am, you know? About what I’m doing to your sister, behind her back – I lose plenty of sleep over it; trust me.” His brother-in-law let that admission hang in the air for a moment before he sighed and sat down on the edge of the bed. Brendon felt it dip under his weight.

“I’m sorry about the money and I’m sorry for leaving without saying goodbye. I guess I wasn’t thinking. It didn’t even cross my mind that you’d think something like that.” Dallon reached out to rub tenderly at Brendon’s exposed ankle and Brendon thought about pulling away, but he didn’t see the point in prolonging their argument. He figured it was easier to just swallow his anger and accept Dallon’s apology.

“I told Lydia your parents kicked you out.”

“What did she say?” Brendon sniffed. He wanted so desperately to pretend like he didn’t give a fuck, that his family’s rejection of him based on his sexuality didn’t bother him, but it did. It really, really did.

“She said a lot of really messed up stuff actually.” Dallon sighed and then bit his lip, holding back the words Brendon knew were troubling him. “We had an argument about it; she said I shouldn’t talk to you anymore, that it was an insult to your parents if I continued to hang out with you, especially after they asked you to leave. I ended up sleeping in the spare bedroom because of it. She didn’t say goodbye to me before she left for work this morning.”

Dallon’s words were quiet, he spoke them down at the mattress without making eye contact, his fingers still looped around Brendon’s ankle. “She said that when you came home and admitted you were gay, she thought she could accept you, but she can’t. She thinks you coming home stressed your mom and dad out too much – she said it might compromise your father’s recovery, having you living back with them.” After a moment, Dallon rubbed at his face and then looked up at Brendon with tired eyes. “She was the one who suggested they should ask you to leave. She thinks they should take you out of their will too, seeing as you’ve chosen to live a life of sin – those are her words, not mine.”

“So that’s it, huh? They’re really going to cut me out of their life?”

Fuck Lydia, Brendon thought. That bitch got him thrown out of his parents’ house simply because she was too small-minded to accept that he was gay. She turned his whole family against him because of something that didn’t even directly affect her. He wondered how she’d react if she somehow discovered he’d been fucking her beloved husband.

All the guilt he once felt about his affair with Dallon quickly disappeared. He hated to be spiteful, but… fuck her. If he had Dallon on his side, he had the ability to devastate his sister’s seemingly perfect marriage forever. He rubbed the empty space on the mattress and coaxed the man to lie down beside him. Dallon hesitated for a second but he soon kicked off his sneakers and lay down next to him, their bodies separated by the covers. Brendon pulled at the zipper of Dallon’s hoodie, pushing it off from around his shoulders as Dallon pulled his arms free. They kissed for a moment, their lips dry, their tongues cautious, Dallon’s hands pushing up into the back of Brendon’s hair, pulling him closer.

When they pulled away, Dallon held him for a moment, drawing him against his shoulder and wrapping him in a tight embrace. He hooked his chin over the top of Brendon’s head and from
above, he felt the man’s heavy sigh ruffle through his hair.

No good was ever going to come from their affair – Brendon already knew that, but right now Dallon was the only friend who cared about him and that was surely worth all the risk that sleeping with his sister’s husband raised. He needed Dallon – if only to keep him sane and alive. Dallon, it seemed, had quickly replaced Jon’s role as Brendon’s lifeline. The fact that they were so different from each other and had grown so far apart fell to the back of Brendon’s conscious. Right now, Dallon was his oxygen.

His brother-in-law was the first one to break the silence, his words jolting Brendon’s quiet heart. “I haven’t slept since you’ve been back in Vegas. You’re the first person I think about in the morning, you’re the last thing on my mind before I fall asleep. I dream about you. I can’t stop thinking about you – worrying about you,” he said. “I count the minutes until I know I’ll be able to see you again. I know you had a life out in New York, I know you had another partner out there who you probably loved a lot, but for me, there’s never been anyone else but you.”

Brendon closed his eyes against Dallon shirt and felt them leak. His head was pounding from too much cocaine the previous evening. His nose hurt, his eyes hurt and his heart strained inside his chest. It was all very well Dallon telling him he loved him every five minutes but it meant nothing unless he followed through with his declarations. Dallon was naïve, he was inexperienced in life and deep in his heart, Brendon knew they were no longer right for each other.

He wondered what his brother-in-law would say when he found out what he’d been doing for a living back in Manhattan, whether it would change the man’s opinion of him or whether the fool really was as in love with him as he claimed. Brendon quickly blinked his eyes, his nose tickling from the threat of tears against Dallon’s shirt. How the hell was he ever going to tell Dallon what he had to do to make ends meet? Hustling on the streets, fucking rich idiots with more money than sense while all the time trying to sustain the love of his hopeless, drug-addicted ex-boyfriend, compromising all of his morals just so that he could pay the rent. They say that love is blind, but they don’t mention how it’s also deaf and fucking stupid.

The silence swelled and after a long moment, Dallon sighed again, pulling Brendon’s face up towards him so they were looking at each other, his hands on either side of his cheeks. Brendon tried to pull himself free, but Dallon’s grip was strong.

“While you were gone I forgot how much I love you; how good you always made me feel. When I’m with you, it’s as if I can finally be myself. You feel the same way about me, right? If you don’t, then we really need to stop ending up in bed together like this.”

He couldn’t lie about something as serious as love, especially not to Dallon. The guy may have been a little on the simple side, but he had a good heart – he’d just been forced, by circumstance to lead a life full of lies. If he told the truth, then Dallon would surely leave him and Brendon would have nowhere else left to turn. He messed up his relationship with Jon, Ryan Ross made him promises he couldn’t keep and now his own family, the very people he should’ve been able to rely on, no matter what, abandoned him.

He had no one apart from his brother-in-law and he was desperate to keep a hold of his very last lifeline. If he let go, he knew he’d drown.

“I can’t be the one who’s going to save you, Dallon.”

“But you love me, don’t you?”

Brendon’s throat tightened, his voice deserting him. He nodded once, his face still held tight between
Dallon’s hands. He felt the tension in his brother-in-law’s body immediately disappear, as if all the strings had finally been pulled from around his shoulders. He rolled away from Brendon and onto his back.

“Jeez,” he whistled, raising his hand to wipe over his eyes. “I don’t know what the heck I’m doing anymore. My marriage is in shambles. Lydia and I... We’ve been struggling for quite some time now. We haven’t got the perfect marriage she’d have everyone believe.”

“Yeah, no shit,” Brendon sniffed. “You are fucking her younger brother. I’m sure it ain’t all rosy in the Weekes’ household.”

He felt the older man’s muscles tighten against him and watched his mouth morph into an irritated frown. “I do wish you’d stop using that cuss word. It means more to me than that, you know it does.” When Dallon looked over at him, Brendon looked away.

“We’ve been going to relationship counseling for the last year; it’s costing us a fortune but she’s so intent on saving our marriage and I don’t have the heart to tell her, it’s already over – that it’s been over for years. Heck, our marriage was over before it ever even started.”

“You don’t have the heart or you don’t have the guts? Because they are two totally different things, man – and no offense to you, Dallon, but Lydia’s a fucking bitch.”

He breathed out a quiet laugh, blinking up at the ceiling. “Yeah. I’m sorry about that.”

Brendon flashed him a side-eyed glance. “And you’re not much better – all you do is apologize for shit, but you don’t do anything about it. My family hates me because of something I have no control over; your wife, my own sister got me kicked out of my parents’ house and you just sit there and let them treat me that way because you’re too scared to admit that you and I are exactly the same.”

Dallon sniffed, the silence dragging on for too long as he tried to think of an answer. “If I was to tell them I’d lose everything – everything that’s important to me, everything that I love - I’d lose it all. I used to think that being married was more favorable to the alternative – leaving the church, divorcing your sister, admitting I’m gay. I didn’t want to shame my family. I thought that if I ignored it, it would go away, that I’d just forget about it - out of sight, out of mind, you know?” Dallon let go of a shaky breath and tried to keep his emotions under wraps. “But it’s impossible, because that’s the way I am – that’s the way I was born. I realize that now. I used to think that being gay was a choice. I thought the church could save me and I was absolutely terrified of admitting that I wasn’t the same as everyone else. I messed up when I married Lydia, but I was young and I was afraid and I know that I will be punished for that for the rest of my life.”

Dallon sniffed up his tears again and raised a shaking hand to wipe over his eyes. “I can’t even have sex with my own wife because the thought of being with a woman horrifies me. I used to feel something for her, but not anymore. She thinks there’s something wrong with me, with my libido – she forced me to the doctor for all sorts of tests. We’ve been going to therapy for over a year, we bought Viagra and Cialis off the Internet, she’s constantly nagging me about having kids... I know she talks to her friends in church about me, about my inability to enjoy sex with her. On our wedding night, I couldn’t even make love to her – it took me over a month before I even plucked up the courage to initiate anything. She calls me pathetic; she calls me a letdown. She said once that she wished we made love before we got married because she wouldn’t have married me if she’d known I was so lousy in bed.”

Brendon watched as Dallon’s lip quivered and his eyes became glassy. The man looked like he needed a hug, so Brendon rubbed gently at his stomach, leaning forward to kiss his shoulder. “Why don’t you just leave her?” he asked. He felt almost sorry for his hapless brother-in-law being stuck in
such a loveless marriage for so long.

“I don’t have anything else. I think about leaving all the time, just packing up a few things and leaving Nevada and moving somewhere where no one knows me – doing what you did - because I know the only reason your family loves me is because they think I’m someone I’m not and I think about how they’d react if they knew who I really was and I know they’d do to me exactly what they did to you, and it breaks my heart every single time, Bren…”

Dallon started crying – big, gulping sobs that shuddered from deep inside his chest and made Brendon nervous. It was as if years of pent-up frustrations and repressed emotions suddenly came pouring out of him. He covered his face with both his hands and turned away from Brendon on the mattress.

Why did every man he fell for have to be filled with so much pain? “Hey,” he soothed, rubbing at Dallon’s shoulder and pulling him back onto his back. “Come on now; it’s not all that bad. You’re still young enough to leave; why are you so intent on holding onto a family that would never accept either of us?”

“I stayed with Lydia for so long because she was my only link to you,” Dallon gulped, turning into his arms and grabbing desperately at his shoulders. Brendon felt the man’s tears dampen his neck and he held the back of his head, waiting for his cries to subside. Dallon needed to feel love just as much as Brendon did and so when Dallon raised his tear-streaked face and pushed their lips together again there was no way Brendon could refuse his advances.

“Please,” his brother-in-law sighed as they kissed, his fingers snaking down between Brendon’s legs and against his hole. “Allow me this; I just want to feel something real. Just this once.”

And so they made love in much the same fashion as they had the previous morning – slow and gentle, punctuated by long kisses and shared moans. They’d both come together and lay next to each other as they recovered from their orgasms. Dallon always enjoyed cuddling after sex and it was something that Brendon had forgotten during his time in Manhattan – the feeling of being needed even after climax. That morning, he was more than willing to let Dallon hold him through the aftershocks.

* *

By the end of the week, Brendon was feeling strung out. The time that he didn’t spend with Dallon, locked away inside the walls of his shitty motel room, he spent propping up the bar at Spencer’s – which was where he was currently sat, hunched over his sixth (or was it his seventh?) glass of whiskey of the evening.

It was a Friday and it was still early enough that the weekend’s usual revelers hadn’t yet arrived at the bar, but Brendon was already well on his way to inebriation. His days were spent with his brother-in-law, fucking – sometimes making love. Sometimes they didn’t even have sex, they just talked or they sat in silence and watched daytime television on the crappy TV in the motel room, Brendon’s head always resting on Dallon’s chest and their fingers entwined. It was strangely familiar and it reminded him of the innocent beginnings of their relationship when he was a teenager.

He decided to graciously accept the money Dallon had given him. After a few more fruitless phone calls to Ryan Ross over the past few days, he accepted that the man probably moved on and didn’t want anything more to do with him. The fantasy had been nice while it lasted and the promise of ten thousand dollars briefly allowed him some interesting daydreams but Brendon wasn’t stupid enough to keep chasing a man who was most certainly out of his league. His dalliance with Ryan Ross was a story he would take to his grave.
Sometimes, he did wonder about Ryan – even after almost a week of no contact, Brendon felt his hopes rise every time his cellphone rang. It was never Ryan, of course. It was always Dallon.

Brendon lived for the company his brother-in-law offered, but he hated the part of the day where Dallon would have to leave and went crawling back to Lydia, just in time for her arrival home from work. To stave off the loneliness that the evenings brought, he would walk to the bar and there he’d stay until three or four o’clock in the morning – or until one of the barmen cut him off and asked him to leave.

Tonight, Spencer was sat in his usual spot beside Brendon at the end of the bar. His outfit, this evening, consisted of a floral maxi-dress that cut low and loose around his chest and floated around his ankles. He was make-up free but adorned in jewelry. He spent the first half an hour of Brendon’s arrival explaining which of his ‘admirers’ gifted him which piece. Spencer was actually kind of fascinating.

“I need a job,” Brendon groaned that evening. He was determined to pay Dallon back the three hundred and twenty dollars he loaned him as soon as possible – and he really didn’t want to have to resort to prostituting himself again to earn money. Those days were behind him, especially now seeing as Ryan Ross had all but moved on.

“I told you, take Ian’s job,” Spencer told him, loud enough that Ian, the curly-haired bartender heard him and glared Spencer’s way. “He’s a lousy bartender – the guy still can’t make a good Bloody Mary and he still serves lemon with my gin and tonic.” Spencer leaned his elbow on the bar and put his chin in his hand, ignoring Ian’s disgruntled murmurings. “You’d get some great tips too, because you’re so handsome,” he said with a smile.

Brendon blushed, avoiding Ian’s scowl and looked down into his drink.

“Oh, come on!” Spencer groaned, knocking his palm roughly into Brendon’s shoulder. “Why are you such a grump? You’re handsome, I’m fabulous and it’s a Friday night. The world is ours, Brendon. Come to the office and have a couple of lines with me, huh?” He tipped his head in the direction of the door marked ‘private’.

Brendon gave the man a skeptical look and sighed. Every night, since being kicked out of his parents’ house, he spent getting high with Spencer. It numbed his mind and body to the guilt he felt about his affair with Dallon and usually he was able to drink enough to pass out on that lumpy motel mattress and not be awoken until his brother-in-law knocked on the door – usually proffering coffee and bagels and that morning’s newspaper, along with a concerned expression, but Dallon never questioned what Brendon did with his evenings after he ran home to play doting husband to Lydia, and he was too naïve to realize that Brendon was always so groggy in the mornings because he was suffering from a coke comedown.

He watched as Spencer sashayed across the floor to the back room and exhaled. He followed him across the bar towards the office and Spencer beckoned him into the small, cluttered space littered with old take-out containers and empty Ziplocs of coke.

He hadn’t asked Spencer what his little side business was, but he figured it was something to do with drugs - perhaps that’s why Brendon enjoyed his company so much. He was used to hanging out with devious characters.

They stayed locked in the office together for over an hour, taking bumps and flirting until Spencer not-so subtly pushed Brendon down on the grubby couch and leaned over him, hands either side of his head on the cushion. Brendon had let the man overpower him, even though he knew he shouldn’t and Spencer sat between his legs and thrust forward. Brendon could feel his erection pressing against
his thigh.

Spencer was still wearing that cologne that reminded him of Jon. He snaked his hands around the man’s neck and found himself pulling Spencer closer so he could bury his nose into his neck and inhale that comforting smell of his ex-boyfriend.

“So, darlin’ – d’you wanna fuck?” Spencer grinned, his tone playful, his lips pressed up against Brendon ear. He drew back and looked at him – a few hours ago, it had been Dallon’s baby blues blinking down at him, telling him he loved him as he rode out his orgasm.

“Right here?” he asked, glancing around the room – it wasn’t the most romantic of settings. He was hoping to dissuade Spencer’s advances – he didn’t want to fuck, not really. He and Dallon spent all afternoon fucking and he was still feeling a little sore. Brendon hadn’t even showered.

“Sure, if you want – or perhaps you can come back to my place. I’ve got a waterbed, y’know. It’s actually kind of a nightmare to fuck on but…” he shrugged. “We could get the Jacuzzi going, I could make us some cocktails, light some candles, maybe? What are you a top or a bottom? I’m switch but I’ve been having a few dirty thoughts recently about having you fuck me. What do you say, are you up for it? You’ve been teasing me now for weeks.”

Brendon held his breath and then let it go slowly. Perhaps this was the catch to Spencer’s generosity? There’s no such thing as a free lunch, Jon always warned him – people don’t do shit for you unless they know they’re likely to get something back in return.

He thought about Dallon and wondered how the man would react if he found out he’d gone home with someone else. He couldn’t rightfully be pissed; not while he was still married to his sister but Brendon knew that he’d be upset and he wanted to remain on Dallon’s good side. He was, after all, the only person who made him feel truly good about himself.

“I’m kind of seeing someone,” he mumbled, regretting it as soon as he saw Spencer’s reaction. The man’s smile twitched for a few seconds and then morphed into a pout, his eyebrows pulled together in disappointment and he pulled quickly away, sitting on the free cushion of the couch as he adjusted the material of his dress across his folded knees.

“So you’re just a little prick tease then is what you’re trying to say? Using me for the drugs and the free drinks, is it? I see how it is. Typical for a guy like you – greedy and needy and then worst of all, unwilling to put out.” Spencer folded his arms across his chest.

“It’s not like that,” Brendon tried to protest – but he could see how Spencer would make that assumption. They’d been flirting for a few weeks now and Spencer had always been unflinchingly upfront about his attraction towards him. He should’ve remembered Jon’s advice – there really was no such thing as a free lunch. Brendon took a breath. “I’m having an affair with the man who’s currently married to my sister. Things are kind of fucked for me right now.”

Spencer’s eyes widened and darted to the side to look at him. His eyebrows rose in surprise and then he wrinkled his nose. “You’re telling me. Wow, call up Jerry Springer. I think you’d be a perfect candidate for a new show. I’m putting dibs on the title though - Things Are Kind of Fucked For Me Right Now. You’re goddamn right they are – I thought shit like that only happened in soap operas?”

Brendon leaned his head back on the arm of the couch and sighed. “That’s only just scratching the surface. My life’s a fucking joke. Recently, it just seems like I can’t catch a break; it’s like the whole universe is against me. My ex-boyfriend cheated on me with his drug-dealer, my parents kicked me out because they can’t accept that I’m gay, my brother-in-law is needy and so fucking up emotionally but I can’t seem to keep him out of my bed. I’m just a glutton for punishment.” He laughed. It
sounded hollow.

Spencer chewed the inside of his lip and gave Brendon’s knee a gentle pat as he pushed up from the couch. “Well, no wonder you’re so serious all the time. I thought it was because you were just one of those hot-but-boring guys. I said to Ian the other day that you’re lucky you’re so good-looking; you can get away with being so miserable all the time… Perhaps you need to see a shrink?” Spencer remarked, checking himself out in the mirror on the office wall and then looking back at Brendon in the reflection. He couldn’t decide whether Spencer's expression was one of sympathy or pity.

“Yeah. Perhaps.”

He didn’t know what a shrink could do for him. In the silence that followed, Brendon listened to the thud of the music from the bar shaking through the walls to stop the tears of self-pity from welling up behind his eyes.

“Hey, listen. I think you’re all right. You’re young,” he shrugged. “You’ve still got a life to lead. I’m no psychologist but if you need a friend to talk to, I’m all ears – my father hated me for my sexuality too. He hated the women’s clothes even more. I know how it feels not to be accepted by your family – it’s unjust, it’s really fucking shitty but you can’t let the bastards grind you down. *Fuck ’em*, that’s what I say. *You don’t like me? Well, get the fuck over it. I ain’t gonna lose any sleep over it. Am I right or am I right?*”

Brendon hummed in consideration and then nodded – he wished he possessed Spencer’s confidence, the ability to just throw his hands up and claim to not give a fuck but that was easier said than done. He blinked up at the ceiling. How the *hell* was he ever going to climb out of this hole? It seemed like an endless black void with sides so steep he couldn’t get his footing.

“Come on,” Spencer cajoled, offering his hand to pull Brendon up from the couch. “I’ll buy you another drink – but this is the last one. After that, you’re paying for shit yourself - especially if you won’t put out for me,” he grinned as Brendon’s fingers closed around his hand. With a huff, Spencer hauled him to his feet, pulling him closer to his chest than he really needed to. Their lips were close; their bodies touching – Brendon could smell Spencer’s minty fresh breath and was once again reminded of Jon. He suddenly felt the need to defend his actions.

“I appreciate everything you’ve been doing for me. I like hanging out with you. I really enjoy your company – I think you’re fascinating.”

Spencer smirked and rolled his eyes. “You don’t have to tell me what I already know, sweetheart. Listen, if you end up with a miserable life because you listened to your mom and dad or your friends or your preacher or some guy on TV yelling at you how to do your shit, then you deserve it – but then that’s just my humble opinion. What do I know?”

The man offered him one final, absent-minded shrug and then turned away, leaving him stood alone in the office with Spencer’s sentiments reverberating around his head. They were the first thing to make sense to him in months. When he left the office, Spencer had taken up his place at the bar again. There was a full glass of whiskey in Brendon’s spot and when he sat down on the barstool, he let his eyes gaze around the room to distract him from the awkward silence that he and Spencer now sat in.

Those two young boys arrived since they’d been in the office. Brendon watched them every night, lurking in the dark at the back of the room, smoking cigarettes with their hips pushed forward and every night, Brendon would feel his heart sink for them.

When he started prostituting himself, it had been a way to pay the rent. He thought it would be a
quick and easy way to make lots of money and when he first met Jon he thought that after a few months they’d be able to save enough cash to get a place of their own – a little apartment in New Jersey, some duplex in Upstate New York; Brendon didn’t care where he lived so long as he had Jon by his side. He wanted the white picket fence and a couple of dogs with Jon Walker. He wanted the American dream.

He hadn’t realized how difficult it’d be to get out of the game. Even now, almost two months since his last trick, his past was still haunting him. His idea of the American dream turned into a nightmare – and he felt like a ghost of the man those two boys would become if they continued whoring themselves to desperate, old perverts. He was nothing more than a foreshadowing of their depressing future.

He watched them for a while, noting the tricks they disappeared to the bathroom or the parking lot with. He wondered how everyone around him could be so blind to what was going on under their very noses.

He was staring into his glass around half an hour later, when Spencer nudged him with a sharp elbow. “This dude here is never anything other than trouble. The boys don’t like him, they say he’s too rough,” he said, nodding over at a tall gentleman dressed in a grey suit who just entered through the side door. Brendon raised his gaze but he didn’t take in any specific details about the grey-haired man who was approaching the bar. He took another sip of his drink and held it in his mouth until it burned.

“He’s some rich fucker from New York – works on Wall Street or some shit.”

Brendon raised his eyes again, attaching them to the face of the familiar stranger stood at the other end of the bar. Beside him, Spencer kept talking under his breath, leaning into his shoulder.

“He’ll come in here every few months and the last time he did he tried to stiff Tyler out of his fee. Hey, jackass,” Spencer called, attracting the man’s full attention. “I told you not to come back here. You’re eighty-sixed, in case you forgot.”

Brendon’s face fell. He felt the sudden chill of recognition run up his spine. He was staring straight into the face of Marc Willis and judging by the man’s ugly expression, he recognized Brendon too. He stood steadfast at the bar, his eyes locked with Brendon’s from across the room. He felt himself getting a little short of breath – this dude almost killed Jon. He raped him and beat him and robbed him and left him for dead in a scummy Manhattan hotel room. He felt the bile rise up his throat and looked quickly back down at the bar top.

Perhaps this was just a coincidence? The boys who lurked at the back of the room did seem to attract a good deal of tricks exactly like Marc, older, sexually frustrated married men and it really could be a coincidence that out of all the sleazy dive bars in Las Vegas, Marc Willis just so happened to walk into the exact one he was sat in.

It was a long shot, but it was what he was hoping for. The alternative was that Marc found out that he’d been the one to tell his wife about his dalliances with male hookers and stalked his prey all the way to Vegas.

“I bring good business to this dump, you can’t eighty-six me,” the old man claimed – and there was no mistaking that voice - the voice that whispered sick sentiments into his ear as he attacked him, you want this, you’re a whore, give it up to me... Brendon felt his palms sweat and his muscles twitch as he wrapped his hand tight around his glass. He was suddenly feeling very short of breath.

“I sure as fuck can,” Spencer retorted. “This is my bar, asshole. Now, get the fuck out – unless you
Brendon bit his lip. Marc Willis was a force to be reckoned with. Around them, the bar descended into silence; all the patrons were watching, waiting for a fight to kick off. Brendon wanted to warn Spencer that he shouldn’t underestimate the strength of the old man at the opposite end of the bar. He managed to overpower both Jon and Brendon a few months ago and although he knew Jon wasn’t much of a fighter and probably didn’t put up much of a struggle, Brendon liked to think that he had. He could feel the blood pumping through his brain. The adrenaline was a sudden rush to him.

“How much for that whore next to you?”

Brendon closed his eyes in shame as he felt everyone in the bar look at him, Spencer included. His face ignited in embarrassment, his whole body shook as he tried to control his breathing – he needed to remain calm and keep his composure, but he could feel himself draining of it by the second. He heard an excited murmur thrum through the bar.

“Get the fuck out,” Spencer said again, his voice firmer this time, more controlled. “Unless you want me to call the cops?”

Brendon fixed his eyes on Marc’s without lifting his head. The fury ran through his body, lighting his muscles on fire and he felt his fists clench on top of the bar as he watched Marc shrug his shoulders and then turn slowly back out of the door he’d entered through a few minutes prior. As the door swung shut behind him, the bar erupted into excited chatter.

“Uh, excuse me, but what the fuck? Do you know that dude?” Spencer asked with a quirked eyebrow.

Brendon slipped to his feet and downed the last of his drink. “No.” He shook his head as he slammed his glass down on the bar. He’d been the downtrodden victim for way too long. Marc’s sick kinks affected him not once, but twice and Brendon couldn’t let that slide again. He was going to fuck him up.

“I’ll be right back,” he muttered, grabbing his coat and before Spencer could talk any sense into him, Brendon marched out of the door after the old man. The guy just wasn’t smart enough to learn his lesson. He was still chasing after vulnerable hustlers even though his past indiscretions resulted in his wife leaving him and filing for divorce. Brendon realized that some men were just pure evil, right down to the very core.

It was dark outside when Brendon pushed through the door and the Nevada air was cool. In the distance, he could see the glow of the Strip reflected in the starless sky and he scanned the deserted parking lot. All was quiet; there was nobody around and Marc couldn’t have gone that far in such a short space of time.

To his left, walking towards a black Mercedes, he spotted him. The cocaine and the alcohol flowing through his veins made him feel almost invincible. He’d never been a fighting man, he hated all sorts of senseless violence but this Marc Willis guy needed some fucking sense kicked into him. He publicly shamed him in front of a bar full of people – he known exactly who he’d been talking to and worse than that, he’d beaten Jon to a bloody pulp, just so he could get his kicks. Marc’s attack on himself, Brendon could just about forgive but he couldn’t excuse what that man had done to Jon – despite everything that had gone down between the pair of them, Brendon still carried a torch for that dozy fucker.

“Hey,” he called into the night, his voice cracking through the dark.

Marc turned his head to look over his shoulder at him and then quickly turned back, picking up his pace to a slow jog back to his car. You better fucking run, Brendon thought to himself.
“Hey, I’m talking to you, asshole. Do you remember me? I sure as fuck remember you.”

Marc ignored him again. He didn’t turn to look at Brendon until he reached his car. If you’re sensible, you’ll just drive away. Brendon didn’t want the man to give him an excuse to hit him – but he would; if the worst came to the worst. Marc Willis fumbled with his car keys and squared his shoulders, pacing a few steps back towards Brendon. “You’re the whore who blackmailed me out of one grand a few months back. I remember you. What the fuck are you doing out here?”

“Small world, huh? I think you know my friend too. You beat him half to death about six weeks ago back in Manhattan. You picked him up and offered him five hundred bucks if he agreed to fuck you and then you tied him to the bed and raped him. Does that ring a bell? You robbed him and left him for dead in a hotel room on West 24th Street - you broke his ribs, Marc. I thought I told you to play nice?”

Marc Willis scoffed, his lips pulling into an ugly sneer. “It really is a small world. You know that pathetic junkie – the fucker who told my goddamn wife what had happened? She’s leaving me; she’s taking the house in New York and the condo in Miami. I should have killed him. I wish I had.”

Brendon felt the sudden anger at Marc’s words soar up through his bones. He read about this – fight or flight – but even during all his years in Manhattan he never experienced it firsthand. He crossed the short distance between them quickly, in three big bounds and Marc jumped back in surprise, dropping his keys on the ground. When he crouched down to pick them up, Brendon advanced on him. He saw the look of fear flash across the man’s pathetic face as he grabbed a hold of his tie and pulled him forward onto his knees on the ground.

Fighting is intrinsic, Brendon realized. Without thinking, he looped the man’s tie around his neck and pulled as tight as he could. Marc’s hands clawed at the material. He choked and his eyes bulged. He didn’t look nearly as self-assured being throttled in the dirt of a parking lot.

“You like doing this to men, don’t you?” Brendon’s voice was low; he spoke with his eyes clamped onto Marc’s. “This turns you on, doesn’t it?” Marc Willis shook his head. His mouth gasped for breath. “I told your wife, motherfucker. That was me. I went to her office and I told her that you’re a rapist pig because you don’t deserve someone like her.”

“I’m sorry,” the man stuttered, twisting his neck to try and find some escape from the pressure around his throat. “I’m sorry – please don’t hurt me.”

“I should kill you right now, right here in this parking lot and I should leave you for dead just like you did with my boyfriend – just like you’ve done with so many others before him, I’m sure. I loved him and you almost killed him. Give me one reason why I should let you go.”

Marc blinked up at him, his eyes huge and streaming. His fingers clawed desperately at his collar, his knees shuffled in the dirt of the parking lot. His face was turning blue. “I can pay you,” he spluttered. “I can get you money. I can pay you – however much you want.” Saliva ran from the man’s mouth; his eyes were full of tears. “Don’t kill me. Please.”

Brendon loosened his grip on the man’s tie. He heard Marc’s quick intake a breath, loud, as if he just returned to the surface after too long under water. A second later, Brendon pulled at the material again. Marc’s eyes fluttered shut. “I don’t want your money. If I find out that you so much as touched someone else again, I will ruin your life – I’ll be keeping tabs on you; if your wife takes you back, if you start another relationship I will tell the world what kind of man you are and you’ll go to prison and your life will be so bad that you’ll lay awake every night wishing I had killed you tonight. Do you fucking understand me?”
Marc Willis nodded - his eyes were starting to roll to the back on his head. “Yes,” he choked, his tongue hanging out of his mouth.

“I’ll ruin you. That’s a promise.” He yanked roughly on the man’s tie and glared down at him – another thirty seconds of pressure and the man would be dead. The thought of having enough power over another human that he could end their life suddenly made Brendon dizzy.

He let go.

Brendon stepped back and glanced around the parking lot – it was still quiet; the only sound around them was the crickets chirping and the incessant thud of music from the bar. He watched as Marc hunched over, loosening the knot in his tie and choked on his own gasps for air. He hoped that he sufficiently scared the man enough that the dumb fuck would heed his warning.

“I mean it,” he warned again. “If I read that you so much as looked at another person again – man or woman, I’ll go to the press. I ain’t fucking around.”

The man nodded, glaring up at him as he tried to catch his breath. Brendon held eye contact for a few seconds and then turned, pushing his hand through his hair as he walked back towards the bar. Behind him he heard Marc Willis’s car door slam and his tires kicking up gravel as he pulled out of the parking lot and sped away into the night. Brendon was shaking. He could feel the adrenaline still coursing through his body. He felt like he was about to puke.

He couldn’t go back into the bar. Spencer would only ask nosy questions that Brendon didn’t want to answer. Marc shamed him back there; everyone heard him call him a whore. He faltered at the door and took a deep breath to steady his nerves. The adrenaline would soon wear off, he thought and he wouldn’t feel this shaky for long. It was still early – before ten o’clock, but he decided he should call it a night. He had enough excitement for one evening.

He walked slowly back to the motel and laid down on the bed in his clothes. The altercation with Marc sobered him up and he always found it impossible to fall asleep sober – his mind was on fire, his thoughts loud in his head. He could’ve killed that dude. He could’ve done it. It would have been so easy to watch the light drain from that sick fuck’s eyes.

It was approaching dawn when Brendon eventually fell asleep. The guests at his motel seemed to be most alive in the middle of the night and he laid awake listening to them shouting and fighting until 5AM. He was awoken at eight that morning by a soft knock on the door – Dallon was early, he thought, groggily climbing up from the bed and shuffling towards the door.

When he opened it, Dallon stood there with a bright smile on his face. “I can’t stay long,” he said. “I agreed to accompany Lydia to some dumb church charity auction this morning but I brought you coffee and doughnuts – and today’s newspaper.” He shoved all three into Brendon’s hands as he tried to blink against the bright morning sunshine. Brendon suddenly remembered how he almost strangled that old man in the parking lot of Spencer’s last night – and he suddenly didn’t feel so confident in his actions. Perhaps he should call Jon and warn him to be wary, he thought briefly as his brother-in-law shifted his feet on the step.

“Are you coming in?” he asked, dropping the paper and the doughnuts to the bed and taking a sip of coffee.

Dallon frowned and shook his head. “I promised Lydia weeks ago – I’m already running late,” he noted, looking at his watch. “It’s Sunday tomorrow though – perhaps we can eventually go for the Sunday brunch buffet at Caesar’s?”
“We’ll see,” Brendon shrugged, but he felt a smile pull at his lips – Dallon Weekes was nothing if not persistent.

“I gotta go. I’ll see you tomorrow.” On the doorstep of his motel room that morning, Dallon leaned forward and pecked Brendon’s lips – there was nobody around this early, but it was still a surprisingly ballsy move for the man who’d always been too scared to commit.

Brendon watched him drive away before closing the door and sitting back down on the bed. The doughnuts were fresh and still warm and the coffee was strong – the breakfast was exactly what he needed. He absently unfolded the newspaper and glanced down at the front page. A familiar face caught his eye and Brendon’s stomach twisted as his eyes scanned over the headline.

**Ryan Ross Out of Rehab!**  
*Heir says he’s “feeling better” as he leaves facility and boards jet to Las Vegas.*

*Shit.* Brendon felt like he was about to throw up.
The Ross Hotel, Spa and Casino, was one of the most exclusive places to stay in Las Vegas. It was where the high rollers went to gamble and some of America’s richest and most famous celebrities went to party. It had always been one of Ryan’s favorite getaways and was by and large one of the finest hotels in the world - but as Ryan stood in the master bedroom in the most exclusive suite of his father’s hotel, it seemed to have lost some of its flare.

First off, he was alone and Vegas was one hell of a lonely city if you didn’t have someone to share the madness with – he didn’t even have William or Shane for company and after seven weeks of being surrounded by doctors and counselors and recovering addicts Ryan was beginning to feel a little antsy. The allure of the liquor cabinet was strong but he hadn’t left rehab to immediately get fucked up - that’s what everybody expected of him and he didn’t want to prove all the naysayers right. Instead, he ordered a freshly squeezed orange juice and a bottle of tonic water from room service and sat on his hands.

Ryan always enjoyed Las Vegas. It was his kind of town, obnoxious and excessive and a little trashy. It was a city with a very warped sense of reality, a synthetic wonderland, an outlaw metropolis in the middle of the desert and as Ryan watched dawn break over Las Vegas Boulevard that morning he recalled the numerous times he and Gabe had tore up the Strip together, stumbling from one high-end casino to the next, high on coke and pills and plied with free drink. Ryan had always been enchanted by the glitz and the glamour. It was one of the only places in the world where his taste for excess seemed to be encouraged - but sober, Las Vegas didn’t seem to hold quite the same appeal as it once had.

From his penthouse suite, Ryan could see for miles – the morning sky was clear and blue and he saw the city in a rare moment of serenity. He didn’t think he’d actually seen the Strip in the daylight before. It looked kind of sad without its bright lights.

He’d never been to Vegas sober, either and he knew the immediate assumption all the tabloids and gossip sites would jump to. Las Vegas was Sin City; the biggest party town in the USA and Ryan had flown there straight after discharging himself from rehab. They were probably already writing his obituary.

He wondered if Brendon was still out there somewhere and how he was doing. He hoped he was happy and stuck to his promise not to fuck anyone else – it had only been a week since they’d last spoken, it surely couldn’t be that difficult to keep his ass out of service for just over seven days. Brendon Urie had been the whole reason Ryan decided to leave rehab early and he was going to be majorly pissed off if the dude had gone back on his word. He sighed and wondered if he made the right decision discharging himself, because Dr. Stump hadn’t agreed with it and Dr. Stump was the most sensible man Ryan knew.

Patrick tried to warn him against leaving the facility in Malibu. “I just don’t think you’re ready, Ryan. We still got an awful lot to work on,” he said but Ryan didn’t care. After his meltdown following the conversation with his father, he’d been left with no way to contact Brendon. He smashed his cellphone beyond repair if the dude had gone back on his word. He sighed and wondered if he made the right decision discharging himself, because Dr. Stump hadn’t agreed with it and Dr. Stump was the most sensible man Ryan knew.

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He clicked his pen and said, “I know you’re not going to listen to me and I know you’re just going to do whatever you want, despite anything that I say but don’t leave because you’re worried that this
Brendon guy will forget about you – if he’s as good a man as you say he is, he’ll wait. I’m sure he understands that you’re in rehab to try and beat your addictions and that it doesn’t happen overnight. I think you should stay here; complete your program.”

“I can’t stay here for another six weeks without a cellphone,” Ryan told his psychiatrist, shaking his head.

“Well then, you shouldn’t have smashed it up, should you? You broke my coffee table too. That was a wedding present from my father.”

“I’ll buy you a new one,” Ryan shrugged. Whatever. Coffee tables were a dime a dozen.

Patrick raised his eyebrows and sucked in a breath. “That’s not the point,” he mumbled under his breath. When he looked back up at Ryan, his face was serious. “I think you should stay. It’d be such a waste for you to leave here unprepared and slip into bad habits again.”

Ryan shrugged his shoulders. His mind was already made up and there was nothing Patrick could do or say to change it – another month and a half without being able to check up on Brendon would drive him absolutely insane and he already lost his mind once; he wasn’t prepared to lose it again.

He left the facility late on Friday evening - much to Patrick’s annoyance, but nonetheless the man wished him all the best, had given him his number before he left and said that Ryan shouldn’t hesitate to call him if he needed someone to talk to.

“Don’t rely too much on your fella to get you through the next few weeks. You’re going to have to wade through a lot of bullshit to earn the respect you deserve, Ryan and it’s not going to be easy. Being sober in here is one thing; being sober out there is another and at the end of the day, the only person who’s going to get you through this is yourself.”

“Gee, thanks for the words of encouragement, doc.” Ryan rolled his eyes and tried to hide his smile. He was going to miss Dr. Stump and his continually sunny outlook on life. He’d like to be able to look at the world through the same eyes Patrick did. He was damn glad to have met someone like him. The man had the patience of a saint and Ryan probably would’ve checked himself out of rehab weeks ago had it not been for Patrick’s tolerance of all his bullshit.

That night, Ryan hadn’t slept – he spent the majority of the time on the phone to his frantic father, who was damn near livid that his son left rehab early. He called Ryan up in a panic after hearing the news and George spent a good hour and a half stressing at him down the phone from Manhattan.

“I only spoke to you last week and you seemed so positive about the whole rehab thing,” his father complained. “What happened?”

_Oh, I don’t know dad – perhaps the fact that you’re hanging out and playing golf with your friend who just so happened to rape me at fifteen, he wanted to spit. That and the fact that I’m so desperate to not lose contact with this hooker I met in New York a few months ago that I’m willing to risk my own health, reputation and sanity just to see him again._

Ryan lied, watching his toes curl in the soft carpet of the master bedroom. “I just decided it wasn’t working out for me anymore. I think I can do this on my own – with the help of AA and NA meetings, I think I’ll be alright.”

“Well, if you fuck up this time, Ryan, that’s it. I’ll cut you off quicker than you can cut a line of coke. I can’t condone you leaving California if you’re going to go straight back to how you were,” George snapped. After a short pause, he spoke up again – his voice calmer this time, a little softer.
“We’re concerned about you, son. Pamela and I - we just want you to get better.”

“I know and I will – I really want to this time, dad, I promise.”

That was no lie. He told George what he knew he wanted to hear, but at the same time, Ryan had no real intention of fucking up. Patrick taught him that he was more than just his addictions and it felt nice to have a clear head for once and to not constantly wake up hungover. Patrick taught him that he didn’t have to stay up until three o’clock every morning, trying to silence his demons – that there were other ways he could battle his sadness. *Take up a hobby,* Dr. Stump told him once. *Learn to channel your emotions into something not quite as destructive.* Ryan had decided to take the man up on his word.

That something was *Brendon.* Brendon could be the one who would take up his drug-free days and distract him from how empty his life was. *Goddamn, Brendon was amazing.* He couldn’t get the man out of his head. He thought about him *constantly,* he even dreamed about him – but Ryan wasn’t so stupid that he hadn’t yet realized that human beings were capable of being complete letdowns and Brendon was but a human being.

Patrick tried to prepare him for disappointment, but Ryan was still hopeful. Brendon *was* just a penniless hooker, after all and Ryan had what he needed – money.

His father was still talking at him down the phone. Ryan hadn’t been listening; he’d been too busy fantasizing about Brendon Urie, but he caught the last part of George’s rant. “*Why Vegas though, Ryan? Of all the places in the world you could’ve flown out to; why Vegas?*” he asked with a sigh.

Ryan couldn’t resist winding his father up. As they say, old habits die hard. “*Well, it was a toss-up between here and Tijuana and Vegas eventually prevailed because I knew you wouldn’t be able to hook me up in a nice-ass suite at such short notice if I went to Mexico. Plus the food always gives me the shits.*”

He heard his father’s irritated huff on the end of the phone and bit back a smile. “*Don’t even joke about that, Ryan, Jesus Christ,*” he muttered, almost to himself. He launched into another long tirade. “I’m going to have to get William back from vacation and reassign Shane’s duties for the week; this really is a huge inconvenience, Ryan. I’ll send William out on the next flight to Las Vegas; he’ll be with you first thing in the morning – and did you still want to go up to Tahoe? I’ll make sure the cabin is organized. No one’s been up there since last winter. I’ll have William organize a chopper ASAP, just… please. Stay in the hotel. Lay low. Stay away from the minibar.*”

Ryan had forgotten about his plans to take Brendon up to Lake Tahoe – in the wake of his meltdown it must’ve slipped his mind but suddenly he felt desperate to see the boy again. It gave him a sick thrill to think about paying for sex, about hiring Brendon’s tight throat and his sweet, round ass. The thought of not seeing him again made his heart thump with anxiety. He was not above ordering Shane to drive the sleazy backstreets of Las Vegas to find that slut, because perhaps he was hooking again? If that failed, he knew it wouldn’t be impossible to contact the dude’s family – that’s where he’d been the last time they spoke, living with his parents. He was sure that if he offered them some money, they’d disclose their son’s whereabouts.

His father eventually hung up on him and Ryan spent the rest of the night staring through the floor-to-ceiling windows of the master bedroom. The Vegas lights were mesmeric and from his suite, he could see where the Strip dissipated into desert, the surrounding mountains invisible in the darkness. He envied the people down there, stumbling through the casinos and getting drunk. Ryan sighed and looked around the room. The vast suite felt empty with just him occupying it.

When he found Brendon again, he’d offer him one of the other bedrooms – just to be polite. Maybe
Brendon would be more likely to stay if he had his own space? He allowed himself to fantasize about the boy; about each of them falling asleep in separate rooms and then waking up in the middle of the night to Brendon pulling back the covers of his bed and climbing in beside him, curling up next to him and how sweet he’d smell and how tight he’d be around his fingers as Ryan slicked him up and teased him open and then fucked him roughly against the mattress. He let the image play through his mind until he was hard, but he didn’t jerk off – he was saving himself for Brendon. He was going to get his money’s worth out of that boy.

As he watched the sunrise, the Strip died and Ryan laid back on the bed and closed his eyes, fading like the city beneath him. He fell into a deep sleep pretty quickly because when he woke up to the sound of the in-room telephone ringing, the sun was pouring in through the window that ran the full length of his bedroom wall. From the penthouse suite of his father’s hotel, Las Vegas looked like a deserted Disneyland.

Ryan didn’t feel any better for his nap. He pushed up from the mattress with a grunt and rubbed the sleep from his eyes, reaching over to pick up the phone. Before he could even say hello, a voice informed him that a certain Mr. Beckett arrived and was waiting down in the lobby.

“Send him up,” Ryan told the male voice on the other end of the line. He’d been hoping to squeeze in another couple hours of sleep before William arrived. His father hadn’t lied when he said his PA would be with him first thing in the morning – it wasn’t even 8AM. He wandered down the hallway and into the foyer and waited for the knock at the door.

When it came, Ryan peeked through the spyhole. William was stood there alone, looking absolutely shattered. He looked like Las Vegas was the very last place on earth he wanted to be right now, but when Ryan opened the door and greeted him, his PA smiled wide and genuine and pulled him into a tight hug. Human contact with a friend, after so long in rehab felt marvelous – he felt himself smile against William’s shoulder.

“Your father is so pissed off at you,” William chuckled, pulling back from the embrace and squeezing at Ryan’s shoulders. He looked him up and down, giving him the once over. “He called me up at 1AM this morning to tell me you left rehab and that I had to get myself on the next flight to Vegas – it’s my fiancée’s birthday tomorrow. I wish you’d stayed locked away for just one more weekend so I could’ve enjoyed it with her,” he lamented.

Ryan apologized, but William brushed it off with a wave on his hand. Despite having to leave his family at such short notice, his PA looked genuinely happy to see him, and Ryan, for one, was relieved to finally have some company.


Ryan’s face flushed at the compliment. Being so famous, he’d gotten used to people telling him he looked great all the time – even when he knew he didn’t – but this was the first time in years that he actually felt good about himself. He survived a whole night on his own in Las Vegas without getting fucked up – that was a huge achievement in itself. If he wasn’t trying to remain sober, he’d have celebrated by ordering a bottle of expensive whiskey from room service and taking a couple of lines of coke.

“Thanks. I actually feel okay – better leaving rehab than I did going in, anyway.”

William offered him a proud smile. “So, you think it worked this time then?”

“I hope so. One day at a time though, that’s what my psychiatrist told me.”
William stepped past him and entered the lounge, dumping his shoulder bag down on the dining table. From it, he pulled a pile of tabloid newspapers and splayed them out in front of Ryan. Most of them had run some sort of headline detailing his departure from the Malibu rehab facility – he’d been snapped by paparazzi boarding his private plane to Las Vegas and almost all of the newspapers in front of him had chosen to use the picture.

“What are people saying online? Do they all think I’m in Las Vegas to get fucked up?” Ryan asked, scanning one article quickly. Brendon would know he was in Vegas by now. He hoped the man was smart enough to realize that the only reason he was here was because he wanted to see him. He hoped Brendon read the newspapers and had access to the Internet. Maybe he would contact him by the end of the day? That would work out quite nicely – at least he wouldn’t have to spend another night alone.

William nodded in reply to Ryan’s question. “Of course they do. You flew straight from rehab to Vegas, dude. Why?”

Ryan took a breath and then fixed his eyes on William. “There’s someone here who I need to see. A boy. I lost his contact and I promised him I’d help him out. He’s really poor and I’m really rich. I have the power to change his life for the better. I think he’s struggling.”

Alright, slow down there, Oprah Winfrey.” William rolled his eyes and whistled through his teeth. “So you left rehab to help some boy?” Ryan nodded and William shook his head in resignation. “Don’t let your dad find out about that. Who is this boy; how do you know him, what’s his name?”

Ryan didn’t want to divulge William that information quite yet – at least not the truth. “All you need to know is that I said I’d help the kid out – and that I’m a man of my word.”

“When have you ever been a man of your word? Let’s hope your recent stint in rehab changed you for the better, huh? Does this guy happen to be a romantic interest?”

Ryan shrugged. “Maybe. What’s it to you?”

His PA held back a laugh. “It’s nothing to me, I’m just saying; I think you’re stupid to have left rehab early for some guy whose contact you don’t even have anymore. You realize your father will give you a serious ass whooping if he finds out that all this is over some boy you promised to help out,” William said, his fingers air-quoting.

“Well, George doesn’t have to know. You’re not going to tell him, are you?”

William zipped his fingers across his lips and raised his hands in front of him. An awkward pause followed and Ryan pulled the closest newspaper towards him and started flipping through it to distract him.

“How’s Shane?” he asked after a moment. Ryan hoped that Shane didn’t hate him – he’d driven that man slowly around the bend. He kept repeating the foggy details of their last interaction through his head and spent a month and a half wondering if his driver still resented him. He would’ve hated to lose Shane’s friendship over some dumb desire he had to get high with that dude, Pete, because Ryan could contest that it most certainly hadn’t been worth it. “Last time I saw him, he told me he quit.”

“Last time you saw Shane, Ryan, he was trying to convince you not to smoke crack with some drug-dealer in the Bronx,” William reminded him, as if speaking to an idiot. “He had your best interests at heart. He’s more than just your driver; he’s your friend. He doesn’t hold a grudge if that’s what you’re getting at?”
Ryan breathed a small sigh of relief and then felt the sudden need to apologize. He bit his lip. “I feel bad about what happened that day, y’know? I’m sorry for putting you guys through that.”

William’s lips pulled into an easy smile. “You’re forgiven,” he said, leaning across the table to rub at Ryan’s shoulder. “Just remember to learn from your mistakes, dumbass – don’t be one of these who fucks up the same way over and over again. People will start losing sympathy for you if you do that.”

Ryan smiled and gave his friend’s hand a quick pat. William was a good friend. He knew how to keep Ryan’s feet planted firmly on the ground and his head out of the clouds, which was something very few other people could do.

His PA quickly changed the subject “Your dad said you wanted to go up to Tahoe for a few weeks? That’s a good idea, more relaxing up there than it is in Manhattan or LA. Or Vegas,” he shrugged, looking around the lounge.

Ryan sucked in a breath and nodded, scratching at his head. “I had mentioned it...”

He wondered how long he could postpone the trip to Tahoe without it appearing suspicious. He really didn’t want to leave Las Vegas without first talking to Brendon and convincing the man to accompany him there – because, really, no matter how beautiful the Sierra Nevada’s were at this time of year, he knew it would be lousy with no one to share it with.

“Your father suggested that you should do an interview before you go up there – just to assure people you’re serious about staying clean. I’ve been getting phone calls and emails all morning. People magazine offered half a million dollars for an exclusive. Rolling Stone said they’d match it-”

“Fuck Rolling Stone,” he spat, suddenly incensed at the memory of how that publication made him out to be a desperate little junkie just before he’d gone into rehab. “Why can’t I just hang out here for a few days and then go up to Tahoe and stay there until I’m ready to go back to Manhattan? I don’t have to convince the world that I want to stay clean; I’m having a hard enough time trying to convince myself that I can do the same.”

“Well,” William sighed with a shrug of one shoulder, “they do say that father knows best.”

“My father don’t know shit,” Ryan mumbled. It was true. If he hadn’t talked to his dad that day in Patrick’s office and found out the old bastard had been gallivanting around Las Vegas with Marc Willis, he’d probably still be safe in his little rehab bubble, none the wiser to their stupid little golfing trips together. He’d probably manage to wire some money to Brendon and finish off his program, without cutting it short.

As it went, he’d been so concerned that Brendon would move on and forget about him – or worse, meet someone else - that he left unprepared and was now faced with a hawk-eyed press who would be judging and commenting on his every move, just waiting for him to fuck shit up again.

He sat and talked to William for another half an hour before excusing himself for another nap. A long night without much sleep was finally getting to him and Ryan drew the curtains and lay back under the soft covers of his bed, scratching absently at his belly.

He could feel himself starting to think about Brendon the same why he thought about drugs – he needed him; he was just itching for another taste of that man and there was nothing he would rather do right now than lose himself in that boy. Ryan always had self-destructive tendencies, he always wanted copious amounts of all the things he knew were bad for him and he figured that
Brendon was no exception, regardless of the outcome.

*Oh, Brendon would fuck him up,* Ryan was sure of that – beautiful people always were the biggest heartbreakers. The only problem was, there was no rehab facility that dealt with broken hearts.

***

Brendon walked across the lobby of the Ross Hotel, Casino and Spa and felt his heart thump harder with each step he took towards the reception desk. He was feeling a little nauseous; his stomach was unsettled and he could feel his muscles jittering under his skin. He didn’t know what the fuck he was doing or even if his grand plan was going to work, but after waking up that morning to the news that Ryan Ross left rehab and was now in the same city as him, he convinced himself that it was no coincidence and that the whole reason the man had flown out to Vegas was to see him.

He was taking a gamble and it probably wouldn’t even pay off but he had nothing left to lose – he already lost it all - so after reading the newspaper article no less than three times that morning, Brendon showered, shaved, cleaned himself out and then spent a whole hour primping himself in front of the grubby mirror above the motel sink.

He slipped into his tightest pair of pants and teamed them with a simple white t-shirt and a pair of pointy boots. By the time he left his motel room, he looked good – great, even - and he fucking knew it. His coke hangover quickly cleared and his run in with Marc Willis at Spencer’s the previous evening was all but forgotten as he walked the half an hour it took to reach one of the nicest hotels on the Strip. The thought that Ryan Ross had left his luxury rehab facility just so he could see him again filled him with confidence and he had a newfound spring in his step.

The Ross Hotel belonged to Ryan’s father and Brendon assumed that he’d be staying there, although he couldn’t be one hundred percent. As he stood in the center of the lobby, his confidence started to desert him. *He was really going to do this.* He suddenly felt a little out of his depth. Brendon tried to muster the courage to approach the front desk. It would be greatly embarrassing if he read all the signs wrong and that Ryan, in fact, wanted absolutely nothing to do with him.

The lobby was decked out in shiny gold marble and dark wooden touches – it was all incredibly opulent. Running either side of the wide space were trees wrapped in lights, creating a canopy above his head and past that, on the ceiling was a moving display of clouds and sky that changed color as the day progressed. Brendon had never seen anything like it.

His boots clicked on the marble flooring and he tried not to give himself away by looking too awestruck. If he expected to show up at what he hoped was Ryan Ross’s hotel and talk the talk, he certainly had to walk the walk too. Over the years, Brendon learned to get what you wanted in life, you had to pretend like you deserved it – that had always been the difference between him and Jon; that’s why Brendon got away with asking his tricks for so much money and Jon resigned himself to a life of ten-buck blowjobs in grimy alleyways.

Brendon waited in line at reception and ran silently through his demands as if practicing a script. He was here to see Ryan Ross, Ryan was an old friend and he was scheduled to meet up with him… Brendon fidgeted on the spot, his nerves getting the best of him. In his heart, he knew it’d never work – he may as well turn around right now, walk back to the motel and wait for Dallon’s regular Sunday visit – but Ryan promised him ten grand. That amount of money was life changing and he wanted to see at least some of it before he left today. *Fuck,* he wished he had a small hit of weed before leaving his motel room – that would help calm his nerves.

“Who’s next, please?” A smartly dressed, male receptionist beckoned him forward and Brendon stepped up to the desk. “Welcome to the Ross Hotel, Casino and Spa. Do you have a reservation
with us today, sir?” he asked, without looking away from his computer screen.

Inside his chest, his heart was thumping; his palms were sweaty, his knees weak. The man’s gold nametag read Brent and underneath his name, in smaller lettering, it said Las Vegas, NV. Employees in most of the hotels and casinos in Vegas tended to wear nametags that specified where they were from – it was meant to make the tourists feel comfortable, but obviously Brent hadn’t gone far in life.

Brendon looked around and swallowed his nerves. “Ah, no actually. I’m here to see a friend. He said to uhh… to just show up here.”

The man behind the desk looked up at him, a tired and unamused expression on his face. “Do you have a name?” he asked, thick fingers poised over the computer keyboard.

“My name’s Brendon. Brendon Urie.”

Brent from Las Vegas, Nevada rolled his eyes and clicked his tongue. “I mean the name of the person you’re meant to be meeting. So I can look him up on the database?”

Well, fuck. That was humiliating. Brendon felt his face prick with heat as he tried to recover from his embarrassment. Ryan’s name got stuck in his throat. Brendon’s poise was draining by the second as the man stared at him expectantly.

“I do have other guests who are waiting to be seen to while you think about that difficult question.” Brent was a bit of a dick apparently.

“I’m a friend of Ryan Ross; is he staying here?”

"I'm sorry?"

"Ryan Ross," Brendon repeated. "Is he staying here?"

“Is this some kind of joke?” the man asked, looking around as if he expected a camera crew to jump up in front of him.

Brendon shook his head. “I’m an old friend. I have a feeling he lost his phone or something, because I haven’t been able to contact him but if he’s staying here, I’d really like to know because we agreed to meet up.”

Brent raised one eyebrow and shook his head. Brendon wanted to punch that stupid, sardonic look off his face. “I’m afraid I can’t disclose that information, sir.”

“I’m not a journalist, I’m a personal friend. Please,” he said, trying to reason with the man, “help me out here, bro – can you just tell me if he’s staying here or not?”

The man sat back in his leather chair and folded his arms. “I said I couldn’t disclose that information… bro.” This dude had one serious attitude problem. “Now, if there’s nothing else I can help you with today, I’ll ask you to step aside.”

Brendon shook his head. “I’m not leaving until you help me out.” He wasn’t going to give up that quick – especially seeing as this receptionist seemed to have a big stick up his ass. He didn’t want to let this fucker deter him that easily. “Brent, listen. I’m going to level with you here, okay? I know that Ryan Ross is staying here and I really need to talk to him, so quit being a little bitch and just call up to his room for me and tell him that I’m waiting for him down in reception.”

That seemed to rile the man up enough. He bristled slightly in his chair and cleared his throat.
“Who’s next, please?” he chimed at the next guests in line, beckoning them forward with a sunny smile. A white-haired man in a matching white suit stepped forward, tailed by his blonde, collagen-pumped and much younger wife.

Brendon stood his ground, pointing at the couple. “I’m not finished yet, step the fuck back.” The firmness in his voice surprised even himself as the man and his wife took a startled step back into the line. He turned back towards the reception desk. Brent looked a little taken aback but he soon gathered himself up.

“Sir, I’m sorry, but if you’re not a guest here – which you’re obviously not,” he commented, looking Brendon up and down, “then I’m going to have to ask you to leave.”

“I’m not leaving. Not until you call him up and tell him my name – if he doesn’t want to see me then fine, I’ll leave but-”

“Sir, I’m going to call security unless you please step away from the front desk,” the man warned him, his voice terse.

Brendon had been prepared for this. He lived in Vegas long enough that he learned that money talks and bullshit walks. You could get away with anything in Las Vegas so long as you had the money. He could stand there all day and try and convince Brent, the sad receptionist to call up to Ryan’s room for him, but he knew it wouldn’t get him anywhere. He pulled his wallet from his back pocket and opened it up.

He still had about two hundred dollars left from the money Dallon loaned him – living was expensive when he wasn’t sucking dick for cash. He pulled a fifty-dollar bill from the folds of his tattered old wallet and pressed it towards Brent across the marble top of the reception desk.

“Just call him and tell him my name; tell him I’m waiting down here for him.”

“Hey, buddy, are you goin’ to check us in now or what? We’ve been waitin’ here for ten fuckin’ minutes,” the man at the front of the line shouted in a thick New Jersey accent. “Swear to God, I paid for better fuckin’ service at a Motel 6,” Brendon heard him mumble.

There was a pause where Brent looked over at the obnoxious guest and smiled sweetly. “I’ll be with you in just a moment, sir.” He looked back up at Brendon and then down at the money, pulling the note into his fist. His expression hardened. “Make it a hundred and we got a deal.”

Brendon was so fed up of people taking him for an idiot and he had no time for this dude’s attitude. He leaned over the desk. “Just fucking call him,” he said slowly.

“Or what?” Brent bit back, but Brendon could see the alarm flicker behind his eyes.

“You’ll regret it. Don’t fuck with me, Brent. You may deal with a lot of rich bullshitters in this place but I’m the real deal and I know that Ryan won’t be happy when I tell him about the attitude you’ve given me today. His dad owns this place – so if I were you, I’d call up to his hotel room and give him my message.” He grabbed a comment card and pen from the desk and scribbled down his name and number, holding it out until the man snatched it from his fingers.

Brent looked like a sullen teenager who’d been well and truly put in his place. “Once I’ve dealt with these guests, sir, I’ll see what I can do.”

Brendon turned away from the reception area and loitered by the elevators. He watched until the line disappeared and as soon as Brent the Receptionist was free, he glared across the lobby at him until he saw the man pick up the phone and hide his mouth as he talked into the receiver.
Brendon’s heart was in his throat. After being such an asshole to Brent he really hoped that Ryan wanted to talk to him again. He didn’t know why he was putting himself out there like this – probably because he couldn’t stand to live the rest of his life wondering what might’ve been.

He spent the last eight years wondering what could’ve happened if Dallon hadn’t grew up despising himself enough that he entered into a loveless marriage with his sister. Their relationship may well have come to an end anyway, but Brendon often pondered whether his life would’ve ended up quite as messy if he and Dallon managed to escape to California together.

Perhaps he would’ve gone to college and learned something valuable? Perhaps he and Dallon would’ve bought a place together and lived happily ever after – two ex-Mormon boys living a carefree life in San Francisco or Berkeley or some other fashionable city. It was the one lost opportunity of his past that made him the saddest.

With Jon, he wanted something similar – love, security, to erase all of Jon’s pain. He wasted their relationship accusing the man of something he wasn’t even capable of – enjoying sex - and the whole time Brendon had been too blind to realize that if you call someone a cheat enough times, they’ll just throw up their hands in defeat and become one. He and Jon could’ve had something and the pain of what-if was what kept him awake at night.

He couldn’t put himself through that again with Ryan – he’d seen enough opportunities in his life bypass him and he couldn’t let this one sail past too. If he did, he’d spend the rest of his life wondering what could have happened between himself and Ryan Ross if he’d just been assertive enough to go and get what he wanted. He was taking this opportunity with both hands. He wasn’t letting go.

If Ryan didn’t want anything more to do with him, then at least he could say he tried.

Brendon was lost in his daydream when he felt his phone vibrate in the back pocket of his pants. He pulled it out and looked down at the screen - it was a private number and his whole body started throbbing with nerves. He prayed that it wasn’t his brother-in-law, checking up on him. When he brought his phone to his ear, his eyes locked with Brent’s across the lobby. The receptionist’s head was poking up from behind the desk like a meerkat.

“Hello?”

“Well, well, well… if it isn’t Brendon Urie. I was hoping you’d call me.”

“Ryan?” he choked, trying to keep his voice even.

“That’s right. How are you, Brendon?”

“Fuck. Thank god,” Brendon cried under his breath. His heart soared inside his chest, all of his nerves left his body in the form of a relieved laugh. “I’m good. I’m great, actually; all the better after hearing your voice.” He blinked up at the ceiling and felt all the blood rush to his head. “How are you?”

“Horny,” Ryan answered. Brendon could almost hear the smile on his voice. “I’m sending my PA down to meet you as we speak - his name’s William; he’s tall, slim, reasonably good-looking - keep a look out for him.” Ryan Ross exhaled loudly. “Damn, am I glad you contacted me. I’ve been thinking about you non-stop. I left rehab because the thought of you being all alone in Vegas was driving me fucking crazy.” A soft laugh, a pause, and then, “Are you still my little whore, Brendon?”

The grin on Brendon’s face was one he couldn’t hide. Ryan Ross had been thinking about him non-
stop; he was glad that Brendon contacted him, he left rehab because of him...

“Fuck, Ryan, I’ll be whatever the hell you want me to be,” he laughed, catching Brent’s eye from across the lobby and slowly raising his middle finger in the man’s direction.
“So... how do you know Ryan?”

Brendon wiped his sweaty palms off on his pants and felt that familiar unease settle in the pit of his stomach. This William guy was an attractive man; he was about the same height as Dallon but held himself with much more confidence. Brendon hadn’t expected Ryan’s PA to be quite so handsome. He always pictured some uptight, smartly dressed woman with a Bluetooth earpiece, not a male model-looking hipster his own age.

William was watching him reproachfully and Brendon felt sick with nerves as they rode in the elevator together. He wondered if this guy was trying to catch him out – perhaps Ryan already spun him some story and this was some sort of test? He figured that as Ryan’s personal assistant, William was paid to take care of him so it wasn’t particularly surprising that he asked that question. Nonetheless, it put Brendon a little on edge.

He bit his lip and tried to disregard that gnawing feeling inside the center of his chest as they ascended up the building. The confidence that he showed talking to that idiot receptionist had long deserted him and Brendon wondered why he continually got himself into situations that made him this anxious.

He stumbled over his answer and rocked back on his heels. “Ah, I umm – we’re... He didn’t tell you?”

William looked at him from the corner of his eye. “No,” he replied, pursing his lips, “he didn’t. He conveniently left that part out.” He sounded suspicious, just like any good PA should be of an encroaching stranger but Brendon really didn’t want to have to make something up on the spot. He stayed quiet and hoped the man would be sensible enough to let the subject drop. The elevator soared up the building in silence. _Fuck, it seemed to be taking_ forever.

“It’s not really my job to pry into Ryan’s personal affairs,” William told him a moment later, “but you obviously made quite an impression on him. I just hope you know what you’re getting yourself into – Ryan’s an international celebrity, one of the most written about men in the world and he just left rehab for god knows what reason,” he sighed, shaking the hair back from his face. “The press is going to be all over him for weeks and I don’t know who you are, what you do or what your intentions are but be warned,” he admonished, “as soon as your name leaks to the press, they will dig up any and all shit that may be lurking in your past, so if you have anything you’d like to remain hidden, I suggest you conduct yourselves in secret and keep whatever’s going on between the two of you on the down low.” William sounded angry, even if his words were just a friendly reminder to keep his wits about him.

Brendon swallowed, uncomfortable in the knowledge that William probably wouldn’t be the only person in Ryan’s life to be suspicious of him and his intentions. “Of course,” he managed to say. “I’m a very private guy as it is. I’m not here to get famous.”

The man’s eyebrows rose and under his breath, he mumbled; “Well, that remains to be seen.”

“I’m _not_ here to get famous,” Brendon repeated, firmer this time, locking eyes with the man to prove his point.

William was the first to look away. He took a deep breath and then exhaled. “He said he promised you money. Now, it’s not my job to preach at him about what I think is right or wrong and nor is it
my job to make rash judgments about people I don’t even know,” he said, giving Brendon a sideward glance. “My job is simply to make sure he’s safe and isn’t making any more bad personal life choices, but the guy’s a willful little shit at the best of times and he’s never listened to anyone – especially not me. I know there’s no point in trying to talk him out of giving charitable handouts to people he doesn’t even know, but he seemed quite determined to meet with you this morning.”

William frowned, looking him up and down and then clicked his tongue. “If Ryan’s happy, I’m happy – that’s all I got to say… but just one more word of warning, those journalists are utterly ruthless; a boy like you? They’ll tear you to shreds.”

Brendon opened his mouth to object, but William spoke up before him. “And so will I if I find out you’re merely here to screw Ryan over or sell him out. He had to deal with enough bullshit recently without another fame whore selling their story.”

Brendon stifled a laugh and shook his head. William may have a few inches on him, but he was skinny and he didn’t seem to have much muscle – he was the personal assistant to a billionaire; Brendon could take him. William probably didn’t even know how to fight. “Are you trying to intimidate me?” he asked as the elevator slowed to a stop.

“Not at all,” the man replied, with a shrug of one slender shoulder. “I’m just saying – no one likes a gold-digger.”

Brendon didn’t argue that point; he stayed silent. He’d rather the world think he was a gold-digger than for them to know he was a hooker.

The elevator doors opened up onto a wide, marble foyer. A glass wall running the entire length of the building gave way to a panoramic view of the Las Vegas Strip and directly in front of him, there was an ornate marble fountain and the soft sound of trickling water. When Brendon peered over the edge of it, he saw frangipani floating on the surface and koi swimming around in circles - even the goddamn fish in Las Vegas were being better cared for than him. The foyer smelt clean, like bleach and fresh laundry.

“Follow me,” William said, tipping his head and walking briskly down the foyer, the heels of his boots clicking across the marble. Brendon did as he was told, quickly falling into step behind the man.

He wondered if he should really be risking so much on so little. Sure, his God-fearing family basically disowned him and ten grand would be the most money he’d ever seen before in his life, but it could only get a man of his age so far – it couldn’t buy him a place of his own, it would pay rent for maybe a year tops, but then he’d be back to square one. Was it really worth having his family find out about his illicit affair with Ryan Ross? What would they say if they found out that their disappointment of a gay son spent his years in Manhattan working as a male escort? Would Dallon ever forgive him, or would he turn his back on him too?

Nonetheless, Brendon didn’t have the confidence to turn back now. He was involved, he made promises – and he was a man of his word. Surely, it couldn’t be that hard to keep his name out of the press and anyway, it wasn’t like anyone knew he was here. He hadn’t let slip to anyone about his dalliance with Ryan – not Dallon or Spencer or Jon or Joe… Who the hell was going to leak his name; Ryan?

One weekend, they’d agreed on – just one weekend. In forty-eight hours, he’d have his money and all he had to do was suck some dick and get fucked a couple of times by a good-looking billionaire. He certainly had worse days. However, at the back of his mind, Brendon already suspected that it was going to be a little more complicated than sex for a couple of days, collecting his money and then walking away.
He thought back to the conversation he had with Ryan just over a week ago when he’d been stood outside Spencer’s, high on coke. They agreed on a price and in turn, Brendon promised he wouldn’t fuck anyone else until he saw Ryan again. He didn’t know how Ryan would be able to tell – not that it was particularly any of that man’s goddamn business. Brendon thought he moved on. He hadn’t been able to get a hold of him after his parents threw him out and he’d given up hope – but he’d fallen into Dallon’s arms before his parents had even asked him to leave, before he’d come to the conclusion that Ryan wanted nothing more to do with him. He guessed he never really intended to keep his word.

Brendon didn’t feel too shameful about breaking his promise to Ryan Ross, but he felt guilty for how he was about to go behind Dallon’s back. If Dallon hadn’t been there for him this past week, Brendon would’ve seriously considered killing himself.

He and William walked towards another, much grander set of elevator doors, framed both sides by two huge, elaborate gold vases, each holding a spectacular arrangement of fresh-cut flowers. The fragrance was actually a little overpowering – strongly scented roses, gardenias and lilies, just managing to undercut the chemical smell of cleaning products.

Everything in the long foyer was bright, gleaming white - from the floor to the fountain, from the flowers to the leather chaise to the right of the elevator, and as the sun shone in through the glass wall, it glared off all the marble. Brendon felt a little blinded by it all - all of this, it was too much. He watched as William touched a keycard against an electronic pad set into the wall and the second set of elevator doors opened up in front of them.

So, this is what having a shit-ton of money could get you at the Ross Hotel, Casino and Spa – a private elevator up to a room that probably cost more per night than what Brendon and Jon paid for an entire six month’s rent back in Manhattan, priceless vases filled with thousands of dollar’s worth of flowers, a marble fountain filled with fish that led a better existence than him. It was all slightly over the top, Brendon thought as he and William stepped into the elevator together.

They suffered the short ride in silence. William was pretending to busy himself with his cellphone, his face illuminated by its light, his finger scrolling without pause. Brendon tried to organize his jumbled thoughts. Things were hell of a lot simpler when he just had Jon to worry about. Jon, despite all of his faults, was a humble man who never asked for anything. Now, since leaving Manhattan, he entered a precarious liaison with his brother-in-law and was about to embark on another one with Ryan Ross.

Brendon knew he was risking a lot meeting up with the guy again, but he felt as if there was something pulling the two of them together; some invisible string that he didn’t feel with Dallon and one that he stopped feeling a long time ago with Jon.

Maybe it was the billionaire lifestyle? Maybe it was all the glitz and the glamour and the fame, because Brendon could sure get used to hotels like this - it certainly beat another night at the Whole Year Inn – and Ryan was an attractive man, there was no doubt about that - but why was he prepared to lose his very last scrap of dignity to a guy who would never understand how it felt to have nothing?

The elevator doors opened again. Another marble foyer, this time bordered each side by mirrors. Appropriate, Brendon scoffed to himself, for a floor in a hotel that was only accessible by the richest of America’s vain elite.

As he walked behind William, Brendon’s eyes drifted to check out his reflection. He was relieved to see that he was still looking good following his altercation with Brent the Receptionist and his grilling from William the PA. He looked fuckable, if nothing else and he hoped Ryan appreciated the
effort he’d gone to before coming out here.

William stopped abruptly outside a double set of wooden doors and once again, touched his keycard to a small pad in the wall until they beeped open. Behind the double doors was a small hallway leading to another entrance way. William pushed inside and ushered Brendon in after him.

So, he was actually doing this? Ryan Ross was behind this door and in a few seconds, they would be stood face to face. He could already feel the panic set in, his nerves buzzing around inside his body. Brendon hadn’t seen Ryan in over two months and even then, he only ever met the dude three times – and each of those times, Ryan had been high as a kite. He wondered if that same spark would still be there or whether Ryan would have difficulty communicating with him sober – or if he even was still sober after what was nearing a full twelve hours in Sin City.

William knocked and then folded his hands in front of him, waiting for an answer. On the door, in gold lettering, it read Grande Presidential Suite. He wondered how many presidents made a habit of spending a wild weekend in Vegas.

Brendon could already feel his cheeks starting to burn under William’s reproachful gaze. Over time, he’d forgotten just how rich and famous Ryan actually was. It was hard to remain starry-eyed about the man when he’d seen him kneeling on the floor of a scummy club bathroom with his pants around his ankles and his dick in his hand. The memory made a small grin pull at the corners of Brendon’s mouth.

After a minute of standing in front of the still unopened door in silence, William knocked again, louder this time, drumming out a pattern on the door with his knuckles. Brendon shifted his weight and sighed, his breath shuddering out of him unevenly. When he’d woken up this morning with memories of his run-in with Marc Willis floating through his head, he hadn’t expected to find himself waiting outside of the Grande Presidential Suite of the Ross Hotel, Casino and Spa waiting for Ryan to open the door to him.

“I guess he can’t hear us,” William mused. “Maybe he’s in the shower.” He pulled out his keycard and opened the door. Brendon bit the inside of his cheek to stop himself from picturing Ryan Ross naked and dripping with suds as he showered. “Come on in,” William smiled, holding the door for him. He sounded much friendlier than he had in the elevator. Maybe he had to keep up appearances in front of his boss?

When Brendon entered the suite, he looked around with wide eyes. He left what was probably one of the worst motel rooms in Vegas that morning and was now stood in the middle of one of the most opulent suites on the Strip.

The room was decorated in warm, neutral colors with modern furnishings and gold detailing. He thought Ryan’s hotel room back in Manhattan had been luxurious, but this place was something else. Ahead of him, a floor-to-ceiling window ran the entire length of the lounge. In the daylight, without its neon lights, the Vegas Strip looked like a mish-mash of every city he’d never been able to visit, the gaudy themed hotels and casinos, the canals and fountains and phony volcanoes.

“Wow,” he breathed, under his breath, walking towards the window. “I’ve never seen the Strip from this angle before,” he commented, looking back at William who was looking over at him cautiously. William didn’t say anything immediately, so Brendon looked back out of the window and took in the various structures, each of them infamous in their own ways. Beyond that, the Mojave Desert sprawled out into nothing, fading into the hazy distance.

“Vegas isn’t my favorite place in the world; I can only imagine how shitty it must be to live out here in Nevada. Jeez, I feel sorry for the locals,” William remarked absently. Brendon huffed at the
inadvertent insult. “I’m from Chicago originally – only the best city in the USA.”

“My ex was from Chicago; he always said the best way to see that place was out of the rearview mirror of a fast car.”

If William wanted to be a little bitch, then two could play at that game. The PA fell quiet.

Brendon thought about Jon. He wondered how he was getting on and whether he was still clean and out of the game and in love with that prick, Joe Trohman. He wondered whether he should call him and mention the fact he’d run into Marc Willis last night but Jon probably wouldn’t want to speak to him – he had Joe to take care of him now. Soon, Brendon’s thoughts drifted to Dallon. He wondered how he was getting along at that church charity auction with Lydia, the fake son of a bitch, lying to everyone he claimed to care about.

“I’ll go and find Ryan to tell him you’re here.” William’s voice startled him out of his daydream and Brendon turned from the window and nodded in silence. “Take a seat,” he said. “Why don’t you make yourself at home?” he suggested with a strained smile.

So, Brendon looked at the nearest armchair and sat down stiffly, both of his hands clasping at his knees, feeling just as out of place and unwelcome as he always felt inside his parents’ house.

* * *

Ryan was in the shower having a mini meltdown of sorts.

Brendon contacted him. Brendon contacted him and although he spent all of his time in rehab fantasizing about the man, now that he was here, in his hotel and eager to meet up with him, Ryan was beginning to worry that it’d be difficult to pick up where they left off.

Brendon was a hooker – and Ryan was a recovering drug-addict; in some ways, he guessed they were perfect for each other, but besides that, what the hell did they have in common? He was rich, Brendon was poor. He was famous, Brendon was a nobody. He moved in elite circles and Brendon…well, Brendon didn’t. They were worlds apart from each other, they lived polar opposite lives and Ryan was certain that nearly all of his friends and family would try and warn him off even striking up a friendship with the man. The powerful jets of the shower were doing nothing to wash away his anxiety and even less to calm his nerves. He pushed his wet hair away from his face and sighed in frustration. Come on, asshole, he cajoled himself, you’ve been waiting for this moment for months. Don’t fuck it up now!

However, now, with a clear head and not an ounce of alcohol or drugs running through his system, Ryan was finding Brendon’s sudden reappearance difficult to comprehend. He was desperate to see the man again but at the same time, he was nervous – he never felt this way about anyone before. The pills and the coke and the booze had given him the confidence he always needed since he was fifteen and now he was clean and sober for the first time in over a decade. The clear head and unmedicated mind suddenly didn’t feel so good. He needed a couple swigs of whiskey and a few lines of coke to sort him out…

He agreed to pay this guy ten thousand dollars for one weekend of his company and if his father found out that he elicited the services of a male prostitute, not more than twelve hours after his departure from rehab then he would probably cut him off and remove him from his will without further discussion. He was risking a lot seeing Brendon again – not just his inheritance, but his reputation and the respect of his family and friends, not to mention his mind – but he just couldn’t get the boy out of his head.
Ryan propped himself up against the shower wall and blinked the water out of his eyes. *Who was he kidding?* He had no reputation left to jeopardize - he already lost the respect of his parents, he was the recurring joke amongst his friends and his siblings had come to resent him when they were still kids. All Ryan knew is that he would *definitely* lose his marbles if he didn’t feel Brendon’s tight, vice-like throat around his dick again soon.

That was the one image that had been driving Ryan mad for *weeks* – the one of Brendon naked on his knees in front of him, lips stretched wide around the base of his cock, holding eye contact and moaning as Ryan fucked his throat. That thought alone made Ryan hard. He tugged at his erection for a few seconds and debated jerking off, but decided against it. There was a beautiful man already on his way up to his suite whose *job* it was to relieve him of his sexual frustrations. Why the hell should he waste an orgasm to his own hand when Brendon the professional dick-sucker was just moments away from arriving?

An abrupt knock at the bathroom door snapped Ryan out of his fantasies. He turned off the water and tried hard to muster up the courage he knew he’d need to face Brendon Urie sober.

“*Yes?*” he snapped, stepping out of the marble shower onto the heated bathroom floor and wrapping a towel around his waist.

William’s voice flowed from the other side of the door. “Your guest is waiting for you in the lounge. How long do you think you’ll be?”

“Give me five minutes,” Ryan called, sighing at his reflection in the mirror. He looked tired and worn out and not nearly as good as William told him he did when he first arrived. He dragged his hands down his face and peered at the bags under his eyes and his pasty complexion – if he hadn’t so desperately been trying to stay sober, he’d have taken a couple of lines to give him the little boost he needed.

Towel drying his hair, Ryan walked out into the bedroom to find William lurking at the door. His unexpected presence made Ryan jump and cuss. He quickly moved the towel down to cover himself up.

“Jesus. Didn’t your mother ever tell you not to lurk in corners like that?”

“Who is he?” his PA asked with a very serious pout on his face. He folded his arms and tapped his foot. “How do you know that boy?”

Ryan raised an amused eyebrow. “You mean Brendon?”

“Yes, I mean *Brendon.* Who the hell else do you think I mean?”

Ryan raised an amused eyebrow. “*You* mean Brendon?”

“Yes, I mean *Brendon.* Who the hell else do you think I mean?”

“He was my sponsor in AA back in New York for a while and we got to talking.”

The lie rolled easily off his tongue. He was sticking to his story. William looked unimpressed, not to mention hugely skeptical so Ryan thought he better elaborate. “He’s had a really tough time – his ex-boyfriend was a *heroin*-addict but they broke up apparently, so he’s single. We kept in touch when I was in rehab.”

“Bullshit,” William hissed. “You might be able to pull one over on your dad, but you can’t pull one over on me. I wasn’t born yesterday, Ryan.”

He shrugged. “Well, I don’t know what you want me to tell you.” He pulled a pair of maroon suit pants off the hanger and stepped into them under his towel. *Huh,* he lost some weight since being in rehab, he noted when he fastened the button around his hips. The coke-bloat he gained around his
middle over the years seemed to have gone down. He slipped his arms into a shirt and tucked it into his pants. William was still watching him expectantly. “What?” he snapped.

William sulked, shaking his head. “That’s a lie, Ryan – you and I both know that. I’m not just your personal assistant; I’m your friend. Stop keeping secrets from me.”

“Jesus, Bill, you sound like my fucking father. Quit nagging me.”

“I’m concerned about that boy’s intentions,” he said, pointing back at the lounge where Brendon was waiting for him.

Ryan forced an abrupt laugh and turned back to the closet, picking out a matching jacket. “Well, I’m a big boy, William. I can make my own decisions about people; I don’t need you to do that for me. We met in NA. That’s my story and I’m sticking to it.”

His assistant cleared his throat. “Thought you said you met in AA?”

William had always been a finicky little shit – and he always called Ryan up on his bullshit. He waved a dismissive hand. “NA, AA – who cares? They’re both pretty much the same.”

He slipped his arms into the jacket and straightened it out, looking at his reflection in the mirror. He was pleased to see that his clothes fitted him a little better after nothing but juice cleanses and organic living for the past month and a half. He was actually pleased with what he saw. In clothes, he didn’t look half bad – but maybe the suit was a little much?

“What’s Brendon wearing out there? Does he look good,” he asked, watching William in the mirror.

“I wasn’t checking him out, Ryan – he’s casual; jeans and a t-shirt, I wasn’t paying too much attention.”

“What about me, do I look good? I mean, if you were gay, would you?”

William quickly became flustered. “Jesus, Ryan. No. Did you seriously check yourself out of rehab to screw some guy you barely even know? Some dude who used to date a heroin addict? I am all in favor of sexual liberty and exploration and whatnot, but that’s just straight-up ridiculous.”

Ryan turned and pointed at his friend. “Don’t ruin my chances with this boy, Beckett – he’s hot and I like him and I haven’t had sex since going into rehab; that’s probably the longest period of celibacy I’ve had since I was fifteen.”

“I think a certain Miss Keltie Colleen would disagree with that claim,” William bit, the cattiness obvious in his voice. “We all read the newspapers, Ryan. Couldn’t get it up for her, could you?”

Ryan turned away in embarrassment – he’d forgotten about his ridiculous attempt at sex with Keltie and he was angry with William for using it as such a cheap shot. The whole world thought he was a lousy screw because of that bitch and the reminder bashed his confidence down to nothing.

He thought about how his psychiatrist would’ve told him to react to that remark and tried to channel his inner-Patrick. “You know, William, I’m going to ignore that and rise above it. That was a very mean thing you just said and it hurt my feelings. I think you should apologize.”

William rubbed at the bridge of his nose and closed his eyes. “I’m sorry. Look, Ryan – I appreciate that you’re looking for something to take your mind off being sober, but don’t you think this dude might be hanging out with you just because of your surname?”
Ryan gathered a breath and attempted a smile. His inner-Patrick was wearing extremely thin, extremely fast. “Yeah, maybe he is. In fact, that’s probably the only reason he’s here – but is that all I am to anyone? My father’s empire, my goddamn surname? I want to be more than that, Bill. I want to be more than some heir whose only got friends because his dad’s fucking loaded.”

“You know I didn’t mean it like that, Ryan…” his PA sighed, his shoulders sagging in defeat.

“I am more than some spoiled rich kid with no responsibilities and accountability for my actions – rehab taught me that - and if I have to prove that to you, then god knows, I’ll try because I know I’ve been an insufferable little shit in the past but give me a chance to figure this out for myself. I’m still learning. If Brendon’s a mistake, then I want to find that out for myself and then you have my permission to sit back and say I told you so, but until then please – just please let me live my own life.”

“I just concerned about you, is all. I don’t want you to get hurt.”

Ryan bit the inside of his lip to stop his friend’s words from affecting him too much. “I need this. I need to know if I’m capable of feeling something for someone other than myself – and Brendon’s a good kid. He’s one of the reasons why I want to stay sober, y’know? To impress him.”

His admission surprised even himself. All this time, he managed to convince himself that the only reason he wanted to see Brendon again was because the boy was great in the sack, but perhaps it was more than that. Right before he fell asleep at night, it was the thought of simply having the man there beside him that clouded his dreams.

William looked down at the floor and blinked at the carpet. “Alright,” he sighed after a while. “I know I’m paid to take care of you, but I only say this shit because you’re like my brother – an annoying kid brother who’s always fucking shit up, but my brother nonetheless,” he smiled.

“I’m glad you’re here, William – truly. You don’t have to worry about me; I just want to spend some time with this guy. I don’t want to drink and I don’t want to get high – well, I do, but I’m not going to. I promise. Why don’t you call your missus and invite her out here for the weekend? Tell her the flight’s on me, we’ll call it her birthday present. I take it my father booked you into a room of your own?” he asked, raising an eyebrow.

William sucked in air. “Yes. He did. I’m just a few floors beneath you – you just want me out of your hair for the weekend,” he grinned. William hit his shoulder. “I’ll call her; I’ll leave you two alone but you should go out there, your friend’s waiting for you.”

Ryan smiled, thankful that he had a least one truly great friend in the form of William Beckett. “You first. I don’t want you lurking in doorways and embarrassing me when I see him again for the first time.”

William laughed and gave Ryan’s shoulder a comforting squeeze. With one final smile and a request that Ryan call him if he needed anything, his PA turned and left the bedroom. Ryan could hear his boots on the marble hallway disappearing into the lounge and he listened as his friend made brief conversation with Brendon. He couldn’t make out what they were saying to each other exactly, but he could distinctly hear Brendon’s voice, low, sexy and strangely familiar.

Ryan felt his insides tighten and his heart pound as he imagined what the day would bring for the two of them. The anticipation was almost killing him. He took one more steadying breath and pulled open the door of the bedroom, walking out towards the lounge. About halfway down the hallway, Ryan wanted to turn back; he wanted to delay this meeting for as long as possible but his feet kept carrying him down the hall and when he rounded the corner, there he was.
Brendon – his fantasy, the man of his dreams, looking every bit as attractive as he remembered. Brendon looked up at him from the couch and smiled and Ryan felt his heart drop into his stomach, he felt the rush of excitement flood his brain and suddenly he couldn’t think straight – he was just stood in the middle of the room, staring. His palms were sweating, his cheeks burning, his mouth went dry – this felt almost as good as taking drugs.

“Hey, you,” Brendon smiled. “Long time, no see.”

Ryan could do nothing but stand there dumbly and nod his head – Brendon Urie was, by far, the most handsome man Ryan ever had the pleasure of meeting. He stood from the couch and took a few steps towards him, faltering about halfway across the lounge.

Ryan did the rest of the work. They came together like two lost lovers as Ryan pulled the boy into his arms and held him, their lips pressing together with no preamble. Brendon tasted of mouthwash and saliva and not much else – and he smelled incredible, clean and natural as Ryan breathed him in.

The thought of this one moment was what kept him going through rehab all those weeks, and now Brendon was in his arms again, solid and real, no longer a fantasy. His lips were wet against his, his tongue soft and cautious in his mouth and Ryan could feel the boy’s heart thumping quickly behind his ribs. The kiss felt grounding, as if this was where he was meant to be – his calling. All his fear and anxiety drifted away as their lips worked together.

Ryan’s hand held Brendon in place at the back of his neck, the other clutching tight at his hip, pulling their bodies together. Brendon’s hands came to a gentle rest on Ryan’s shoulders, fingers digging in as he pulled him close. Ryan was already rock hard inside his pants.

Brendon pulled back, a smile playing on his lips. “D’you miss me?” he asked.

“Fuck, yeah,” he nodded, “but you know that. That’s why you’re here.”

Ryan watched the blush rise on Brendon’s cheeks – his embarrassment was kind of endearing. He saw his dark eyes focus on the space between their bodies and felt him take a breath. “I tried to call you. When I got no answer, I figured you just moved on, that you rethought your decision to meet up with me when you got out. I almost gave up – until I read this morning that you were in Las Vegas. I took it as an invitation to seek you out,” he smiled, looking back up at him.

Ryan couldn’t stop the grin from forming on his face. “I’m glad of that, Brendon. I was worried I wouldn’t be able to get a hold of you. How did you manage to convince the guy at reception to call up here?”

Brendon laughed. Ryan could feel the man’s fingers carding gently through the back of his hair. “I paid him fifty bucks – he was brash enough to ask for a hundred. I had to throw my weight around a little, threaten him a bit.”

Ryan briefly pictured the scenario – Brendon Urie causing a scene down in the lobby - and he smiled. He raised one amused eyebrow. “You’d’ve gotten into a fight with him for me?”

The boy shook his head. “Nah, he was bigger than me. I think I’d only be able to beat someone up if they were already hurt or really weak – or really old and pathetic, y’know?”

The kid made him smile.

“I’m glad you’re here,” he said, pulling Brendon back against his chest. Ryan closed his eyes. “You look beautiful,” he murmured against the man’s lips. “Exactly how I remembered.” This kiss was slower, more controlled but Ryan could still feel the desperation behind Brendon’s movements – the
way he clutched at his neck and angled his hips against his, the force he was using to pull their bodies closer. After a moment, Brendon was the one to lead them back towards the couch. He pushed Ryan down into the soft cushions and stood in front of him, lips red and wet and parted, his cheeks and neck flushed from their make out.

“Ten grand, right?” the man asked quietly.

“Ten grand,” Ryan repeated with a nod.

Brendon didn’t pause before pulling his t-shirt up over his head and dropping it to the floor. Ryan had forgotten what a great body he had, all tight muscles under flawless skin. His pants hung low on his hips, revealing where his stomach tapered down into a V. Ryan swallowed, adjusting his pants around his boner as he watched the man slowly unbutton his belt and pull it from the loops of his pants. Brendon kicked off his boots and then slowly, slowly, slowly started to unbutton his jeans.

When he pulled them down, Ryan could see the outline of his semi-hard dick inside his underwear. He remembered Brendon’s similar striptease from the first time they met – he was going to turn around now and push his briefs down to reveal that ass; he could already sense the familiarity in Brendon’s movements. He undressed like someone who learned exactly how to make the most out of his body. The way he angled himself, the pace at which he stripped, the look on his face as he did it… He was like an actor, merely taking his mark for his next performance.

Sober, Ryan noticed the glazed look in Brendon’s eyes for the first time. He wanted all of that. Ryan wanted everything that Brendon stood for – all of the boy’s pain and humiliation, Ryan wanted to be consumed by it, to share it with him, to take on half of the burden.

Sure enough, Brendon turned around and playfully pulled his briefs down to reveal his ass. The desire to spread that boy’s cheeks and eat him out surprised Ryan – he never wanted to do that to anyone else before now.

“Come here,” he said, his voice rough as he swallowed the lump in his throat. Brendon stepped out of his underwear and sat down in Ryan’s lap naked. He could feel the warmth of the boy’s body against him and for the first time, he noticed all the freckles dotting Brendon’s chest and shoulders. He was beautiful.

He wrapped his arm around Brendon’s waist and pulled him into his chest. “I want to spend more than a weekend with you,” he said. He wasn’t going to suggest going up to Lake Tahoe just yet. He’d leave that until a little later in the evening.

Brendon’s eyes shifted across his face, down towards Ryan’s lips and then back up to look at him. “I have things I need to get in order before I do that. I have my own life, y’know, Ryan? There’s a lot of shit going on right now and I can’t just drop everything because you and your permanent boner decided to check out of rehab early,” he said with a coy smile, brushing his palm against Ryan’s cheek.

Ryan turned his head to kiss the man’s fingertips. “I know.” He should’ve guessed as much – Brendon was a man with a life beyond sucking dick and hustling his ass. He probably had a family and friends he needed to spin a story to. Maybe he had loose ends to tie up? He paused, thinking about how to phrase his next sentence – please don’t leave me to spend another night alone. Fall asleep next to me? Don’t let me down...

“Now you’re here though, I don’t think I want you to leave.”

“Well, I’m yours until tomorrow morning.”
That was all Ryan needed to hear right now – the fact that he’d be able to share that vast hotel bed with Brendon tonight made his heart thump somewhere between his chest and his belly.

“Let’s get you out of this suit though, huh?” Brendon made quick work of the buttons of his shirt, unfastening them with one hand as he rubbed his cock through his pants with the other. He kissed Ryan’s skin as it was revealed to him and Ryan let his head fall back against the couch cushion behind him, his mouth open as he closed his eyes and became lost in the sensation of Brendon’s mouth, hot on his chest, sucking around his nipples and down to his navel, stopping just shy of where his cock strained inside of his pants.

“You really are happy to see me, aren’t you?” Brendon grinned, popping the button on Ryan’s slacks and unzipping him. He pulled them off around his ankles and his underwear soon followed as Ryan hurried to rid himself of his jacket and shirt until they were both naked, Brendon between his legs on the floor, with his hand around his cock.

Brendon kept teasing him, pressing feather light kisses up the inside of his thighs but keeping his mouth away from his hard-on. Ryan was already wound up. He’d been fantasizing about this all morning and he knew he wasn’t going to last long as soon as Brendon’s lips were around his dick. Ryan bit the inside of his cheek; precome was already spilling over the head of his cock and Brendon Urie was so good at his job. Ryan felt like those six weeks in rehab had all been worth it, merely to experience this sober.

When the man’s tongue finally licked up the length of his dick, Ryan opened his eyes to watch. Brendon was looking up at him, his dark eyes sparkling. In all his life, Ryan couldn’t remember witnessing a more arousing sight. His hand came to a soft rest on the top of Brendon’s head, but he didn’t force him down – he simply held it there, his fingers pushing through the soft strands of Brendon’s hair. It seemed like that was all the encouragement the boy needed because shortly after, he shifted his mouth to suck at the head of Ryan’s cock, licking away the precome and slowly sliding his dick down his throat. Brendon took him straight to the hilt without even gagging.

Ryan had never been a religious man but this was surely as close to heaven as he was ever going to get.

Brendon sucked him for a few minutes, alternating between sucking gently on the swollen head of his cock and taking him all the way down the back of his throat. He was, by far, the best dick-sucker Ryan ever had the pleasure of knowing and as the boy brought him closer and closer to the edge, Ryan felt the waves of arousal creeping up his legs from the tips of his toes, his thighs shaking as he tried to delay his orgasm.

He uttered a breathless warning as he felt himself peak, but Brendon didn’t pull off. He kept his lips wrapped tight around Ryan’s cock, bobbing his head until Ryan’s entire body clenched with the effort not to come.

“Brendon, baby – I can’t hold out any longer…”

Brendon’s face was buried in his crotch, his nose pressing against Ryan’s pubic hair. The boy’s hands smoothed up Ryan’s stomach, up his chest as his fingers circled his nipples and then pinched. Ryan came, harder than he had in a long time, semen spilling out of his cock and over Brendon’s tongue – he couldn’t stop. It had been months since his last real sexual encounter and he watched, bug-eyed as Brendon stuck with it, swallowing around his shaft as his orgasm kept coming.

After a few moments, the strain of his climax gave way to pure and utter relaxation; his muscles melted into the couch and when Brendon pulled away, his dick was already turning soft. The boy sat
back on his heels and wiped his mouth after swallowing the last of his come. Ryan wondered if it would’ve been appropriate to ask for a kiss so that he could taste himself, because that had been one of the most epic blowjobs he’d ever received and it had been so hot to watch him swallow. Brendon hadn’t wasted a drop.

He offered his hand and pulled the man up next to him on the couch, winding his arm around the boy’s shoulder. Brendon’s dick was hard between his legs.

“You didn’t have to do that,” he whispered, turning his head to kiss Brendon’s temple – but he couldn’t battle the enthralled grin from his lips because what man didn’t enjoy watching their lover swallow their come?

Not lover, he reminded himself. Hooker. He’s a fucking hooker.

There was a silence that hung in the air between them. Brendon’s arm looped low across Ryan’s middle, their fingers joining on the other side. “I wanted to,” he sighed eventually.

“How did I taste?”

Brendon shrugged. “Good. Not bad.”

“Share it with me next time,” he smiled, hooking his finger under Brendon’s chin and pulling his face up to look into his eyes. He drank in the beauty of the man in front of him and reluctantly realized that one night was not nearly enough time to spend with this man. They kissed and as they did, Brendon pushed his erection purposefully into Ryan’s hip. When Ryan pulled back and looked down at it, the head was bright pink and leaking precome.

“I want to watch you jerk off.”

Brendon quickly complied, sitting himself back on the couch with his legs spread and his fist around his dick. Brendon moved quickly, moving his palm up and down his length until he bucked his orgasm over his fingers, his eyes closed, mouth open in a groan.

Without being told, Brendon raised his hand up to his mouth and Ryan watched with a knot in his stomach as he licked them clean, sucking each one into his mouth and hollowing his cheeks around his knuckles. It was a wonderfully sordid sight to witness.

“Want to taste how hot you make me?” Brendon asked, holding out his hand where one more pearly pool of come remained, decorating his thumb and wrist.

Ryan paused, his heart beating wildly inside his chest. He was just about ready for round two. Looping his fingers around Brendon’s wrist, Ryan slowly closed his lips around the boy’s thumb, cleaning it off with one long, gentle suck. He tasted salty, not bitter or unpleasant – just different.

“I didn’t think I’d be witness to that when I woke up this morning,” Brendon smiled when Ryan let go of his hand.

“Neither did I. I’m fucking glad you called, kid.”

Brendon squeezed his thigh. “Me too.”

They shifted around each other on the couch, both lying down facing each other with their bodies pressed tight. Brendon dropped his head against Ryan’s chest and sighed as Ryan’s arms wrapped tight around his shoulders, smoothing over his back, his fingers trailing gently through his hair. He
pressed a kiss against the top of Brendon’s head and felt himself relax for the first time in what felt like months. Years.

He’d been wrong back there. This was as close to heaven as he was going to get.
Early that evening, on the couch in the bedroom overlooking the glittering lights of the Las Vegas Strip, Brendon curled around Ryan and pressed his mouth against his ear.

“I want you to fuck me,” he whispered with a smile, pressing the palm of his hand against the already growing bulge inside Ryan’s pants and squeezing the shaft of his dick through the material of his slacks.

“Oh, really?” Ryan raised one eyebrow and tightened his grip around the boy’s shoulder. “What do you want me to do to you?”

“I want to feel your dick in my tight ass. I want to ride you nice and slow until you can’t hold out any longer and all you can see is me, even when you close your eyes – and then you can come on my face or in my mouth and I promise to swallow every drop.”

Ryan’s eyes closed, imagining the scene for a brief moment as he felt his cock twitch in Brendon’s hand. The dude sure knew how to stir Ryan’s arousal and he wasn’t shy when it came to dirty talk – Ryan liked that about him, it was one of his many turn-ons - but he couldn’t ignore that voice at the back of his mind constantly reminding him all Brendon’s hot promises were merely an act. *He’s only saying this because he’s being paid, because he’s a whore and it’s his job.* When that part of his conscience made itself heard, Ryan remembered all of the reasons he’d become so dependent on drugs – they shut that part of him up, locked it away behind chains and bolts, drowned at the bottom of a glass. Without drugs, his doubt and suspicion kept rearing their ugly heads at the most inopportune of times.

Outside of the window, the sun was setting, painting the sky a mess of pinks, purples and oranges. Along the Strip, the casinos were coming to life. The city that had once been his playground felt like nothing more than an over-hyped theme park when he had Brendon snuggled into his shoulder. He had Vegas’s real star-attraction nestled right here in his arms. He pulled his eyes away from the sunset and looked down at him. “How would you like us to start?” he asked.

Brendon was already naked and had been since he stripped himself of his clothes after he first arrived. Ryan hadn’t any intentions of telling the boy to get dressed again after the blowjob in the lounge and Brendon seemed happy enough to lounge around in the nude for the majority of the afternoon – he looked *great* without clothes and the dude had a confidence in his body that Ryan almost envied.

He always thought of himself as gangly – he didn’t have the muscle or the tone that Brendon had and even several weeks of working out at the gymnasium in rehab had done nothing to bulk him out. Ryan admired Brendon from afar that afternoon – he enjoyed watching the muscles in the boy’s stomach flex and tighten when he laughed. The sound reverberated around Ryan’s head like a pinball. He felt like he hit the jackpot when he was the cause of Brendon’s laughter.

There was a smile playing across the boy’s lips and Ryan couldn’t help but grin back at him in return. “I’d like to start by making you feel good. Let me suck your dick again and lick your asshole – if I remember correctly, you went crazy for that last time.”

In reply, Ryan kissed him. Brendon was a good kisser - exactly what Ryan always looked for in a partner - soft and compliant when it was called for, always ready to bend to Ryan’s will and desperate and rough when things got a little more heated. Brendon kissed like a slut – always confident and assertive. Ryan savored the taste of his tongue in his mouth as their lips moved against
That afternoon, Brendon asked Ryan about his stint in rehab and his plans to remain sober. Ryan attempted to be as honest as possible with him because he really did want to stay clean, but he was under no false pretenses. Like Dr. Stump constantly warned him; it would be no easy task – especially when he returned to Manhattan.

"My ex was a heroin addict for the longest time. He got clean and then dumped me after hooking up with another man in our bed," Brendon told him.

Ryan really didn’t care about Brendon’s smack-addicted ex-boyfriend but it seemed Brendon wanted to talk about him. It was all Jon-this and Jon-that for at least fifteen minutes, mostly complaining about his abysmal behavior, but Ryan knew that no one talked that much about someone they didn’t care about. After ten minutes, he reduced his commentary to a series of uninterested grunts until Brendon shut up about him.

"I personally think that this Jon guy is a fucking idiot for hooking up with someone else when he had you," Ryan told him. That made Brendon smile, at least and he quickly dropped the conversation.

Instead, Brendon teased him about his run-in with Keltie - which wasn’t much better than listening to the guy bleat on about his junkie ex, but he remembered something Patrick told him in rehab - it’s important to learn how to laugh at yourself. It makes life one hell of a lot easier if you don’t take yourself too seriously. Remembering his doctor’s wise words, Ryan rolled his eyes at himself and held up his hands in defeat.

That afternoon Brendon asked how Ryan ended up at a drug-dealer’s apartment in the projects. Ryan didn’t want to admit that the reason he got so fucked up that day was to teach Brendon a lesson for not agreeing to meet up with him. Ryan had been beside himself the day he ended up OD’ing in that dude Pete’s apartment. All he’d needed was for someone to take his mind off of Marc Willis and his bloody knuckles and sick smile.

“I don’t know,” he shrugged, at a loss for a legitimate reason why he, Ryan Ross, ended up slumped outside of a scummy apartment building that day. “I did a lot of fucked up stuff when I was high.”

“So… this guy who you’d been buying drugs from?” Brendon looked away and down at his hands. For the first time, Ryan noticed the tension in the boy’s shoulders, running up into his neck. “Was he surprised when you turned up at his door?” he asked eventually, looking back up at him with a smile.

“Yeah. He was kind of intense. I don’t remember much – he gave me a blowjob and smoked crack with me; the rest is kinda foggy until I woke up in hospital the next morning.”

Brendon looked taken aback by Ryan’s admission. He looked over at him with surprised eyes and stammered over his words. “You let him suck your dick? Was he better than me? Did you think he’s better looking than me? Did you find him attractive?"

“No,” Ryan laughed. Brendon’s underlying envy of the situation was actually kind of charming. He pulled the boy into his shoulder and kissed the top of his head. “I never met anyone who’s better at giving head than you, Brendon.”

“So, if you had to choose between me and him – I mean, hypothetically speaking – who would you choose?” Brendon looked up at him from the crook of his arm as Ryan knotted his brows at the peculiarity of the boy’s question. “Just hypothetically speaking, of course,” he’d repeated. Why was Brendon so worried about a blowjob that occurred months ago?
“The age-old romantic rivalry between the hustler and the drug dealer, huh?” he teased, successfully gaining a laugh and an embarrassed nudge in the ribs from Brendon. “You’re the one that’s here, aren’t you?”

Brendon dropped the subject after that and settled back down into Ryan’s embrace, relaxing against him. He guessed it was possible that Brendon may even be a little jealous of his endeavors with Pete whatever-the-fuck his name was – he certainly acted a little envious. It was cute.

In turn, Ryan asked what Brendon had been doing with himself during his time in Las Vegas. Brendon told him he left his mom and dad’s place because they were nothing more than self-righteous homophobes and that he was currently living in a cheap motel at the very top of South Las Vegas Boulevard. The ghetto, Brendon called it – full of tweakers, whores and gangbangers.

The other details of Brendon’s time in Vegas were a little blurry. He admitted to doing a lot of coke and drinking too much to not only get over the culmination of his relationship with his ex, but to block out the fact that his family wanted very little to do with him. At that information, Ryan couldn’t help from feeling sorry for the guy. He could feel himself warming to him and the disaster of a lifestyle he seemed to lead. Brendon’s life was a hot mess and he’d been beaten down again and again, but Ryan still saw this naïve hopefulness inside the man. He never felt protective over someone else before. He never felt the need to care for another person and be the one source of their happiness, but if Brendon hung around for long enough, he could see himself falling for him and he knew when that happened they were entering dangerous territory.

Ryan let his hand stroke down the man’s back and over the round globes of his ass to give it a squeeze. Brendon let out a quiet yelp and pulled back from the kiss. He bit his lip and flicked his eyes down to Ryan’s erection that had grown hard during the time they’d been kissing.

“I’ve been waiting for so long to fuck you again,” Ryan said, moving his lips to suck at Brendon’s neck. He wanted to mark this boy, to claim him as his own in a series of hickeys and bruises. When Brendon left tomorrow morning, everyone would be able to see that he was someone’s and they would look at Brendon and admire his beauty and think to themselves; whoever made that mark is one lucky son-of-a-bitch. He sucked the pale skin of Brendon’s neck until the man pulled away with a moan – Ryan was pleased to see that a reddish-purple bruise quickly formed just above the man’s collarbone.

Brendon shifted himself around on the couch, sitting forward on his knees to kiss down Ryan’s chest and bite gently at his nipple. He teased him with a string of wet kisses down his stomach and stopped just shy of where Ryan’s hard dick strained inside his slacks.

Brendon pulled back with a smile and pressed his lips deftly against Ryan’s once more. “I want to suck you off again so bad,” he grinned, moving back to repeat the process – his mouth once again, working a trail from Ryan’s neck to his collarbone, down his chest and towards his navel. This time he pulled Ryan’s cock from the confines of his pants and lapped the precome away from its swollen head. Brendon Urie had a mouth to die for.

He began to bob his head up and down in Ryan’s lap and hacked up saliva onto his dick like a true porn star. All niceties deserting him, Ryan placed his hand at the back of the boy’s head and pushed him forward. “Take it all the way down, baby,” he groaned as he felt the tip of his cock hit the back of Brendon’s throat and his nose nestle in his pubes.

Brendon stayed like that – mouth stretched around the base of his dick, looking up at him with wide searching eyes until he gagged and pulled away, a string of spit trailing from his tongue to the head of Ryan’s cock. He moved back to deep-throat him again and as Ryan watched his erection disappearing between the boy’s lips, he wished there was some way he could film this – or some
way he could float outside of his body to view this scene from a different angle.

If there was one thing that made itself clear since he left rehab, it was that sex with Brendon was infinitely better when he was sober.

“Do you want my dick in your ass?” he asked, pulling Brendon’s mouth up to meet his. The man straddled him on the couch, rolling his hips against Ryan’s as they made out. Ryan wanted nothing more than to just lube himself up, slip between the boy’s ass cheeks and watch him ride his dick.

“Yes,” Brendon hissed. “I want to feel you inside me right now.”

Brendon leaned in for another kiss but Ryan pushed him back. “Stand up,” he ordered. Brendon quickly conformed. “Lie on the bed, raise your legs and finger yourself. I want to watch you.”

Abiding Ryan’s wishes, Brendon walked backwards towards the unmade bed and lay down on top of the mattress. He spread his legs wide and slowly took his middle finger into his mouth, sucking around it as Ryan tried to drink in the sight. Some people pay money for this, he thought to himself, before remembering that’s exactly what he was doing, because he was a dirty pervert who got off to the idea of paying a prostitute obscene amounts of money to spend time with him. The only reason you’re getting such a show is because you’re paying a whore ten grand to spend the weekend with you – the details of which are still cloudy. He made a quick mental note to go through the terms and conditions of their agreement before Brendon left tomorrow. He still wanted to take the boy up to Lake Tahoe…

Drawing the finger from his mouth and pressing it against his puckered pink asshole, Brendon smiled. “I can usually fit one or two, but I’m going to need a little help if you want to see me take any more than that,” he said as he pushed his digit easily inside him. Ryan watched in awe, his cock throbbing at the sight in front of him. “In the front pocket of my pants in the lounge, there’s condoms and a couple little packets of lube. Maybe you can be a star and go grab them for me?”

Ryan nodded in a daze. He would love to go bareback with Brendon Urie – he wanted to come inside the boy’s tight ass and then watch it dribble out of him, but the boy needed lube if they were going to fuck. He kicked his pants off from around his ankles and stepped out of them, his eyes not leaving the scene between Brendon’s legs for a second.

Despite his desperation to fuck the man, Ryan left him in the middle of the mattress and walked calmly towards the bedroom door. As soon as he was out of sight, he rushed down the hallway and towards the lounge, with his erection bobbing between his legs.

Brendon’s clothes were still in a pile in the middle of the floor and Ryan quickly searched through them, picking up his pants and pushing his hand into the pocket. His fingers initially closed around Brendon’s cellphone and he let go but a second later he felt it vibrate – a message tone sounding once, muffled by the pocket of Brendon’s jeans.

He felt his hand slip back inside the fold and pull it out. Brendon’s phone was old; some archaic Nokia brand cellphone that was probably only capable of making phone calls and sending texts. Ryan had forgotten that phones like this even existed anymore. He quickly unlocked it and looked at the screen – three missed calls and two messages, all of them from someone called Dallon.

Ryan looked back over his shoulder at the bedroom and he knew he shouldn’t snoop into the boy’s personal affairs – he was a hooker and he was doing a really good job so far, but he couldn’t help himself. He opened the messages and let his eyes scan over the text.

*Where are you? I came by the motel but you weren’t there. Call me ASAP. It’s important,* said the
first message.

Ryan felt his lips twitch. Perhaps this Dallon character was another trick, just desperate enough to want to spend a long day in bed with Brendon that he’d send him needy texts when he didn’t answer his phone? Maybe he was a fellow hooker, simply looking out for him or maybe a drug-dealer, looking for payment? Brendon had said he’d been doing a lot of coke. Either way, Ryan didn’t much like the sound of competition. With another glance over his shoulder, he clicked to the next message.

*Lydia knows, it said. I’m freaking out, please answer your phone.*

Again, Ryan’s eyebrows knotted together. Who the hell was Lydia? And who the fuck was Dallon and why was he so desperate to contact Brendon? His heart contracted inside of his chest and his erection quickly depleted between his legs.

Ryan accepted the jealousy that settled in his chest with surprising clarity. He simply didn’t want Brendon to leave – that was his main concern. If Brendon left then he would be alone and the longer he spent alone, the more likely he was to turn back to drugs to fill his empty evening.

“Ryan, come on, I’m waiting! What the hell are you doing back there?” Brendon called from the bedroom. The sudden interruption made him jump, his heart rate picked up – he should in no way delete the text messages, he should in no way delete the text messages, he repeated to himself. He could go back there and pass Brendon his phone and if Brendon left, then at least Ryan would know he’d done the right thing. After all, he was trying to be a better man.

Instead, in the heat of the moment, Ryan made a rash decision. He fumbled with the old cellphone and deleted both the messages, cleared the call log and turned the phone off before slipping it back into the pocket of Brendon’s pants. That should give them some time without being disturbed by the tinny sound of Brendon's message tone.

“I’m coming,” he called, quickly pulling the foil string of condoms and lube from the other pocket and turning back towards the hallway. When he re-entered the bedroom, Brendon had slipped two fingers into his ass and was slowly fucking himself with them. He already felt guilty about erasing those texts from Brendon’s cellphone – that was the work of some jealous sociopath; Patrick Stump would be truly ashamed that he purposefully interfered with Brendon’s private life to advance his own. He was meant to stop being so selfish and put other people first.

“I thought you got lost on the way back here,” Brendon smiled from the bed. “I was about to send out a search party.” He rubbed at the mattress beside him and Ryan sat down.

For a short second, Ryan debated asking Brendon who Dallon and Lydia were, but that meant he had to admit to not only snooping through Brendon’s cellphone, but deleting what sounded like important text messages too. If he mentioned it, there was a high possibility that Brendon would leave in a hurry and never return and if left to his own devices, Ryan couldn’t be held responsible for his actions – he’d leave the hotel room and trawl the sleazy Vegas streets for a hit and come tomorrow morning, everyone would know that he already fucked up his month and a half of sobriety.

Perhaps Dallon was a love rival, he thought. Maybe he was Brendon’s new boyfriend since he arrived in Las Vegas? The thought that Brendon would choose to lie down next to someone without accepting payment made his heart sink. Perhaps Dallon made him come and then got to spend the night curled up next to him? In that moment, Ryan realized he was falling hard and fast for the man. It was already more than just sex; it was the desperate need not to feel so alone - and that could almost be considered *love*, the preference of spending time with someone over being alone.
Whoever this Dallon guy was, Ryan wanted to make sure Brendon forgot about him. He leaned forward on the mattress and joined their lips. “Later this evening we have to discuss how this is going to work out between us, okay?” He tried to keep his words as casual as possible, but his heart was beating hard inside his chest.

“Okay,” Brendon nodded, eyes serious and fixed on Ryan’s. “We can talk about that after you fuck me.” His eyes darted down to where his fingers were still playing with his ass and he looked back up at Ryan with a smile. “D’you feel like giving me a hand here?”

Ryan rubbed his palm low across Brendon’s stomach and wrapped his hand around his semi-hard dick. He pulled it a few times and leaned in to kiss his chest. Maybe this Dallon guy sucked Brendon’s dick, maybe he ate his ass and then fucked him slowly? The thought drove Ryan absolutely insane with envy – he wanted to match this fucker. He wanted to fuck Brendon until the only name on the boy’s lips was his, over and over and over again. Ryan, Ryan, Ryan. Ryan.

He pulled Brendon around to face him on the mattress and opened his legs. He suddenly had a purpose - to fuck the man until every last one of his previous partners paled in comparison – and then he would clean Brendon up so he could go off and fuck someone else, knowing full well that no one could ever come close to making him feel as good as Ryan had.

He pulled gently at Brendon’s wrist, watching as his empty asshole contracted around thin air – he couldn’t wait to get his dick inside there…Pushing Brendon’s legs further apart, Ryan lowered his face between them. “Pull yourself open for me,” he mumbled, swallowing his nerves as Brendon’s hands pulled his cheeks apart. With his eyes closed, Ryan pushed forward with his tongue, licking the puckered pink hole all the way up to his balls.

Brendon’s dick immediately sprung to life and the moan that left his mouth was sinful. Ryan let the sound spur him on and for five full minutes, he rimmed him – soon, the only thing he could taste under his tongue was clean skin and during the process, he managed to lube up three fingers and was currently fucking Brendon with them slowly, his tongue and his lips pressing against the gaping hole whenever he pulled them away.

“It’s been a long time since anyone treated me this good,” Brendon sighed. His hand was in the back of Ryan’s hair and his eyes were closed. When Ryan pulled his fingers away, Brendon was sufficiently stretched, his tight asshole open and wet.

“Jesus fucking Christ, you look so hot like this,” Ryan mumbled, sitting up between the boy’s legs. “How long’s it been since you last got fucked, huh?”

He asked more as a test than for any other reason, because he couldn’t care less if this Dallon dude was another trick – Ryan had experienced the disdain with which Brendon treated his clients first hand - but it made him uncomfortable to think that the boy had some secret lover he wasn’t telling him about. That hadn’t been part of their deal, he asked Brendon to remain loyal. The thought was enough to drive Ryan to distraction.

“It’s been a little while. I really liked it when you licked my ass – that’s a big turn-on for me. Let me ride your dick, Ryan. I want you to fuck me like a whore – make me feel filthy.”

Ryan felt the words right in the center of his chest. Brendon was irresistible – everything about that boy did was shrouded in sin and desire. He was all of Ryan’s deepest, darkest sexual fantasies rolled into one, so he tried to push those consuming thoughts to the back of his mind – at least while he had a handsome rent boy in bed next to him, begging to be fucked.

Ryan lay back on the mattress and Brendon straddled him, tearing open a condom, rolling it down
his dick and lubing him up all in a few quick movements. He pulled his ass cheeks apart and then sat slowly down on Ryan’s cock. Ryan’s eyes slipped closed in ecstasy.

Brendon Urie was definitely his new drug of choice.

With Brendon, he forgot about the fact that he wasn’t high. He forgot about the fact that he couldn’t drink – Brendon took his mind off that nagging feeling of sobriety and for that, Ryan had to forgive the man any previous indiscretions. The guy was a hooker and he owed Ryan nothing – he tried to remind himself of that as he felt the tight heat of the boy’s ass and the pressure around the base of his dick as Brendon took him in to the hilt.

So what if Brendon had some guy who sent him frantic text messages and dropped by his motel room? Brendon had been the one to seek him out when he learned of his arrival in Las Vegas and Ryan was going to take that as evidence that there might just be something more than a hooker/client relationship between the two of them. He told himself he wouldn’t stress over it again and opened his eyes to gaze at the man above him.

_I could get used to this_, he thought as he lay back on the mattress and watched Brendon riding his dick, rolling his hips as if he was born to fuck. The muscles in Brendon’s stomach flexed and tightened as he moved and Ryan couldn’t tear his eyes away from him. Brendon’s eyes were closed; his mouth open and his head tipped back as he fucked himself on top of him. Brendon looked completely blissed out. _I could definitely get used to this._

Ryan bit his lip and held back a moan as Brendon moved – the boy was so tight and so hot that he had to concentrate on something outside of the feelings coursing through his body to stop himself from coming right there and then.

“You look good like this,” he smiled, gazing up at the man above him. “It suits you.”

Brendon laughed, leaning forward to catch Ryan’s lips – the sudden change in angle made him groan into Brendon’s mouth and arch off the bed. The pressure made his toes curl into the sheets. “It’s all I’m good for, huh?” he mumbled against the kiss.

“You’re good for a lot more than just awesome sex, I’m sure of it.” Ryan could feel himself peaking and he didn’t want to shoot too soon – he pushed Brendon off him and climbed to his knees. Brendon compliantly shifted himself into position, on all fours with his face buried in the pillow, his ass sticking up in the air.

When he reached around to pull his cheeks apart, Brendon’s asshole was wet and open as it gripped around thin air. If Ryan were ever going to leak a sex tape, he’d want it to be with Brendon Urie – the boy was nothing short of the hottest man he ever laid.

Ryan slid his cock between the boy’s ass cheeks and reveled in the groan that escaped his lips. After a few moments, he pushed his dick slowly back in - Brendon’s tight asshole gave way to him once again and Ryan gripped his hips and fucked him from behind. For a few moments, Ryan was the one putting all the work in. All Brendon could manage were desperate moans and quiet encouragement and prayers to a god Ryan knew he didn’t believe in – _oh my god, that’s it, harder, faster, oh god, don’t stop, Ryan, oh fuck…_

After a minute, Ryan felt him begin to push back into his thrusts, meeting him halfway. The boy’s groans filled the room, the sound of skin slapping against skin as they fucked rang loud in Ryan’s ears and eventually, Ryan stilled his movements completely, watching through hooded eyes as Brendon fucked himself. He let his hand snake between Brendon’s legs and grazed his fingers along his dick – the man was rock hard and there was already a wet patch on the mattress where the head
of his cock leaked so much precome.

Each time Ryan felt himself get too close to the edge, he stilled Brendon’s hips, attempting to ride the wave of his arousal for as long as possible. Brendon was the first one to pull away – he turned over onto his back and raised his legs into his chest. Ryan resumed his actions; slipping back in and holding Brendon’s thighs apart as he fucked slowly back into him.

“I could do this all fucking night. You feel so good,” Ryan sighed, pushing his hair back from his sweaty brow. He hooked Brendon’s legs over his shoulders and drank in the sight of the boy in the throes of orgasm – sex-flushed chest and barely open eyes, his full lips red and parted as his jaw quivered. Brendon was jerking his dick, twisting his palm around the shaft on each upstroke.

Ryan was close – he leaned in for another kiss but was greeted by Brendon’s cheek. He gripped the boy’s chin in his hand and turned his face towards him. Ryan pressed their lips together, his tongue running across Brendon’s until his mouth opened in acceptance. Ryan could tell that he was close to coming – his thighs were shaking, his stomach muscles were tightening and his groans were becoming more desperate.

“I want to watch you come,” he whispered, the words flowing straight into Brendon’s ear. As if on cue, Brendon’s back arched up off the mattress and he came with a cry, his asshole tightening impossibly hard around the base of Ryan’s dick.

Ryan rode him through it, encouraging the boy as his come decorated his stomach and chest. As soon as he jerked the last of his orgasm out of him, Ryan pulled out quickly and ripped the condom off his dick – the sight had been enough to tip him over the edge. He clambered forward, his knees on either side of Brendon’s head and jerked himself off over the man’s face.

His second climax of the day hit him just as hard as his first. His stomach muscles clenched up in effort as Brendon moaned beneath him. The first pump of come overshot its mark, hitting Brendon’s forehead and hairline, the second caught him just underneath his eye, streaking over his cheek and the rest Ryan managed to aim right across his lips and chin. Brendon licked over them and sucked gently on the head of Ryan’s swollen dick to take the last few drops into his mouth. When Ryan’s climax shuddered to a stop, the man looked like a beautiful mess; cheeks flushed red, hair wet with sweat and a face streaked with come.

“I want to take a photo of you looking like that,” he sighed, collapsing down onto the mattress next to him. “For my personal use, when you’re not around.”

Another testing remark – he wanted Brendon to agree to stay with him indefinitely, tucked away in the master suite of his father’s hotel, overlooking the glittering Las Vegas Strip together.

Brendon laughed and curled up beside him – he was sticky with sweat and come, his skin hot against Ryan’s. Ryan embraced him, unable to pull himself away from the man. “You’re more than welcome to take that photo,” he said, draping his arm over Ryan’s chest. “Just be quick; this stuff sucks to wash off after it dries.”

Ryan turned to kiss him, tasting himself clearly on Brendon’s lips as they shared his come. The rest of the mess, Ryan rubbed away with the corner of the bed sheet and when he was clean, Brendon settled down into the crook of his arm, yawned and stretched.

“What time do you need to leave tomorrow?” Ryan asked after a moment.

“Early – before nine. There’s a few things I need to sort out – a couple of people I need to talk to, but I’ll come back, I promise - then we can strike a deal. I enjoy spending time with you, Ryan – you
make me feel really good about myself and trust me, that’s been a difficult task for anyone these past few months. It’s been a real shitty time, Ryan – I’m not too sure how I made it this far.”

Ryan felt a surge of sorrow for the boy – not only that, but he had the sudden desire to wrap him up in his arms and protect him from all of the things that were causing him pain. Ryan never felt the need to defend someone from their own demons before – but he felt it with Brendon. They were both two lost souls who time and time again found each other in the dark.

“You’re not like all my other tricks – I feel drawn to you somehow and I don’t know why. I wish I could explain it, but being with you feels kind of natural,” Brendon told him. “And then sometimes I have these weird moments of clarity where I think to myself, you’re in bed with goddamn Ryan Ross, dude! You’re one lucky son of a bitch.”

Ryan felt a pleased smile pull at his lips. “I have the same moments of clarity about you,” he admitted. “The thought of meeting you again was what got me through rehab.”

Brendon hummed quietly and curled into Ryan’s side. “I’ve been keeping so many secrets from so many different people for so long now – it feels nice to find someone I can finally be honest with, y’know?”

Well, if Ryan wanted to ask Brendon who the hell Dallon was, then this was his chance. He may have a perfectly reasonable explanation that could put Ryan’s mind at ease – but Brendon was currently wound around him, his body warm, his breathing shallow. Ryan didn’t want to ruin the moment asking for truths he may not be able to handle.

Soon, he felt the man fall asleep in his arms and Ryan, despite the uneasy feeling that settled in his stomach, mirrored Brendon’s slow breaths. Within five minutes, he could feel himself drifting off, the memory of those two deleted texts as bright and unavoidable as the Vegas lights outside of his window.
Chapter 39

When Brendon awoke the next morning, the bed was empty beside him. It was still early – they hadn’t drawn the curtains before they’d fallen asleep last night and dawn was just breaking over the Strip. The light splintering in through the window was what woke Brendon up.

He stretched his tired body and twisted on the mattress with a yawn. He was sore all over and his muscles gave a sharp spasm of protest as he did. Brendon was aching in places he didn’t even know existed, but he felt satisfied and sated after being fucked so good the previous evening.

It was a strange feeling for Brendon to comprehend. To all intents and purposes, Ryan was still a trick and he wasn’t meant to enjoy sex with his tricks. He always despised the way rich men felt so entitled to his body and the way poor men were sad and desperate enough to seek out his company. He didn’t know why it felt so different with Ryan, just because he was good-looking and, Brendon had to admit, reasonably charming since he quit getting high.

He could hear Ryan showering in the en-suite and felt himself smile at the idea of joining him – Ryan would be wet and clean and smelling good and perhaps they could fuck once more before he had to leave and meet Dallon for his usual Sunday morning visit.

Brendon was dreading facing Dallon after last night. Ryan treated him so well – he’d been an attentive lover, remained sober and had even eaten Brendon’s ass! Brendon couldn’t have asked for a more considerate client. It had been difficult not to get swept away with all of Ryan’s moans and sighs – he kept having to remind himself that Ryan Ross was nothing more than a trick who was paying for his company, because when they fucked it certainly didn’t feel that way.

It felt natural. It felt easy. It all felt a little too comfortable. Waking up to dawn breaking across the Strip and watching the sunrise from the master bedroom of the Grande Presidential Suite of one of the most exclusive hotels in Las Vegas sure beat being jolted awake by the sound of nineties rap blaring out from the stereo of a car parked outside his motel room at the Whole Year Inn. Brendon felt like he was floating through an alternate reality; that everything that happened to him since he’d woken up yesterday morning was merely some cruel dream, because stuff like this didn’t happen to boys like him.

Tucked up between the covers of Ryan’s vast bed, he could pretend that there wasn’t a shitty life waiting for him when he left the hotel - that Dallon didn’t matter and his parents weren’t important and that at the end of everything, no matter how much he or Ryan wanted to dress it up, he was still a hooker sleeping with a pervert for ten thousand dollars.

Tucked up between the covers of Ryan’s vast bed he could allow himself the fantasy – he could get used to the luxurious hotel suites and the incredible view of the city that caused him so much pain since he’d been back in Nevada, he could even get used to waking up to the sound of Ryan rinsing the sins of the night away in the shower, because it all felt oddly familiar and strangely soothing.

Dallon had a lot of baggage and he knew that his relationship with the man was already too far-gone to be rectified. He knew that after eight years apart, they were never meant to be together. The guy was married to his sister, for god’s sake! Even if Dallon did get himself together enough that he left Lydia and filed for divorce, where the hell did that leave them? Were they meant to run away together and never turn back? Brendon, an ex-hooker and Dallon, a Mormon boy who’d chosen to suffer through eight years of marriage rather than admit to himself that he’s gay – it would never work.
Brendon was under no false pretenses regarding his future with Dallon. He already felt guilty about going behind the man’s back so deliberately to meet up with Ryan Ross and the thought of having to sit down with him and make up an excuse that would allow him to spend time away from him was driving Brendon to distraction.

Dallon had fallen so hard and fast for him because he didn’t have anyone else to take his mind off of his sham of a marriage. Dallon was in love with Brendon because he thought that he was the only man who understood him, the only man who could make him happy. Dallon hadn’t lived; he moved from Utah to Nevada, settled down and got married and there he stayed – Brendon had shaken up his life for the first time in eight years and Dallon didn’t know how to react to it. Maybe what they both needed was some time away from each other to figure out what they both wanted?

He sat up in bed and rubbed the sleep from his eyes. He tried to push all thoughts of Dallon to the back of his mind – he would cross that bridge when he came to it. Dallon was naïve and gullible enough that he’d probably believe any story that Brendon spun him. From the bathroom, the sound of running water disappeared and a few minutes later, Ryan appeared at the side of the bed, his chest covered in water droplets as he towel dried his hair.

“Good morning,” he nodded, when he caught Brendon watching him. “Did you sleep well?”

Brendon stretched again with a smile, purposefully pushing his hips up off the mattress to catch Ryan’s eye. The sheets slipped away from him and Brendon lounged naked on the bed. “I slept great – you wore me out. That was some phenomenal sex we had last night.”

Brendon wasn’t lying. He slept better next to Ryan than he had during all the time he spent back in Vegas. Last night, they stayed up together for hours. Ryan fucked him until they were both spent, until the muscles in Brendon’s arms couldn’t hold his weight anymore and his exhausted body collapsed down onto the mattress. They’d eventually fallen asleep together and Brendon had woken up a few hours later to find Ryan spooned up behind him, breathing softly and fast asleep.

Ryan dipped his head forward to hide his grin and rubbed at the back of his wet hair with the towel. “Well, I do try,” he said.

Brendon could smell the body wash fresh on Ryan’s skin. He turned over onto his side and coaxed Ryan to join him on the mattress. Life seemed infinitely easier wrapped up in bed with Ryan Ross – somewhere no one could disturb them, somewhere Brendon didn’t have to think about his lost brother-in-law and his judgmental family. With Ryan, he felt like all of that just filtered away – like background noise, still there, but barely noticeable.

When Ryan spoke up again, his voice was quiet and his eyes downcast. He rubbed the pad of his thumb over Brendon’s nipple and bit at his lip. “When do you have to leave?” he asked.

“Soon,” Brendon replied.

“Are you going to come back? If you’re not, I’d prefer you just tell me straight-up that we shouldn’t see each other again.”

Brendon watched Ryan’s face, the slope of his nose and his tight jaw, those whiskey brown eyes refusing to look up at him. Brendon didn’t know what it was about the man that attracted him so much. He hooked his finger underneath Ryan’s chin and pulled him up to look at him.

“I’ll come back,” he said slowly as he looked into Ryan’s eyes. “There are just a few loose ends I need to tie up. I need to make sure no one gets worried about me if I disappear for a few days and calls the cops, but I’ll come back. You have my word.”
Ryan managed a brief smile. “I can pay you for last night if you want. I don’t know how you’re doing for money, but I’ll pay you – you were great last night, you made me forget who I am.”

“You should count last night as a freebie,” Brendon laughed, unwilling to be dragged down by heavy conversation. “You should count yourself lucky; I’m not usually this accommodating towards my clients – only the cute ones,” he grinned, poking Ryan’s ribs.

Ryan blinked up at the ceiling for a few seconds without cracking a smile. “I want to ask you something,” he sighed eventually, turning his head to look at Brendon. Brendon nodded for him to continue. “My parents own a house up on Lake Tahoe – they hardly ever use it and it goes mainly unoccupied. When I was in rehab, I debated the idea of going up there when I got out - you know, stay out of the city for a couple weeks, relax and recover in peace.”

Brendon knew what was coming, but he played dumb. “That sounds nice.” He dug his fingers into Ryan’s ribs once more and bit gently at his shoulder. “I hope you send me a postcard.”

It obviously wasn’t the reaction Ryan had been hoping for. He pulled away and huffed. “I want you to come up there with me. I’ll pay you accordingly and you can leave whenever you want but I want to disappear for a while and I’d like you to do that with me.”

Brendon paused, immediately worrying about Dallon. Now it was his turn to avoid Ryan’s eyes, the excitement at the thought of spending time with Ryan in Tahoe battled with his need to keep things ticking smoothly with Dallon. He couldn’t do both.

“I don’t know. I don’t want either of us to forget why we’re both here. I’m an escort, Ryan, we both know this - and if this gets out, I’m screwed.”

Ryan forced a laugh. “It was just a suggestion. I get it; you still think I’m an asshole after how I treated you before. I don’t blame you for not wanting to come up to my parents’ cabin with me to escape Las Vegas for a week or so. I get it,” he nodded, sitting up on the mattress and swinging his legs from the bed. He grabbed at his towel again and continued to rub at his damp hair. “Two days, starting from your return. I’ll pay you five grand on your arrival and the other five when you leave. Deal?”

“Okay,” Brendon nodded from the bed. “Deal.”

Ryan turned to him. “You’re more than welcome to use the shower. I’ll order room service – is there anything you don’t eat?” He stood and looked down expectantly at him. Brendon reached for his hand and when their fingers linked, he pulled Ryan back down onto the bed next to him.

“Why don’t we skip breakfast and squeeze in another fuck before I leave?” he said, his hands slipping down to run over Ryan’s ass cheeks.

Ryan quirked an eyebrow and smirked, his hips nestled between Brendon’s bare legs. “On the house?” he asked with a smile.

Brendon laughed and he felt genuine happiness swell inside his heart. “You bet. You make me come, Ryan - not many men have been able to do that. Men who pay for sex aren’t usually the most conscientious of lovers, but they broke the mold when they made you, huh?”

Brendon felt the soft press of Ryan’s knuckles down his cheek and he leaned up to kiss him. The kiss was soft and gentle and cautious – almost like two teenagers making-out for the first time. Brendon could tell Ryan was holding back and he urged him on by rolling his hips up and thrusting against him.
“I’m not going to break,” Brendon whispered into Ryan’s ear as they pulled breathlessly back from the kiss. Ryan’s lips travelled down over his jaw, to the junction of his collarbone and he bared his teeth to the skin, biting and then sucking, his tongue wet against Brendon’s neck.

Ryan pulled away when Brendon moaned and he repeated the action the other side, just below Brendon’s ear. “I feel like I’m high when I’m with you,” he said.

Brendon smiled and pulled Ryan closer towards him. He closed his eyes and inhaled the fruity scent of shampoo on Ryan’s hair. “Keep talking,” he grinned, “some nice words come out of your mouth when you’re sober.”

“That’s not all my mouth is good for,” Ryan said, shifting down under the covers and between Brendon’s legs.

Brendon blinked up at the ceiling. His eyes fluttered shut when he felt Ryan’s tongue between his ass cheeks again. He held back a groan and let his hand push under the sheet and trail gently through Ryan’s damp hair.

Brendon didn’t feel high when he was with Ryan but he felt a little less low – and after months of nothing but pain and torment and unsolvable problems since he arrived in Las Vegas, he felt he deserved these few moments of happiness, despite how fleeting they may be.

Later that morning, when Brendon left the hotel, it felt awkward saying goodbye to Ryan. Inside of his clothes and stood in the lounge of Ryan’s hotel suite, Brendon couldn’t help but feel slightly uncomfortable with the situation. They said goodbye like two businessmen rather than two people who’d just given each other incredible orgasms – which Brendon begrudgingly accepted wasn’t too far from the truth; his relationship with Ryan was nothing more than a contract after all.

They shook hands and when Brendon turned to leave, Ryan shuffled back down the hallway and towards the bedroom without another word. Brendon was out of the room and halfway down the mirrored corridor before he laughed to himself about the peculiarity of the situation; he felt captivated by the man – star-stuck even and he felt a thrill roll up in his belly.

His neck was bruised with two obvious hickeys – marks made by Ryan: ownership – Dallon would be all over him about them. Brendon touched the tip of his finger against the tender skin, but he didn’t feel regret or shame; he felt exhilarated.

In the elevator, on the way down to the lobby, Brendon thought about Dallon. For a short moment, he considered calling him, faking illness down the phone and claiming he needed a few days to recover but he knew it wouldn’t work. Dallon was ultimately a good-natured and affectionate person; it would take him no time at all to drive to the motel and offer to play doctor.

He pulled his cellphone from the pocket of his pants to check his messages for the first time since he arrived at the hotel the morning prior, but the screen was black. He figured his battery must’ve died sometime during the night – another thing Dallon would probably bitch at him for if he’d been trying to contact him. He pushed his phone back into his pocket and felt his stomach drop as the elevator descended.

He walked for half an hour to get back to his motel and as he left the glittering Strip and its five-star hotels behind and approached the sad, desolate little motels of South Las Vegas Boulevard, Brendon’s heart grew heavy. He suddenly remembered that this was a reality for him – the crime-ridden streets and the seedy strip clubs. This was where he belonged, not locked away in the Grande
Sex with Ryan last night had been incredible. Brendon’s dick twitched every time he reflected on it – Ryan made him feel desirable and not just in the way most of his previous tricks had. He knew he was dispensable to them all. He was a whore and his function was to satisfy – all of his own needs and desires had gone largely ignored over the years, but now it seemed like his libido had suddenly been awoke. After years of feeling dead inside, after years of only desiring a man who couldn’t stand to be touched, he was craving sex. He and Ryan just seemed to gel together – it was a mutual attraction, it was carnal and it was exciting; the exact kind of relationship he always wanted with Jon.

Ryan made him feel needed, like he was the only one who could satisfy him. No one made him feel that way in years – not even Dallon. Dallon had Lydia and as much as he claimed that Brendon was his one and only, he still hadn’t given him any inclination that he was prepared to leave his sister for him.

Brendon didn’t know if he wanted that anyway. He and Dallon were both very different people now and he knew deep down, their relationship would never amount to anything more than reasonably enjoyable sex and company on long and lonely weekdays.

As he walked, Brendon couldn’t stop thinking about Ryan. Ryan enticed him. He was attracted by the man’s magnetism and he felt confused by his feelings. To all intents and purposes, Brendon should hate Ryan Ross. He was still just a trick, no better than any of his previous clients. He was spoiled and disgustingly wealthy and he had everything in life handed to him without ever doing a moment’s work. Brendon should’ve despised Ryan and his glamorous addictions, but he couldn’t.

Brendon felt flattered that someone so famous, someone so desirable found him attractive enough to pay for his company. He was entranced by the way Ryan talked to him sober and the way he looked at 4AM or coming out of the shower – softer, looser, human.

Every time he thought about the man, he felt a wave of arousal rising up through his belly from his dick. Ryan rimmed him – twice! - and he brought Brendon to a remarkably confident orgasm not more than an hour prior. He felt loose and satisfied, as if his bones were all floating an inch apart from each other. He guessed he’d been stuck in a rut back in Manhattan – men didn’t pay to please him, they paid simply to get their kicks with a whore with no repercussions. Ryan Ross seemed to have turned that on its head.

It was a quarter to nine when he arrived at the Whole Year Inn. It was a Sunday and Dallon always turned up at 9AM, on the dot. He had just enough time to change his clothes, brush his teeth and attempt to hide the hickeys on his neck.

Breakfast on the Strip with his brother-in-law was the furthest thing from his mind right now. He was in no real hurry to rush back to Ryan but he really didn’t want to deal with Dallon and his baggage this morning. It wasn’t like he didn’t care about Dallon because he did – but on his walk back to his motel, he decided that perhaps they needed some time away from each other. Maybe after a few days alone to reflect on their affair, Dallon would finally decide what he wanted.

When he turned into the motel parking lot, Brendon’s eyes fell on Dallon’s Honda parked up outside his room. Shit – he was early...

He paused for a second, wondering how long Dallon had been there waiting for him and immediately regretted engaging Ryan in that final fuck. If he left when he’d first woke up, he would’ve had enough time to pretend like he’d been in his room all night. Now, he had to stand in front of his brother-in-law like the dirty stop-out he was and lie on his feet.
When he approached the vehicle, he found it empty. Brendon furrowed his brows, pulled his key from the back pocket of his pants and pushed it into the lock. When he stepped into the room, Dallon was sat on the edge of the bed, looking up at him with red-rimmed eyes and a blank expression.

Brendon jumped and then cussed. “What the hell are you doing in here?” he gaped, his heart rate spiking immediately as his eyes settled on his brother-in-law. In a word, Dallon looked terrible – underslept and overwrought. He looked like he’d been crying. “How did you get in?”

“I told the little Filipino lady at the front desk, I lost my key and paid fifty bucks for a new one,” Dallon replied, his voice flat, his blue eyes dark in the shadows of the motel room. “Where have you been?”

“Just out.” Brendon swallowed and closed the door behind him, pulling the collar of his jacket up to hide the purple bruises on his neck. Their exchange seemed all too familiar. A few months prior, he’d been having exactly the same conversation with Jon – and their arguments all stemmed from Brendon sneaking off to meet Ryan Ross too. Dallon stared at him blankly. “How long have you been waiting here?” he asked with a quirked brow.

Dallon blew out a breath that ruffled his hair. “Since about midday yesterday. Didn’t you get my messages? I lost count of the number of times I tried calling you. Your phone’s been off.”

“The battery died,” Brendon shrugged, moving towards the bathroom to brush his teeth – he could still taste Ryan’s come in his mouth. “What are you even doing here?” he snapped. “Don’t you have your own home to go to?”

As soon as he said it, Brendon knew why Dallon was waiting in his motel room for him. He knew. Lydia must’ve found out. Brendon stared at his reflection, toothbrush poised inside his cheek as he heard Dallon’s reply.

“Lydia knows.”

Brendon’s eyes closed and he felt the bile rise up his throat. He spat into the sink and stepped into the threshold of the bathroom door. “She knows?”

Dallon nodded his head once. His mouth pulled into a tight line. “She knows about us.”

Brendon’s knees almost gave way beneath him. He doubled over and felt the shock escape from his mouth in a series of undignified swear words. “Jesus motherfucking Christ… fuck me. You’ve got to be fucking kidding me?” He repeated Dallon’s words. They came out of him slow, sticking to his tongue like tar. “Lydia knows about us?”

His brother-in-law nodded his head again - just the once. His eyes were glassy; his shoulders were hunched as he sat on the edge of the bed. Brendon watched him swallow. “I tried calling you, Brendon but your phone stopped ringing. I came by here and you weren’t in. I’ve been going absolutely out of my mind – I had no other way of contacting you and I knew that even if you were ignoring me you’d come back here eventually. I thought you had an accident. I spent all last night calling the hospitals and the police stations – the flipping morgue, Brendon!” he whispered, eyes wide. “Where were you?”

Brendon ignored Dallon’s question. “My sister knows about us? How the hell does she know, Dallon? Did you fucking tell her?”

Dallon stood from the bed and crossed the small space between the box spring and the bathroom door with his hands out. Brendon held him back by his chest.
“Dallon, how did Lydia find out about us?”

Dallon looked skywards, searching for the words. He exhaled and then his face crumpled. What a fucking mess they were in – just when Brendon thought things were looking up again. Brendon’s happiness never hung around for too long. It seemed there was always something working against him, trying to make him as miserable as possible.

“We were on our way home from that dumb church thing. She checked the bank account and noticed the money I lent you was missing – three hundred and twenty dollars, she kept going on and on about this three hundred and twenty dollars and so I was honest with her and I told her I lent it to you and she just lost her mind, Brendon. She asked if we’d been keeping in touch since your parents kicked you out and I said we’d been hanging out because I felt sorry for you-”

Brendon rolled his eyes.

“She was so angry about the money. She said she didn’t want our money going to you – I’m not going to repeat the word she used, Brendon but I told her, I didn’t think it was fair how you’d been treated since you came home. There was no reasoning with her, she said that if I continued to hang out with you, it’d give the people in church the wrong impression and I asked her, I said, what kind of impression would that be and she was like, everyone’s going to think you’re queer, Dallon and she just kept going on and on, badmouthing you, insulting me, calling me pathetic and a loser…” Dallon’s voice broke and his eyes looked everywhere but Brendon’s.

“She said that marrying me was the worst mistake of her life - and I told her that I felt exactly the same way and that we should get a divorce. She was having none of that, she start crying in the car, wailing that I never loved her. She was trying to open the passenger door on the freeway – I had to pull over until she calmed down.”

“Should’ve just let her fucking jump,” Brendon bit. “An easy solution to your batshit crazy wife situation that way.”

“That’s not funny, she’s your sister.”

“She’s your wife!” Dallon wouldn’t look at him. “So, you told her about us? How much did you tell her?”

“All of it,” Dallon mumbled, biting at his nail. He explained how it went down as Brendon listened, stiff and taut, leaning against the doorframe.

Lydia eventually calmed down. She turned to him and asked him with teary eyes and a red face to just be honest with me, Dallon. What’s going on with you recently? Dallon groaned and pressed his forehead against the steering wheel, his knuckles white as they gripped hard at the plastic.

“I told her, I just came out and said it – Lydia, I think I’m gay, I’m sorry. She lost it; she kept saying no, no, no, this can’t be true, this can’t be happening, stop messing with me and I just couldn’t handle it anymore, Brendon – I told her. I told her everything.”

“You told her about us, before the two of you got married?”

Dallon nodded, sitting back down on the bed. He put his head in his hands. Brendon could see his shoulders heaving. His voice came muffled from inside his palms. “I couldn’t lie to her anymore. I told her we’re in love. She threw me out - threw all my clothes out of the bedroom window like in a movie – the neighbors were all watching, she called your dad and I made a pretty sharp exit after that.” He raised his head from his hands to look at Brendon with teary eyes.
Brendon felt an outburst of contempt for the man. Dallon singlehandedly fucked up his life once again. He was now dealing with not only telling his wife that he’d been unfaithful but that he was gay too and had been in love with her brother for over a decade. Any hopes Brendon may’ve had about finally reconciling with his parents were dashed.

“You’re a dumb fucker, Dallon,” he sighed, with a shake of his head. “I can’t believe you actually did that.”

“This is good for us though. Right? I mean, now we can be together.” Dallon stood quickly from the bed and rushed towards him, both hands clasping roughly at Brendon’s cheeks and pulling him in. Their lips connected and for a few seconds, Brendon felt himself kiss back, but he pushed Dallon away and glared at him.

“You think that we’re going to live happily ever after; that you can just divorce Lydia and we can move in together and play happy families? You really think it’s that simple?”

Dallon bristled, his hands still on Brendon’s shoulders. He looked like he really hadn’t expected such a reaction. Perhaps Dallon really did think that their relationship was that simple. Perhaps he really did believe in a fairytale ending. “You were always telling me that I was a coward, that I didn’t have the guts to be honest about myself and Lydia was just nagging and nagging, badmouthing you, calling you all kinds of horrible names. I couldn’t stand to hear it anymore.” Dallon’s hand moved up into his hair, slipping under the collar of Brendon’s jacket to rub at his neck. His expression suddenly changed.

“What’s this?” he asked, touching the bruise that Ryan made. Brendon pulled away, pushing past Dallon towards the bed – there was absolutely nowhere to hide and the motel room suddenly felt a whole lot smaller. “Where were you last night, Brendon?”

“I told you, I went out. My cellphone died, that’s why I didn’t get your messages. Can we just drop it? I think we both have way more important things to worry about than where I went last night.”

“Who were you with?”

Brendon’s eyes rolled. “Does it matter?”

“Yes, it does,” Dallon snapped. He waved his finger at the bruises. “You got… marks on your neck and I think I have the right to know how you got them.” His brother-in-law folded his arms. The dude was freaking out over a couple of hickeys when outside the motel room his entire life was in shambles.

“You wanna know; you want me to tell you?” Brendon goaded. Dallon nodded. “I went out and I fucked another guy last night.” He waited for the exact moment Dallon let that news sink it and then he continued. “He was good. I let him come in my mouth and I swallowed and we fell asleep together last night - and this morning, before I left his hotel, he fucked me so good that I didn’t even want to leave. I didn’t want to have to come back here, to this shitty room and deal with you and now I realize that perhaps I should’ve stayed with him – you’re problematic, Dallon, you drag me down. You really think we could ever work this out? You’re my goddamn brother-in-law, for Christ’s sake!”

Dallon shook his head, almost as if in a daze. It looked like he was trying to shake Brendon’s words from his ears, refusing to believe every one of them.

“I enjoyed it. He made me feel good.”
Dallon stammered over his words. “But… I can make you feel good too.”

Brendon shook his head. “No. *This,*” he said, waving his fingers between them, “this doesn’t feel good. You *left* me for her, Dallon. You thought she’d do a better job at making you happy than I could – just because Lydia’s finally found out your secret doesn’t mean that I’m your easy ride out of Vegas, out of your terrible marriage. I can’t forgive you for what you did. I already told you that.”

“I thought you loved me?”

Brendon looked away and bit his lip. He led Dallon on, he realized that, but it wasn’t like he *didn’t* love the guy – he was very fond of him, he enjoyed the company he offered and the orgasms weren’t too bad either, but Dallon was stupid and thoughtless and indecisive. Brendon needed a man, not a scared little boy.

Ten years ago, they could’ve had something. When he was a teenager, Brendon truly *loved* Dallon, he’d have done anything to keep his attentions – he had dreams about the two of them running away together, adopting a couple of dogs, having a nice house and fashionable friends, but now there was too much water under the bridge – too much time passed between them to ever go back to how it once was.

“So, who did you sleep with last night? Some stranger you picked up at a bar, I’ll bet.”

Brendon looked up at the man and raised one eyebrow. “The holier-than-thou, disparaging asshole look is not very becoming of you, Dallon – just drop it, will you?”

“So, you’re man enough to fuck someone else behind my back last night, but not man enough to tell me who it was?” It was one of the only times Brendon could ever recall Dallon cursing.

“Yeah, well, what use is a name now? I’m not your boyfriend, Dallon. I don’t owe you shit – *this,* whatever the fuck *this* is, is not exclusive and you can’t stand there with your arms folded and tell me what I can and can’t do with my free time.”

“It was *one* day I left you alone for – what, you couldn’t wait it out? You had to go out there and find someone to hook-up with? Some meaningless guy who doesn’t love you? Is that what you did in New York too? Let random dudes degrade you into nothing more than a one-night stand?”

Brendon sprang from the bed and pushed Dallon back against the wall. His head bounced off the cheap plastering and his breath left him in a surprised huff. Brendon pushed against him, holding Dallon’s shoulders against the wall. “You know *nothing* about my life in New York. I left Manhattan because my ex-boyfriend cheated on me with his goddamn drug-dealer. He was a heroin-addict, Dallon, a fucking junkie.”

Dallon swallowed, his blue eyes full and panicked.

“I *loved* him – and when he told me he didn’t love me anymore, it broke my heart. I knew the end was coming; I just didn’t want to accept it.” He forced an anxious laugh. “I wanted to feel love. I wanted to be needed by *someone* and what happened? My parents threw me out and I started an affair with you in the vain hope that just for a few hours a day, I wouldn’t want to kill myself - and I’m thankful for that. You’ve been here for me when no one else was, but this can’t *ever* work. I can’t be the one to save you. I’m fucking *drowning,* Dallon – you’re like an anchor around my neck, dragging me down.”

He stepped back and Dallon looked down at him. Brendon sighed, trying to process everything that just happened between them. Lydia knew – after ten years of keeping their love affair a secret from
his entire family, Lydia knew. Brendon could almost feel himself unraveling. He rubbed at his face to relieve the pressure behind his eyes and let loose a shuddery breath.

“Why the hell did you have to go and tell Lydia?” he asked, pacing sullenly around the room.

“It wasn’t like I planned on doing it. It just kind of happened.”

“Telling your wife that you’re gay and that you’ve been screwing her younger brother doesn’t just happen, Dallon.”

A silence hung over the motel room. Brendon could hear the police sirens blaring past outside the window and reggae music being played too loud through a car stereo. Dallon approached him from behind, pulling him into a bear hug.

“I love you, Brendon. I ruined my marriage for this; your family will probably never talk to me again.”

Brendon felt like turning around and punching Dallon square in the jaw. Dallon was stupid and he was selfish. He shrugged the man from around his shoulders and stood up against the door.

“I think it’s probably best if I leave Las Vegas for a bit,” he said. “Let things settle down. I think you could probably do with some time alone to think through your shit too.”

“Don’t leave without me, angel, please. I can’t lose you again.”

Dallon Weekes sure knew how to grind his gears. The room was suffocating him. He felt like the air was too hot and inescapable. “You didn’t lose me to begin with. You made your choice – you chose Lydia. I left Nevada because I couldn’t stand seeing you with her. I was jealous – so jealous that I left my family and didn’t come back for eight years and trust me, I felt guilty as hell every single day, but I worked my ass off to support my dad through his treatment.”

“And everyone appreciates that, Brendon-”

“They don’t!” Brendon seethed, throwing up his hands, unable to even look Dallon in the eye. “They threw me out at the lowest possible time in my life – not because I’m a bad person or a drug-addict who stole their shit or a slob who never cleaned up. They kicked me out because I’m gay – because I don’t fit in with their stupid, messed up beliefs and I bet you sat there last week, at their dining table, eating dinner, listening to them talk shit about me and I bet you didn’t say anything in my defense.”

Dallon looked guilty, a red blush rose on his cheeks and his eyes cut to the side.

“Dallon, we don’t belong together anymore. We’re so wrong for each other, can’t you see that?”

“Don’t say that to me, Brendon – I love you.”

“No you don’t. You don’t know the first thing about me anymore – you’re still in love with the meek, seventeen year old me who’d have done anything for you. You have this messed up idea in your head that I’m the same person I was back when we first met and I’m not. I’m not that person anymore, Dallon – I wish I was, but I’m not.”

Another silence. Another heavy sigh.

Brendon pulled his duffel bag from under the bed and started grabbing clothes from the floor – clothes that Dallon pulled him out of only a few days before. He sniffed up his emotions and wiped
his nose. “I’m going to leave Las Vegas for a week or so. I don’t want you to follow me. I don’t want you to contact me – you made this mess yourself, I don’t want to hang around and help you pick up the pieces.”

Dallon faltered uneasily at his side, watching him stuff his bag with shirts and jeans and underwear. “Please don’t do this. Please don’t leave me, Bren – I don’t have anyone else anymore.”

“Well, you should’ve thought about that before you opened your big mouth and started blabbing to Lydia about how you’re in love with me.” The anger spiked quickly inside him and he looked up to stare at Dallon with hard eyes. “You don’t love me – you think you do because you’re lost and lonely and scared and need someone to tell you what to do. I’ll tell you what you should do, even though I know you won’t listen to me – you should leave Lydia, get divorced and move the hell out of Vegas – go someplace new, live on your own for a few months, go out there,” he said. “There’s so much more to life than chasing the guy you were in love with ten years ago. You’ll meet someone, someone who’s right for you.”

Dallon wiped at his eyes with the back of his hoodie sleeve and fixed his gaze on the far wall. His jaw was tense, his lips twitched slightly.

“I care about you, Dallon, but I’m sorry – I can’t say I’m in love with you. I’m not seventeen anymore.”

“But I love you – you make me feel like I’m not some freak. You’re the only one who gets me. You’re the only one I can ever picture myself with in the future.”

Brendon didn’t say anything. He gave the room one final scan and then zipped up his bag. He’d been in Vegas for less than two months and he’d already become too emotionally invested in Dallon. He wondered what would’ve become of them if Ryan hadn’t checked himself of rehab yesterday, whether they’d be fleeing the city together following the news that Dallon told his wife about their affair – they’d still be unhappy, nothing would change. They probably both just wear each other down like he and Jon had. They’d probably wind up hating each other.

Brendon hauled his duffel bag onto his shoulder and sighed – Dallon had a kind soul, he wasn’t a bad man. He was probably the nicest guy Brendon would ever be involved with but he knew with Dallon, he’d have to try and keep his past secret – it would eat away at him inside, festering his brain and his heart. He moved towards the door. Dallon stepped forward to block him.

“Baby, you can’t just leave like this!” his brother-in-law protested. “Where are you going to go? You don’t have any money.”

“I don’t know,” Brendon shrugged. “Away from you for a while, away from my whack-job family and my sister, who not only has to deal with the fact that her perfect little husband is gay but that he’s also been fucking her faggot brother since he arrived back home – I doubt I’m her favorite person right now. I need to get away. Please don’t follow me.”

He took another step towards the door. Dallon took another to stop him.

“I can’t let you leave like this, Brendon. Please don’t do this to me. I am in love with you.”

“Then let me go.”

“Love doesn’t work like that.”

“Love doesn’t work, period. In my experience, it doesn’t bring anything but grief and heartbreak. Please move out of the way of the door,” he sighed, closing his eyes. He’d been feeling so good
before he arrived at the motel, like he was walking on air. Half an hour back in his room with Dallon and that black cloud had settled over him again, low and dark and asphyxiating.

“I can’t let you leave like this. Please,” he choked. “I’m begging you…”

“I’m telling you I need some time on my own – if you can’t respect that, then how the hell do you think we’ll ever work things out?”

“You’ll come back - after a few weeks, right? You’ll come back and we can try again. Maybe I can meet you in California – LA, San Francisco? Anywhere you want, angel, I can meet you there.”

Brendon sighed and turned away. He couldn’t even look at Dallon anymore; all of Brendon’s secrets and lies were biting at his ankles and Brendon never wanted to disappear more than he did right now. “I’ll call you,” he promised. “When I got my shit sorted and my head’s a little clearer, I’ll call you – but don’t contact me.”

“Everyone’s going to think you’re a coward if you leave town,” Dallon told him.

“Well, let them think that – but I didn’t make it this far in life by being a coward. I stand up for what I think is right and I might not always make the best decisions but at least, I can say I’ve always had the right intentions.”

Dallon’s lip curled. “And you think that this is the correct decision – leaving me, running away from your problems?”

“Right now? Yeah, I do – but I guess we’ll just have to wait and see, won’t we?” He felt his heart give a twinge at Dallon’s reaction – he looked absolutely disgusted with him. “Please move out of the way of the door.”

Dallon stepped back. “You want me to open it for you too?” he bit, yanking the door wide open.

Brendon stepped outside. The door slammed behind him.
When Ryan was alone, he found himself thinking about Marc Willis and it left an uncomfortable knot in the center of his stomach. Thoughts of his attacker didn’t seem to consume him like they had in rehab; he no longer felt that the mere mention of Marc’s name warranted a meltdown - for once Ryan felt in control of his emotions - but the way that name gnawed at his subconscious was like the itch he couldn’t scratch and since Brendon was no longer around to take his mind off things, the name bugged him constantly.

Every time he let his mind wander, he felt a mixture of anger and hopelessness, each of them battling for dominance. He internalized the anger; he was furious with himself for letting the man get to him so much, but each time he considered sharing his past with the people who cared about him, he felt that overwhelming sense of hopelessness wash over him. The challenge of telling his father what Marc Willis had done to him when he was a teenager was more terrifying than keeping quiet – the feelings it would uproot, the emotional toil it’d take on him. He was already dealing with trying to remain clean and sober after more than a decade as an active drug-addict; he wasn’t strong enough to tell his parents of his past just yet – he wanted to pretend like he was strong, not admit to them that he was weak and that’s how Marc Willis made him feel, weak, hopeless and ashamed.

He couldn’t quite put his finger on the feeling it left inside his chest. In one word, Ryan felt alone; as if he suddenly lost that one person who knew all of his secrets, the one man he enjoyed being honest with – Patrick.

Dr. Stump had become his crutch in rehab, he was the only one he could depend on, the only person he ever connected with who didn’t make him feel guilty about his behavior as a drug-addict. Now Ryan felt as if he was out in the big, bad world on his own – and without the security that the rehab facility offered, he felt out of his depth. He left rehab before he was ready, but he’d be damned if he was going to admit that to any of his friends or family.

Ryan was intent on destroying his past, burying those issues and trying to live life as honorably and compassionately as possible and when he thought about Brendon, that’s what he wanted to do – become a man that Brendon would want to hang out with, prove to him in less than forty-eight hours that he was a decent and thoughtful human being. He wanted to make it impossible for the man to leave after their weekend together. He wanted Brendon to be as dependent on him as he was on Brendon.

Ryan still had his heart set on taking the boy up to Tahoe and getting him out of the city for a while; he knew that Brendon needed it too, even if he wasn’t ready to admit it yet. Ryan pictured himself fucking the boy in front of the fireplace or out on the heated deck, overlooking the lake – but Ryan didn’t just want the incredible sex that would surely ensue if Brendon went with him to Tahoe. He wanted companionship. He wanted to wake up to the same man over and over again, not a different face every morning. He wanted shared jokes and familiarity - to be indispensable to someone. He guessed that someone was Brendon, even if the guy was just with him for the money.

*The Boyfriend Experience*, he heard it called by others – where a whore would take time out to forge
a relationship - cute pet names and tender kisses – but that was goddamn pathetic, Ryan told himself, running his hand over his face. *If you fall for this boy, you’re just as stupid as everyone seems to think you are.*

The fact of the matter was that Ryan was tired of *playing*; he was tired of constantly being the liability of his family and the joke between his friends. He was tired of acting like the things people said about him didn’t bother him and after over a decade of nothing but failure and regrets, he wanted to disappear and reemerge as a better man. Perhaps Brendon could be the one to teach him that?

Ryan sighed and scrolled through the contacts on his cellphone – it was looking decidedly empty after he’d broken his old phone and lost most of his numbers, but he was disappointed to see that Gabe hadn’t called him, even though news of his departure from rehab must’ve been all over the Internet and newsstands across the country by now. He felt very much alone and with nothing more than his thoughts for company, he realized once again that his decision to leave rehab might’ve been a little rash.

It was just after 9AM – he wondered what Brendon was doing and when he’d return to the hotel. It was midday in New York; why hadn’t Gabe called him yet? Ryan lay back on the couch and dialed his number, switching his cellphone to loudspeaker as he waited for his friend to answer.

It rang and rang and rang and Ryan was just about to give up when he heard the call connect with a click. He hadn’t spoken to Gabe in *months.*

“Hey, man, what’s up?” his friend sighed through the receiver.

“Gabe, it’s me. It’s Ryan.”

“Yeah… what’s up, man?”

Ryan’s eyebrows pulled together and he frowned. Gabriel Saporta was his best friend; why did he sound so disinterested in talking after months without contact? He blinked up at the ceiling. “Well… I’m out of rehab, didn’t you hear?”

“Yeah, bro. Yeah, I read about that.”

A silence fell between them. Ryan felt his nose tickle. “So, uh… How’re things with you? I haven’t talked to you in such a long time, but if you’re busy…” he trailed off, not quite knowing how to salvage the conversation.

“Things are great. I’m in the Bahamas with Erin right now and next week, we’re flying to Europe – she’s got a fashion show in Paris and I get to go along and flirt with cute models in their panties all weekend.” He gave a laugh, but it was abrupt and a little too loud. “I don’t know when I’ll have the time to catch up with you, amigo. I doubt I’m going to be back in Manhattan for another two weeks or so…”

Ryan stayed quiet. He didn’t know what kind of reaction he expected from his best friend, but he hadn’t expected him to blow him off quite so obviously – but Patrick told him that this may happen.

“Ryan? You still there? The service out here is kinda shitty; you’re breaking up, my friend. I can hardly hear you.”

“I can hear you just fine,” Ryan bit, irritated by Gabe’s apparent attempt to cut their conversation short. He’d have thought that his friend would be keen to catch up after all this time, eager to know how rehab treated him and how he was feeling.
“Ryan? You’re breaking up, amigo. I’m sorry. I’ll call you when I get back to—”

The call was dropped and Ryan gripped at his cellphone in annoyance and cussed Gabe out under his breath. *God, he was so frustrated.* He hated feeling this *alone.* He was one of the richest, most famous men in the world, so *why* did he feel so isolated and pathetic? He was chasing after a whore, because he felt like Brendon was the only person in his life that couldn’t judge him, but even Brendon made his excuses to leave that morning.

Ryan was feeling very sorry for himself come mid-morning and when he picked up his cellphone to call William, he prayed that the man was alone and willing to let him chew his ear for a few hours – or at least until Brendon called him again.

He hadn’t forgotten that it was William’s fiancée’s birthday today and he also hadn’t forgotten his suggestion the previous afternoon that he fly her over to Vegas for the weekend. He sort of hoped that William hadn’t taken him up on his offer because having to sit and watch their public displays of affection wasn’t how he wanted to spend the rest of his morning.

“Did you call your missus in the end?” he asked after a minute of niceties.

“Yeah,” William sighed, “but someone’s got to look after our little girl. Not everyone can change their plans at the drop of a hat to fly out to Vegas for the weekend, no matter how tempting that offer may sound.”

Ryan breathed a silent sigh of relief. He was secretly thrilled that William was alone. “She could’ve brought the kid along – there’s plenty of stuff for children to do out here. If you and the lady wanted some time alone, I could’ve babysat.”

That was a joke.

His PA scoffed. “I think it would’ve ended up the other way around – her looking after you. I’m on my way up,” he continued. “Did you need anything? Coffee, OJ, rosehip tea or whatever hippie shit you’ve been drinking in rehab?”

“Oh, hey man. What’s up?” he smiled in reply. He knew he could always rely on William Beckett to pull him out of his slump. In less than two minutes, William was knocking on his door and when Ryan rushed to open it, he was surprised to see Shane stood behind his personal assistant, his eyebrows raised and a bemused smiled on his face.

“Shane arrived about half an hour ago,” William told him as he entered the hotel suite. Ryan lingered in the doorway, carefully watching his driver.

“Just your handsome self for company,” he smiled in reply. He knew he could always rely on William Beckett to pull him out of his slump. In less than two minutes, William was knocking on his door and when Ryan rushed to open it, he was surprised to see Shane stood behind his personal assistant, his eyebrows raised and a bemused smiled on his face.

“Shane arrived about half an hour ago,” William told him as he entered the hotel suite. Ryan lingered in the doorway, carefully watching his driver.

“Oh, hey man. What’s up?” He flashed the man an awkward smile and felt the color rise on his cheeks as he recalled the last time they’d seen each other – stuck in that drug-dealer’s apartment in the Bronx when Ryan had been intent on getting high with a stranger who Shane obviously - and quite rightly - didn’t trust.

Shane pulled him into a rough hug and slapped his back jovially. “I’m good, buddy. You look a lot better; it’s good to see you again.”

Ryan could hear William far back in the lounge and as Shane tried to move past him, Ryan blocked his way. He felt he owed the man an apology for his behavior. He realized now that Shane hadn’t asked him to leave Pete's apartment because he was a dick; he’d done it because he had Ryan’s best interests at heart – because *he’d* been sober and Ryan had been high and evidently didn’t know how to look after himself.
“Look - listen, man… about that day… I want to say sorry.”

Shane waved it off. “You don’t need to apologize for that, bro. It’s part of my job to make sure you’re safe – I shouldn’t have given up so easy, should’ve dragged you out of that apartment by your hair and driven you back home. My bad.” He gave Ryan a reassuring smile and gave his shoulders another rough squeeze. “I guess it was a blessing in disguise though, huh? I assume you’re staying clean?”

His driver walked past him into the suite and clapped his hands, looking around the ornate lounge. “It’s actually a relief to be back working for you. I’ve been driving your brother around for the last month and a half and he’s a great guy and all, but he don’t half love the sound of his own voice, fuck me,” Shane whistled, shaking his head. “Motherfucker started talking down at me because I didn’t know where Sarajevo was. Now I know, it’s the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina which is one of the poorest countries in Europe.” He rolled his eyes. “Jacob’s there now, helping to rebuild some children’s hospital.”

“Yeah, that sounds like my brother, trying to save the world - one poor European city at a time,” Ryan remarked, quietly pleased that Shane seemed to dislike Jacob as much as he always had.

Shane looped an arm around Ryan’s neck and crushed their heads together. “We kinda missed you, didn’t we Bill?”

“Yeah,” William smiled, tipping his head to one side. “Kinda.”

Ryan tried to hide his smile. He had William and Shane for company – they were his real friends. Fuck Gabe Saporta.

“Bill and I made a bet on whether you’d stay your full three months in rehab. Uh, let’s just say it’s not me who’s two hundred bucks poorer this morning.”

“Well, thanks for the support, man,” he groaned, pulling away from Shane’s grip. “It really means a lot.

Shane cackled and threw his head back, clapping his hands. “I’m just fooling around, man. It’s really good to see you again, dude. You look great – you gonna keep clean this time?”

“I’m certainly going to try.”

Ryan wanted to try so, so badly. He wanted a life of sobriety. He didn’t want to kill himself anymore. He was tired of waking up hungover – of late nights, forgotten places and bad mornings after the night before. He was exhausted.

“Your father called this morning and told me to tell you that the house in Tahoe is ready for your arrival and that there’s a helicopter leaving the hotel at seven this evening – he wants you ready at seven sharp. He’s really keen to get you out of Las Vegas, Ryan,” his PA remarked.

Ryan felt the panic immediately sweep over his body. He had to leave Vegas tonight? What about Brendon? “I can’t leave for Tahoe this evening. I have plans.”

William tried hard not to roll his eyes, but Ryan could see the irritation etched all over his face. “Yeah, well. He was adamant that he wants you out of here tonight – and you can’t particularly blame him, can you? You’re straight out of rehab and staying in Las Vegas; it’s the party capital of the world, Ryan – he’s concerned about your well-being.”

“I’m not backing out of my plans – you can tell him that from me. He has to reorganize, I’m not
leaving.” Ryan folded his arms and averted his eyes out of the panoramic windows. *Fuck,* he wished Brendon agreed to go to Tahoe with him, he didn't want to rub his father up the wrong way so soon after leaving rehab.

“Ryan, your dad wants you to keep a low profile. There’s plenty of Internet buzz around you leaving rehab early; there’s paparazzi in the lobby and the staff downstairs are doing their best to keep them at a distance, but you know what they’re like – they’re sneaky and ruthless.” William paused and looked over at him. Ryan couldn’t stand that pitying look in his eyes. “He’s concerned that you’ll go back to old habits if you stay in Las Vegas for too long.”

“You realize that if I wanted to take drugs, I already would’ve by now, don’t you? And if I want to take drugs in Tahoe, I fucking well can. I’m not leaving, Bill. Not yet.”

His PA furrowed his brow and clicked his tongue. “Does this have anything to do with your friend from yesterday?”

From across the room, Shane’s interest in the conversation piqued. He was sat at the dining table, skimming through yesterday’s newspaper but he looked up and wagged his eyebrows at Ryan. “You got a new lady already, man? That was quick, you’ve only been out of rehab for a day and a half. Good for you, dude.”

“Don’t encourage him,” William spat, like a disgruntled parent, “and this is a guy, not a girl. Have you met him before? His name’s Brendon. Ryan apparently met him in NA or AA.” He directed his attention back to Ryan. “One of the two, right Ryan? I personally don’t trust him – and I’m usually pretty good at reading people.”

William was being a goddamn gossip and Ryan didn’t like it. Inside of his chest, his heart was thumping out of sync – he’d forgotten that Brendon and Shane crossed paths before, on two separate occasions, no less.

“Brendon?” Shane said the name like he was recalling the same memories as Ryan currently was – the night he ordered him to drive to the bad area of Manhattan to pick Brendon up from his crappy apartment and the blowjob in the backseat of his car and then the night he bumped into Brendon at that gay club and fucked him in a scummy toilet cubical, all while Shane waited patiently outside.

“That dark-haired kid from New York?”

Ryan saw the recognition of the name click in Shane’s eyes and he flashed him a warning glare. He knew that his driver was going to say it. He was going to spill the beans on his relationship with Brendon because Shane was no fool. “Shane, don’t.”

“The hooker, Ryan? *Fuck,* you’ve got to be kidding me.”

“You shut your goddamn mouth, asshole,” he spat, pointing at his driver. “Talk about him like that one more time and I’ll have you working for Jacob full time.”

William startled. He straightened his back, squared his shoulders and gaped at Ryan and Shane. “What?” he almost spluttered. “Is this a joke?”

Shane looked back at yesterday’s newspaper and shrugged his shoulders with a huff.

“Of course it’s a joke. Shane doesn’t know what the hell he’s talking about,” Ryan mumbled under his breath, his face bright red and the wind most certainly taken out of his sails.

“So, you’re going to try and deny the fact that the guy’s a fucking hooker? Ryan! Dude!” Shane
sounded just as exasperated as his PA and it was unusual, because his driver rarely got involved with his personal affairs. “You’ve been out of rehab for less than forty-eight hours and you’re already consulting with prostitutes? Dude ones, no less. I hate to tell you this but no one else seems to be doing it – you really are a fucking idiot on occasions.”

Ryan was pissed – he didn’t need someone like Shane telling him how to live his life. Shane didn’t even know Brendon, how the hell could he pass judgment on him? He was tired of people naggimg him, telling him that they constantly had his best interests at heart – it was a load of bullshit. Ryan heaved a sigh.

“Well, number one, he’s not a hooker, he’s a friend - he's my sponsor,” Ryan stated, splaying his arms. “I met him in AA back in New York a few months ago. He just so happened to be in Las Vegas visiting his family and got in touch with me when he found out I left rehab.”

“Of course he did,” Shane mumbled under his breath, raising the old newspaper in front of his face.

“And number two,” Ryan continued, a little louder. “I don’t see what on earth any of this has to do with either of you. I mean; all anyone ever does is tell me I’m making the wrong decisions and quite frankly—”

“That’s because you make the worst decisions of anyone I’ve ever known,” Shane interjected, dropping the newspaper down on the table. “This guy’s a fucking prostitute, Ryan. I’m not stupid – and you’re telling me you can’t understand why Bill and I might be a little wary of letting the two of you hang out?”

“I actually had no idea he was a prostitute,” William piped up from the other side of the room, holding his hands up in defense.

“I’m a fucking adult. I can do whatever the hell I want and I can hang out with whoever the hell I choose. I don’t need you two to babysit me, trying to live my life for me – I’m fucking sick of it,” he seethed. Ryan had damn near enough of people telling him that everything he did was wrong. He couldn’t win, no matter what he did, he couldn’t win.

“Jesus Christ, Ryan – if your father finds out about this… if the press find out…” The threat trailed off as William rubbed his forehead.

“Whatever. If George finds out, I’ll deal with it. He doesn’t scare me,” Ryan lied, “but I promised Brendon we’d spend some time together and there is no way in hell I’m getting on that helicopter this evening, so you go and tell my father that I’m not leaving until I’m ready and that I’ll need this room for another couple of nights.” He finished with a sigh and folded his arms. He wasn’t going to budge from his decision.

The silence inside of the hotel suite swelled. Shane looked awkward sat at the dining table, he looked a little out of his depth and William appeared more than a little frustrated at Ryan’s tantrum, but the man quickly regained his composure and decided to act professional about it.

“Fine. I’ll pass on your message, Ryan, but I should warn you that he said that if you cause any trouble, he’ll be on the first flight out here from New York to sort you out.”

Ryan shook his head. Whatever, he mumbled to himself, avoiding eye contact with the two men. He didn’t care about his father’s empty threats. He really didn’t care.

“He wants you out of Vegas, Ryan – you can’t blame him for that. He’s concerned about you. He cares about you.”
Ryan twisted the hair that fell behind his ear around his finger and spoke his words up at the ceiling. “People keep telling me that my dad cares about me but he only ever talks to me when I fuck up – if he was really so concerned about me, he’d have flown over from New York as soon as he heard I discharged myself, but no – he’s evidently got more important things to be doing,” he remarked, picturing his father sipping scotch with Marc Willis or happily playing golf with the fucker at some members-only resort in Upstate New York.

“I think I want to be alone,” he sighed. He was irritated – and he was embarrassed Shane had spilled Brendon’s secret. Brendon was a good man and he didn’t deserve to be talked about like that – he was more than just a hooker. *Fuck*, he was already so much more than that…

William huffed and Shane rolled his eyes, pushing himself up from the dining table. He slapped Ryan on the shoulder as he passed him. “I used to think that this whole self-saboteur, woe-is-me thing was an effect of the drugs – but I think it’s a little more than that. You have no right to be this angry at the world, Ryan. There are people out there who are hell of a lot worse off than you. Okay?”

Ryan wanted to lash out and smack Shane right in his stupid mouth. Shane had absolutely *no idea* how it felt to have everything apart from the one thing he needed – love – and not just romance, but friendship and the love he never received from his father. He’d give up his entire inheritance if it meant he could experience real, true, overwhelming *love* - the kind people write about, that's what he wanted.

“Can you both just leave?” The words came out strained. Ryan hadn’t known how close he was to breaking down until he spoke. He *really* needed a drink to take the edge off of his mood. That’s how he’d have dealt with his emotions before he went off to rehab - a few shots of vodka and a couple lines of coke would put him right. He pinched hard at the skin on his elbow, trying to distract himself from his renewed desire to get high and pass out – that’d make his friends and family feel guilty, another overdose less than forty-eight hours after leaving rehab.

William and Shane both left the hotel suite a few minutes later and Ryan was alone once more. Las Vegas sure was one lonely city from way up in his Presidential Suite and without the distractions of group therapy and Patrick and the timetable he kept in rehab, all that Ryan could think about was getting high.

*Well*, that and Brendon Urie.

He dreamed up scenarios in his head; he could leave the hotel and find some scummy dive bar to get drunk at, maybe pick up an eight ball if he was lucky – failing that, he was certain that Brendon knew someone who could get their hands on some drugs for him. It was an almost insatiable need burning through his body - the need to just shut everything down and stop thinking for just *five* minutes.

Instead, he returned to his bed and climbed under the covers. The pillow on which Brendon slept still smelled like him and Ryan found himself wrapping his arms around it, inhaling deeply and *wishing* the boy was lying next to him, wrapped tight in his arms right now.

As he lay there, he found himself thinking back to Marc Willis again. He started to play conversations through his head where he’d tell his father everything that happened when he was younger. He imagined his father slowly weeping and apologizing over and over and over again for being such a distant father, for showing his love for his son with expensive gifts, instead of quality time together.

It was something he was still torn between. On one hand, he knew it’d be good for his recovery as
well as his relationship with his parents if he did share his issues with them. A lot of the time, Ryan took drugs to escape his past and he kept quiet about what happened with Marc not because he thought that people wouldn’t believe him, but because he was ashamed - and in turn he’d become the crutch that helped Marc Willis continue to haunt him, even a decade later. The reality of his family knowing the secret he managed to keep for over ten long years was daunting – and it wasn’t just his family who’d find out, it was the whole world. He worried that people would somehow think less of him, that they would deem him weak or deserving or even worse, a liar - desperate for attention.

He lay back in bed and wondered what the real reason behind Marc’s divorce was. His wife cited irreconcilable differences and was still fighting for her share of their combined $75 million fortune, but neither of them had spoken about it publicly. It had been announced not too long after he’d gone into rehab and it forced Ryan to wonder why they’d broken up so suddenly after so many years of marriage. Maybe it had something to do with those bloody knuckles the man had been sporting the day Ryan wound up unconscious outside of that guy Pete’s apartment?

Or maybe Marc had gotten into a fight? Ryan recalled the way Marc's fist collided with his face the night that he raped him. He remembered the shattering pain that rippled through him and the way the blood pooled in the palm of his hand – he also remembered the way his father hadn’t bothered prying for the real reason behind the black eye he’d been sporting the next day.

Marc Willis was evidently not above using his fists to get what he wanted and maybe he was enough of a piece of shit that he beat his wife? It was entirely possible that she finally had enough of pretending like her husband was a good man and was taking his ass to the cleaners in the process.

The memory of Marc’s split knuckles and the blood crusted under his fingernails haunted him – it was all like some terrible, inescapable nightmare and if the man’s actions towards Ryan when he was a teenager were anything to go by, Marc Willis obviously enjoyed inflicting pain on young men - holding them down and forcing them to bend to his will – Marc obviously got a kick out of it. Perhaps this time he tried his luck with someone he really shouldn’t have fucked with; perhaps the real reason for his divorce was that his wife finally found out that her husband was a rapist.

Or maybe Marc got his kicks by consulting with hookers? He guessed it was one of the few ways married perverts could indulge all of their sick desires, with someone who was getting paid, some kid who couldn’t say no. Someone exactly like Brendon…

The memories of that man drove Ryan to the point of nausea. He imagined the beating some poor fool suffered for Marc’s hands to get busted up like they had been all those weeks back. Ryan was suddenly faced with the suspicion that he might not be Marc’s only victim – he hated to think that his silence could’ve caused others to suffer like he had and the sudden thought made his eyes pool with guilty, frustrated tears.

The memories of his attack had him in a chokehold. Why hadn’t he pointed out those contusions on that man’s knuckles when they’d been sat in his parents’ lounge together? Instead, he ran off to get high to try and deal with his torment alone.

Ryan rubbed the tears from his eyes, sucked in a deep breath and counted to ten – all the tricks Dr. Stump taught him to use to deal with an anxiety attack. He was stronger than this, he didn’t have to succumb to memories of the past; he could live his life without the constant fear that he was a failure hanging over him. He could be more than just a victim - if only he saw Marc Willis get what was coming to him. The divorce from his wife was only the beginning of that man’s downfall - that sick fuck deserved prison time, he deserved to lose everything. Yeah, that was it - karma. Everyone gets what they deserve in the end. What goes around comes around, Ryan told himself as he buried his face into Brendon’s pillow.
His thoughts eventually wore him out enough that Ryan started to doze off. He was almost asleep when the sound of his phone ringing burst through the bedroom and jolted him awake with a pounding heart. He clamored through the sheets to find his cellphone and answered it blearily – it was probably his father, calling to inform him he was on his way to Vegas to scold him for being so irresponsible, or more than likely, it was William, merely passing on his father’s message.

“Hello?”

“Hey. Ryan?”

It wasn’t his father, but immediately Ryan knew who was calling him. It was Brendon.

“What’s up, man?”

Ryan startled, sitting up in bed as his heart started to pound. Goddamn, even talking to Brendon made him dizzy. Brendon was already downstairs waiting for him, the prospect made his insides burn. “You’re back already? That was quick.”

“Yeah.” Brendon let loose a bitter laugh and then there was silence.

“Is everything okay?”

“Things are so far from okay right now, Ryan – shit, can you just come and get me?”

Ryan couldn’t be sure, but it sounded as if Brendon was trying very hard to stop himself from crying. He heard the shudder in his voice, the telltale sign that he was trying to keep himself together. “Sure, sure.” He softened his voice. He wanted to soothe Brendon’s woes, whatever they were. Maybe that was going to be Ryan’s salvation – looking after someone who needed a friend. “I’ll be down now. Hold tight, I’m on my way.”

He disconnected the call and gazed at his phone for a second – he hadn’t expected Brendon to be back so quick, he hadn’t even had time to wash the man from his skin after he left and the bed was still unmade. Brendon’s scent still lingered on the sheets.

Without much more thought about his appearance, Ryan left his suite and walked down the mirrored corridor towards the private elevator. The thought that Brendon was waiting for him downstairs thrilled him and he already felt sick with anticipation – he could feel his heart beating wildly inside his chest and his stomach twisted as he stepped inside the elevator and took a deep breath to steady his nerves.

No one ever had this effect on him before.

When the elevator started to descend, Ryan bounced on his heels – he met fans of his, strangers on the street who’d been left speechless by his presence. He imagined this is how they felt on meeting him - dizzy and lightheaded. Starstruck.

The elevator door opened with a ping and there he was. Butterflies. Lightning bolts.
Brendon was red-eyed and blotchy-faced. The boy’s dark eyes were glassy with tears, but Ryan didn't have time to notice because Brendon was pushing into the elevator next to him, clutching his arms and pushing him back against the wall. Their lips connected as the doors slid closed and Ryan felt the press of his mouth and the taste of his tongue as his hands slipped around Brendon’s waist and pushed beneath his shirt to thumb at skin.

He felt the desperation behind his kiss. He felt it in the way Brendon pushed his body against his and the way he pulled at his shirt, molding himself as close to him as possible.

Ryan kissed back.

Brendon pulled away when the doors reopened on Ryan’s floor, but he dropped his head against his shoulder and turned to kiss at his neck. Ryan’s butterflies were growing stronger wings – he felt the electricity of Brendon’s touch.

“Take me up to Tahoe with you,” Brendon sighed in his ear. “I need to get the hell out of Vegas after all. I keep thinking that my life can't get any worse and every day, it proves me wrong.” He sniffed hard, his face still buried in Ryan’s shoulder. Ryan could feel tears soak through his shirt and then the heave of Brendon's chest as he tried to hold back a cry. Suddenly, all of Ryan's troubles faded into the distance.

He stroked the back of the boy’s head and turned his mouth against his ear. “Close your eyes, count to ten, breathe,” he soothed. ”You’re going to be okay.”
Chapter 41

Brendon was a little embarrassed about crying on Ryan’s shoulder in the elevator. He never lost his composure in front of a client before and once again, Brendon was left wondering why the hell he let down his guard in front of this particular trick. Ryan himself was a mess of emotions and turmoil and Brendon wasn’t quite sure how he was meant to help him come to terms with his own, but he needed that kiss. He needed to feel something – comfort, consolation. Desire.

Following his arrival at the hotel, it had been reassuring to feel a pair of arms around his waist and the soft thud of a heartbeat against his chest. Running straight into Ryan’s arms had taken away a fraction of the grief – and so that’s where he stayed. Ryan didn’t seem to object.

Ryan offered him the comforting words he needed to hear in his time of need. His presence was calming, just like a sedative and Brendon was thankful, if not a little uncomfortable he let that side of himself slip in front of him.

Brendon had been trying to keep himself together for so long now that it was a wonder he hadn’t already fallen apart. His breakup with Jon had been a long time coming and it was just the tip of the iceberg. Following their split, Brendon thought his return to Nevada would be a good thing but it seemed like the universe was working against him. No good had come from his affair with Dallon and the news that he told Lydia about their situation shattered what was left of Brendon’s world. He deserved it. He deserved everything – that’s what he got for sleeping with his sister’s husband. This – his life blown apart.

In short, his sister finding out about him and Dallon had been the straw that broke the camel’s back and Brendon just couldn’t hold his shit together any longer – which was the reason he ended up crying into Ryan Ross’s shoulder earlier that morning. He felt like he was breaking, unraveling, imploding from the inside. He questioned why on earth he let himself get involved with Dallon in the first place – he’d been bad news eight years ago and evidently the man hadn’t changed.

After leaving the motel room, Brendon hadn’t known what to do. He debated showing up at Spencer’s to ask for a little advice – Spencer knew the situation after all and despite his apparently shady reputation, the man seemed to be a reasonably sensible character. Spencer was someone who had his shit together; Brendon could probably take a few pointers from him… but he knew how his night would end up if he turned up at the bar after a spectacular break-up with his sister’s husband. He’d end up high and at his own mercy, which wasn’t somewhere he wanted to be and besides, where was he meant to go after that? Back to the motel to face Dallon? Back to Ryan, all fucked-up on coke?

He walked back towards the Strip and checked his cellphone. He’d forgotten that it was dead. He pressed the buttons in the vain hope that there was just enough life in it to check through his messages - much to Brendon’s surprise, the screen sprang to life with a cheerful ring. He frowned at the full bar of battery that blinked back at him. His phone hadn’t been dead after all. Huh. He didn’t think too much of it – dozens of unread texts from Dallon beeped through on his phone, all of them begging Brendon to contact him and growing more and more desperate as the hours wore on.

He felt guilty he hadn’t answered his cellphone. Dallon must’ve sat in that motel room, going insane with worry but he was almost glad he hadn’t seen his calls; he’d been able to spend the day in bed with Ryan Ross, getting fucked and made to feel desirable and that sure beat fielding the new problems that his brother-in-law just presented to him. He enjoyed the way Ryan made him forget about his life outside of disappointed parents and problematic lovers. He guessed he was grateful for the short amount of time he had to be selfish – when all he had to think about was how good Ryan
made him feel.

Ryan made Brendon feel worthy and that’s all he ever wanted - to be made to feel irreplaceable. In his past, Dallon had chosen Lydia and Jon had chosen Joe. The only two men he’d ever fallen in love with needed more than he could offer and it made him feel inept – like he was missing some vital trait and hadn’t figured out what it was yet.

Ryan made him feel fine just as he was, even if their relationship was treading the exceedingly blurred lines between professional and personal. There was an intimacy with Ryan that he never shared with any of his previous clients, there was the chance that this was something more than either of them wanted to admit to and Brendon needed to know what that little something was.

That morning, as he walked back towards Ryan’s hotel, he tried hard to suck up his emotions. He’d been stupid to think that this would work out – agreeing to spend time with Ryan while stringing Dallon along until he got his money. He thought that life couldn’t get any worse for him after his parents kicked him out but of course, life was there to grind him down, to test his absolute limits as a human.

He hit rock bottom as soon as Dallon told his wife of their affair. Lydia and his family now knew about his homosexual fling with their favorite son-in-law and of course, they all blamed him. All of this was going to be his fault - their evil, gay son, luring Dallon away from his wife, disrespecting the family and choosing a life of sin. Maybe his parents were right. Perhaps, there really was a God and maybe this was his punishment.

The messages kept beeping through on his phone – missed calls from his father and sister, angry texts and hysterical voicemails. Brendon deleted each of them as they came through, but not before he scanned through a handful of messages he received from his family.

You’ve disgraced this family for the last time, one of them said. This is the final straw, said another. Don’t come back here, faggot, you won’t be welcome.

Brendon had become incensed with fury – his family always wanted him to give them an excuse to disown him. Well, now they had it. Another few yards down the sidewalk, he stopped to listen to a hysterical voicemail from his mother. She cried that what he’d done was unforgivable.

“You’re no longer a son of mine,” she told him. “Stay away from my family and just hope that someone prays for your soul. Find salvation, Brendon,” she wept.

Brendon took her advice. His only salvation was waiting for him in his hotel suite. Ryan Ross was the very last person left in his life that hadn’t screwed him over yet and Brendon ran to him, eager for sympathy.

Unsurprisingly, Ryan had been keen to comfort him and from the elevator, they walked quickly towards the hotel suite together, hand in hand until the door locked behind them and they came together in a hurried kiss.

Brendon felt the need bubbling inside of his stomach. Ryan’s mouth tasted minty and fresh and – oh fuck, he reminded him of Jon. The kiss was a mess of tongues and teeth and Brendon pulled Ryan against him roughly, deepening the kiss as the tears dried in his eyes. Ryan’s tongue pushed against his and when he pulled back, Brendon was too dazed to notice the man’s darkening eyes. Ryan pulled Brendon’s t-shirt off, dropped it to the floor at his feet and let his hands dance down his chest and stomach. The man’s feather light touch made his muscles twitch in anticipation.

Ryan’s mouth pressed against his neck, sucking once more at the bruises he left earlier that morning
and Brendon felt his head fall back in compliance. He began to tug desperately at the buttons of Ryan’s shirt - he needed to feel something that could help him forget about Dallon, because he couldn’t stop thinking about their last conversation.

After Brendon managed to fumble open the first button, Ryan reached up and stilled his fingers, wrapping his hands around Brendon’s wrists. “You looked a lot happier leaving than you do coming back – are you okay?” he asked, hooking his finger under Brendon’s chin and forcing him to look at him. Brendon couldn’t hold the man’s gaze for long. He looked off to the side and averted his eyes.

“You can talk to me about what happened if you like. It might help – you know, to get whatever’s bothering you off your chest.” Ryan bent down to grab Brendon’s t-shirt and handed it back to him.

Brendon didn’t want intimate conversation; he didn’t want to let Ryan know he was falling apart. He wanted to be fucked with passion by someone who was desperate to taste his skin under his tongue.

“I mean, I’ll totally understand if you don’t want to… but if you do, I’m more than willing to listen. I had a doctor in rehab who just listened to me and he gave the best advice. I can try my best to do the same.”

Brendon quickly pulled his shirt back on and pushed his hand through his hair. He didn’t even know where the hell he should start – where had it all gone wrong? With his less than ideal relationship with Jon? With the appearance of Joe or the fact that it was Brendon’s fault Marc Willis attacked his ex-boyfriend? What about his reignited romance with his emotionally stunted brother-in-law and the fact that his family just officially disowned him? Was Ryan willing to listen to Brendon complaining about that too?

“It’s a long story, I guess,” Brendon shrugged eventually, looking down at his hands. “Maybe some other time…”

Ryan accepted Brendon’s avoidance of the subject with a nod of his head. “You can tell me whenever you’re ready,” he said, rubbing at Brendon’s shoulder. He turned back into the lounge and walked away. “Are you free to leave for Tahoe tonight?” he called as Brendon floundered in the hallway.

“Sure,” he called back. No one was going to miss him and he didn’t owe Dallon anything – not after he just dropped that bombshell on Lydia. His family would be glad to see the back of him, they no longer thought of him as their son and his sister definitely wouldn’t care if he dropped off the radar for a while.

“I’ll let William know there’s been a change of plan.” Ryan waved his cellphone and disappeared down the hallway as Brendon entered the lounge. He took a seat on the couch and blinked up at the ceiling.

His actions had torn his whole family apart and he felt empty inside – all he could think about was the venom in Dallon’s voice as they said goodbye and the way he looked as he slammed the door.

Dallon could never have been his escape. When he was seventeen, the man filled his head with ideas that Brendon still found himself dreaming about almost ten years later – moving to California and starting a life together. He guessed they could’ve been happy together - that’s if Dallon could learn to accept Brendon’s past. He should’ve just been honest with his brother-in-law, right from the very start. He should’ve laid all his cards on the table as soon as he returned to Nevada – maybe that way he would’ve had some chance at redemption. Maybe it could’ve explained his behavior over the past week weeks – the reason why he always appeared so hollow.
Brendon didn’t know why he was here. His life had been okay until he met Ryan - it had been far from perfect but he had a boyfriend who he loved and a bed to sleep in at night. He’d still been able to laugh. In the few short months since he met Ryan Ross, it seemed like everything in his life had gone irrevocably downhill. He lost everyting – his man, his apartment, then his entire family… His trust in the one man who’d been there for him since he arrived in Vegas had been dashed. Dallon inexplicably messed things up and now he expected Brendon to stick around and help sort out the mess he created.

From the other room, Brendon could hear Ryan’s voice raised in argument with someone who he could only assume to be William the PA. He couldn’t decipher the full conversation, but he was going to take a wild guess and assume that William was none too happy about Ryan running off to his parents’ cabin in Lake Tahoe with a whore.

He could clearly hear the impatience in Ryan’s voice and he sighed to himself – no one in Ryan’s close circle of friends would ever trust him. If they ever got together, he’d have a constant battle trying to convince the people around them that he wasn’t some fame hungry gold-digger, desperate to be associated with the infamous Ryan Ross. If they got together - not that they ever would. Brendon was speaking hypothetically, of course.

He imagined how much Ryan’s parents would hate him after the world found out he was a hooker and he imagined Ryan blindly defending him to a bunch of friends who couldn’t wait to say I told you so. He caught himself in that thought and bit the inside of his cheek – he and Ryan would never be together. They hardly even knew each other and they were both from entirely opposite worlds. He was a hooker and Ryan was a client - it would never work. He had to get a goddamn grip of himself.

What the hell was he doing? He shouldn’t be doing this, he shouldn’t be here – he really should have been helping Dallon through the shitstorm that was surely brewing over at the Urie household. Dallon really loved him and maybe he could change for someone like Dallon. He was the exact kind of someone Brendon needed after Jon – sweet and caring, gentle and sober. At least, that’s what his revered brother-in-law would have everyone believe. The truth was Dallon was the darkest motherfucker Brendon knew. He was cruel and self-loathing and deceitful – much more than Jon Walker ever had been. Brendon sure missed the simplicity of his life with Jon; before all the lies and the cheating started, the bubbling, unavoidable contempt they held for each other.

Brendon dragged his hands down his face and blinked out of the window – fabulous Las Vegas, in all its gritty, faux glory. Dallon was down there somewhere. Brendon found himself wondering where, whether he’d already gone running back to Lydia with sorry eyes and claimed to have made a mistake. Maybe he was already on the doorstep of their house, begging for forgiveness on his knees, or maybe he was still locked up in the motel room, his arms wrapped around Brendon’s pillow, trying to remember his scent.

A little while later, Ryan returned to the lounge and rubbed Brendon’s shoulder as he rounded the couch. He looked a little flushed and sat down next to Brendon with a huff, their knees and hips touching.

He looked better than before he went into rehab – a little healthier with a brighter complexion. Having Ryan around certainly distracted Brendon from his troubles. He let his hand settle on the man’s thigh and Ryan looped his arm around Brendon’s shoulders, pulling him in against his chest.

“‘There’s a helicopter picking us up at seven this evening. If you need anything before we leave, I can arrange to have William pick it up for you.”

“I don’t need anything,” Brendon sighed. There was silence. “Does William hate me?” he asked
after a moment.

Ryan scoffed – too loud for it to be a genuine reaction. “Of course not. What gave you that idea?”

Brendon shrugged, unsure how to word his concerns. He had nothing to lose from telling the truth. “I just thought he might’ve found out how we know each other. I could kind of hear your phone conversation – not that I was eavesdropping, I just thought you sounded a little stressed. I thought maybe he was warning you against inviting me up to Tahoe.”

“Don’t take anything he says too seriously. He doesn’t hate you.”

Brendon hummed. It was obvious Ryan was lying, Brendon wasn’t stupid – of course William hated him. Truth be told, Brendon really didn’t think too much of him either, but he could certainly keep his distaste for the man under wraps while he was associating with Ryan. He just hoped William would be kind enough to do the same thing, because he was tired of constantly having to prove himself to those around him.

“Don’t sweat it,” Ryan continued. “William’s just really anal about certain things – he always has been. It’s his fiancée’s birthday today and he’s pissed he’s missing it because he said that all he’s done so far is hang out in the hotel room and listen to my driver harp on about all the chicks he bangs. I think Shane’s the only one who believes his own hype. William’s just kind of fed up.”

“Poor guy,” Brendon commented inattently. Wow, what a tough old job William has- getting paid to hang out with a celebrity and stay in the nicest hotel in Las Vegas…

Thoughts of Dallon were tapping at his head again and even with Ryan acting as a distraction, Brendon couldn’t help thinking about his brother-in-law and the mess he left in his wake. He needed to do something that’d make him forget about Dallon Weekes and taking drugs to cloud his emotions was definitely not the answer to his problems right now, but Ryan could certainly fuck Dallon out of him. Ryan knew how to make him feel good. Maybe Ryan really could be the salvation his parents always talked of. His savior. His redeemer.

The afternoon pressed on and Brendon went through the motions of pretending he was okay. It was something he had down to a fine art these days.

As they lounged together on the couch, Brendon promised himself that he wasn’t going to fall foul of this hurdle. He made it this far for a reason; it was because he was a fighter, determined to make a better life for himself. Brendon decided that this weekend with Ryan was going to be his turning point – no more bad choices or guilty thoughts. If everyone else could be heartless, then so could he.

* * *

Ryan watched as Brendon shielded his eyes against the setting sun as they stood beside each other on the roof of his father’s hotel. The sky was a paint palette of blues and pinks and purples and it seemed a suitably ethereal ending to the day. That afternoon with the boy had felt like a dream.

They watched as a shiny black helicopter came in to land, the rotor whipping up the air around them. Along the tail end, the family name was emblazoned in obnoxiously large white lettering and as it took its place on the landing pad, Ryan realized that it was a brand new model – his father indulged himself again. Brendon looked a little blown away by the whole charade.

The entire thing was actually a little embarrassing, especially in front of someone like Brendon who clearly wasn’t used to the five-star treatment. The helicopter at sunset, the security guard who stood watch of the fire escape, the goddamn red carpet the hotel laid out – it was all too much. Ryan didn’t
want the boy to think he was showing off.

Ryan nudged him with his elbow. “Have you ever flown in a helicopter before?” he shouted over the noise of the still-spinning rotor. Brendon leaned in close to reply and his hand settled at the small of Ryan’s back - he couldn’t help but arch into it.

William and Shane were stood right behind them; they were surely watching Brendon’s public display with distaste – but perhaps that’s why Brendon was doing it - to piss off the squares, play up to his reputation as a whore.

The boy pressed his mouth against Ryan’s ear and lingered there. “You’ll be taking my helicopter virginity,” he grinned, biting his lip.

Ryan resisted the urge to pull him in for a kiss. Instead, he pulled Brendon’s ear against his lips and whispered, “Well, I’m thrilled you waited for the right guy.” He snaked his arms around Brendon’s waist and pulled their hips together, brushing his mouth against the boy’s neck. One kiss, two. Three. “We’ll take it slow for your first time – no surprises. I’ll make it special,” he smirked. Brendon’s head fell back with a smile and Ryan dropped his hand to squeeze his ass through his pants.

Brendon let him – but of course he did; Brendon was a whore, he’d let him do anything. Ryan would bet that he could order him down on his knees right now, in front of everyone and the boy would shamelessly suck him off. The fantasy stirred inside his pants. When he caught Brendon’s eye again, he was blushing – he felt that small victory flutter in his chest. The man made him feel untouchable, as if nothing could bring him down. He leaned forward to catch Brendon’s lips with his own.

“Knock it off, will you? We’re right here.” A sharp slap to his shoulder pulled Ryan out of the moment and he turned to glare at his disgruntled driver. Shane stood there, eyes averted with his jaw pushed forward – Ryan knew Shane wouldn’t be making this fuss if Ryan were taking off to Tahoe with some chick. It was the gay affection Shane had an issue with, not the fact that Brendon was a stranger and rumored to be a hooker.

Ryan raised a quizzical eyebrow Shane’s way, his arms still holding tight to Brendon’s hips. “Do you have a problem with two men kissing, Shane? Does it freak you out and affect your sensitive morals?” he teased.

“No,” his driver snapped. “I just don’t want to see it, that’s all. Do whatever the hell you want behind closed doors, Ryan, but not in front of me. You’re like my brother; I don’t want to see that shit. You need to learn to keep your private stuff, well… private.”

Ryan stepped away from Brendon and turned his back on Shane, speaking back over his shoulder at the man. “You’re a hypocritical son of a bitch, you know that, don’t you? Bill told me you spent the entire day talking about all of your sexual conquests. You’re the kind of guy who cream his jocks at two chicks making out but gets all up in arms about two men doing the same thing. Don’t worry, bro, I’m not going to try and suck your dick – you’re not my type.”

What was he saying? His attempt at bravado in front of Brendon was making him sound like a complete douchebag. Ryan bit his lip and tried to rise above the petty argument. He was going to be glad to get away from both Shane and William – they’d both been driving him insane since Brendon returned. All they’d done since they found out he was accompanying him to Tahoe was bitch and nag and pass judgment on a man neither of them knew. Ryan was fed up with both of them.

On top of the roof, the sky was darkening. The sun was dipping behind the horizon – casting deep purple and blue shadows across the sky. The silence pressed heavy between them.
William was the first one to speak, leaning forward to talk into Ryan’s ear. “I’ve done you the courtesy of not telling your father about your little friend, but he will no doubt find out eventually and when he does, he’ll probably want an explanation. So will the press - they’re probably already digging up dirt on him and I don’t know how you’re going to handle the whole *escort* thing, but when this goes public, it’s going to blow up. This could kill your father’s reputation, Ryan. I don’t know, but maybe it’s something you two should discuss? You know, so you’re both on the same page.”

From behind him, he heard Shane mumble. “Yeah, find five minutes when your friend hasn’t got his mouth stuffed full of cock to discuss what you’re going to do when all of this goes public, Ryan. *Dating a whore,*” he muttered under his breath. “And I thought I’d seen it all with you.”

The helicopter rotors were coming to a stop, cutting through the air above them with a final long, slow *swoosh.* Shane’s voice carried and Ryan noticed Brendon stiffen at his words, but he didn’t retaliate.

“Hey,” Ryan snapped, turning towards his driver. Shane looked a little flushed at being called out for his remark. “How dare you talk about him like that. Both of you have been really disrespectful today and you haven’t even had a proper conversation with Brendon. Apologize to him, Shane.”

Now it was Brendon’s turn to flush. He looked markedly more uncomfortable than he had in the entire time that they’d known each other and he was quick to claim there was no need to apologize, that he wasn’t offended, that it honestly was *nothing.*

Ryan was frustrated with Brendon’s humility. He didn’t deserve to be desecrated like that, but it seemed like the boy just accepted this kind of treatment. He wanted to give Brendon back his dignity, but Shane was full of pride. He shook his head.

“Apologize,” Ryan repeated, firmer this time.

“Just leave it, Ryan - it’s fine, honestly,” Brendon interjected. The man didn’t even think he was worth an apology and that hurt Ryan’s chest.

He stared Shane out until his driver’s eyes darted quickly towards Brendon and then up at the sky. He let out a loud sigh. “I’m sorry for calling your friend a whore and not trusting him.” He looked down at Ryan with his tongue pushed into his bottom lip like a fourth-grader. “Happy now?”

“That’s not good enough,” he bit, folding his arms across his chest. “Apologize to Brendon, not me.”

Shane splayed his hands and then looked directly into Brendon’s eyes. “Sorry for insinuating you’re a whore who’s only hanging out with Ryan for the meal ticket - that’s definitely *not* what you’re about. *Hey!* Who knows maybe the two of you will even fall in love?” He opened his arms in a hapless shrug. “No, fuck this. I’m out, y’all. I’ll see you around, Ryan.”

William put a hand on Shane’s shoulder to calm him down but Shane shrugged him off in irritation. “Nah, man, fuck this bullshit. Everyone’s always tiptoeing around you, trying so desperately hard not to upset you, well, I ain’t having a part in it anymore. You’re a spoiled little prick.”

“Shane – come on now,” William tried.

His driver stepped forward, pushing his finger into Ryan’s chest. The dynamic between them was quick to change. Ryan was taller than Shane, but Shane was bigger – and Shane knew how to fight. “You piss me off so much – fuckin’ rich boy with no fuckin’ grasp on the real world,” he said, squaring up to him. William was quick to try and get between them. “Some people
got real problems, Ryan – they lose their jobs, they can’t feed their kids, they get raped - and you’re here whining because I’m trying to warn you off a guy who’s obviously no good for you. You can’t accept advice and then you wonder why everything you do turns to shit.”

“Shane,” William hissed. “Stop this. There’s no need in getting into a disagreement.” His PA pushed Shane back, but his words already infiltrated Ryan’s head. He tried to gather his emotions, but they stung his face in their attempt to spill out of his eyes.

“I’m fucking trying here, Shane.”

The man rolled his eyes. “Yeah. Whatever – I’m fuckin’ out. Peace, y’all – this shit’s too much for me.” Shane turned and marched towards the fire escape with his middle finger raised above his head. They all watched him leave. Ryan cursed the man under his breath.

Shane had absolutely no idea the shit he’d been through. Was he seriously insinuating that because he was privileged he had no right to be sad because there were people out there who have it a lot worse? Ryan thought that was one of the main things you never tell a person with depression. In rehab, Patrick had told him depression knows no social, racial or cultural distinctions and happiness wasn’t about being successful at life or the money in his bank account, much rather, depression was the feeling he wasn’t good enough, that nothing he did was ever going to be good enough. He may have been a rich, white boy but that didn’t save him from the sadness that followed him everywhere he went.

Shane was a fucking asshole, there was no doubt about that and if he couldn’t support him in his recovery, well then… fuck him. Ryan didn’t need that kind of negativity in his life. He decided to bite his lip and shake his limbs and forget about Shane’s harsh jibe.

“We’d better get going,” he told William, powering through his fury at Shane’s words. “I’ll deal with my father when the time’s right. You know nothing of this, okay?”

William zipped his fingers across his lips and held his hands up. “My lips are sealed – just don’t expect the same thing from Shane.”

“Fuck Shane,” Ryan spat petulantly, but the possibility his driver would go running to his father and tell him of his liaison with Brendon made him panic. “You make sure he doesn’t blab. I’ll be really upset if he tells George my business before I do.”

“Shane’s a loose cannon, Ryan, but I’ll try my best.” William touched Ryan’s shoulder and squeezed. “Look after yourself, buddy – and don’t be afraid to call me if you need it. You better get going – your ride’s waiting,” William told them, nodding his head towards the helicopter and its waiting pilot.

“I’m sorry you missed your fiancée’s birthday because of me. Send her my best regards.”

William shrugged Ryan’s apology off before pulling him into a hug. “It’s fine.” he smiled, stepping away from Ryan’s grip. They offered each other one final goodbye, before he turned away. He felt Brendon follow a few paces behind him.

William acted like he didn’t mind that he’d been pulled away from his fiancée on her birthday weekend at such short notice, but Ryan could see the disappointment in his eyes. It was funny; he noticed a lot more now that he was sober and he didn’t like it. Ryan was used to living his life with blinkers on, blinkers that shielded him from the things in his life that were liable to weigh him down. When he was on drugs, it was easy. All he had to think about was getting his next hit; and now, having to live his life as a recently clean and sober man, Ryan had to deal with reality - the obvious
disappointment and constant liability he was to his family, the weary look in William’s eyes and the fact that the two men he considered his best friends were merely employees of his father’s, paid to take care of him.

Being clean also made him second-guess himself a lot. When it was just him and Brendon, Ryan couldn’t see the harm in inviting the boy up to his parents’ cabin in the woods. They got on and Ryan enjoyed his company – not to mention he was a great lay. It was only when his friends reminded him of the basis of their relationship that he began to doubt his actions.

Maybe Shane and William were right; maybe Brendon really was bad news, just some guy, out for himself, willing to ruin Ryan’s reputation to further his own? He wondered if he was making the right decision inviting Brendon up to Tahoe. After all, he hardly knew the guy and he knew they couldn’t help but become more involved with each other if they spent any more time together, but wasn’t that what he wanted - someone who could distract him from his real problems? Someone to think about, someone to care for?

The two men climbed into the helicopter just as the sun set over the Las Vegas Strip. Once they were strapped in and fitted with headphones and a mic, the pilot turned around in his seat and introduced himself. He gave them the safety rundown and Ryan heard the whole rigmarole hundreds of times before – he’d been flying by private helicopter since he was a baby, but he noticed Brendon tugging at his seatbelt, pulling it tighter across his chest and gripping at the armrest.

Bless him, Brendon looked terrified. He rubbed at the man’s knee in reassurance. “You okay?” he mouthed as the pilot started the rotor.

“Fine.” Brendon wasn’t a very convincing liar.

As the helicopter rose into the air and took off from the roof, Ryan felt the tension in Brendon’s body, he stiffened up beside him and closed his eyes and as they flew over the neon-encrusted casinos of the Strip, Ryan nudged his elbow into the boy’s side. “You’re missing the view,” he smiled, his voice crackling through the mouthpiece of his headset. “You’re not nervous, are you?”

“A little,” Brendon admitted, slowly opening his eyes and glancing down quickly at the Vegas lights below them. The helicopter suddenly dipped to turn and Brendon made a quick grab for Ryan’s hand and quickly closed his eyes again. Their fingers linked together and Brendon squeezed Ryan’s knuckles as they left the Strip behind and took off into the night. It was a half an hour into the flight before Brendon let go of Ryan’s hand.

When they came in to land, it was already pitch black. The full moon reflected off the ripples of the lake and Ryan noticed his familiar family home appear in view from behind the shield of the forest.

He hadn’t been up to Tahoe in years. After he discovered the joys of drugs and drink and parties, the seclusion of Lake Tahoe held no real interest for him. He always wanted to be in the hustle and bustle of a big city - Manhattan, Miami or L.A, the center of everything - not way up in the middle of nowhere where there was nothing to do, but he always enjoyed summers at his parents’ cabin when he was a kid. The house held happy memories for him, which was perhaps why he’d chosen to disappear into the mountains in an attempt to recover – there was no pressure up in Tahoe to do anything other than relax.

As the helicopter touched down on the landing pad, Ryan was disappointed that they left it so late to leave. He always loved the view as they came in to land on the property, but it was nearing 9PM and the sun already set long before their arrival. The beauty of the lake was shrouded in darkness and the surrounding trees reached high into the night. The sky was littered with stars.
Once inside, Ryan found the house to be warm and immaculately clean. The Ross family rarely used the cabin, but his father obviously wasted no time in sending someone to organize it for his arrival. The refrigerator was stocked with food, the master bedroom made up, on the kitchen counter, was an extravagant hamper of food filled with artisan breads and gourmet cheeses, fresh fruit and designer candies and next to the hamper sat two bottles of apple cider. Ryan checked the labels – they were both alcohol free.

It took a little while for them to settle in. After a quick tour of the house, Ryan asked Brendon if he could light the fire as he poured them each a glass of cider into a champagne flute – it was almost like drinking real alcohol.

It was a strangely comfortable scenario this - the two of them playing house like good friends or comfortable lovers instead of who they really were – a recovering drug-addict and his whore forced into each other’s arms by necessity rather than choice.

As he watched Brendon tend to the fire, he noticed how sad the boy looked staring off into the flames – that was another thing he probably wouldn’t have noticed when he was on drugs - the sag of the boy’s shoulders and the fact that his mouth seemed to struggle so much to pull into a smile. He returned to the space in front of the fire with the two flutes of cider and handed one to his guest.

“It’s non-alcoholic, don’t worry. I’m not back on the sauce already.”

“It’s fine.” Brendon took a sip. “I probably need to quit drinking for a little while, anyway.”

Ryan nodded, eager to power through the unease of forced conversation. “Hey. Cheers.” They clinked their glasses together and Ryan drank the liquid down quickly.

“Did you want to tell me why you were so upset this morning?” Ryan asked, settling down on the rug next to Brendon and folding his legs at the ankles. “You seemed a little off compared to yesterday.”

Brendon sighed slowly and shrugged, still concentrating on the movement of the flames. He cleared his throat. “I had a lot on my plate these last few weeks is all. You know, with leaving New York and everything, Jon and all that – getting kicked out of my parents.”

Of course... Jon - the junkie ex-boyfriend Brendon still seemed so hung up on. He decided to stay away from the topic of Jon. “Why did your parents kick you out?” he asked gingerly, unsure whether Brendon would want to open up to him. They were just virtual strangers...

Brendon shrugged again and poked at the fire. It crackled and sparked. “They don’t agree with me being gay. They were always super religious and they were so upset when I left the church. I thought I’d been gone long enough that they all figured it out and when I came out to them, I think they thought they could accept me if they just ignored the fact that I’m gay, but obviously they couldn’t.”

“Didn’t you have anyone to help you out?”

Brendon scratched at his head. “My brother-in-law helped me out a little – he loaned me some money, he made sure I was eating. Dallon actually pulled me through a lot after my parents kicked me out, but he’s… shit, I don’t know.” Brendon trailed off and looked down at his hands.

Dallon? Ryan recognized the name from the texts he deleted from Brendon’s phone the other day. He deleted those messages because he’d been consumed with jealousy at the thought that this Dallon guy was a love rival, but Dallon wasn’t a threat, he wasn’t competition – he was Brendon’s brother-in-law! Ryan breathed a small sigh of relief.
“Well, that’s good to know. Did you let your family know you’d be out of town for a little while?”

“They don’t care – not my mom and dad, not anymore. They disowned me. They fucking hate me. I think they’d prefer I was dead than gay.”

The silence that followed Brendon’s admission was deafening. “That sucks,” he said after a long pause. It was a meager follow-up to something so heartbreaking. Ryan didn’t have the words, there was nothing he could say to try and make the boy feel better.

Ryan couldn’t understand how parents could disown their child simply because of their sexuality. He always despised his father’s interference in his personal life, but he couldn’t imagine how it’d feel if one day, his dad flat out refused to care for him based on his attraction towards other men.

George Ross was a lot of things – a nagging, meddling parent and a habitually unaffectionate father but he wasn’t a homophobe. George always accepted Ryan’s same-sex dalliances, despite what the press said about him. He wondered how it’d feel to be hated for something he couldn’t change.

Ryan felt sorry for the kid. He wanted to wrap him up in a big hug and tell him he’d be okay if they stuck together, but he didn’t. He stayed quiet and let the silence drag.

“My dad is such a pain in the ass sometimes but I guess I’d be really upset if he turned his back on me. I never really felt like my dad loved me – not as much as he loved my brother and sister - he never showed it anyway, even when I was a kid. He never hugged me, he never kissed me, he never told me he was proud of me. I can’t ever remember him saying he loved me. I put my dad through so much shit; I guess I was always too high to realize that he always had my best interests at heart.”

“You’re surrounded by people who care about you, Ryan – your dad, your family, William and Shane. I mean, I know you don’t get it but they only nag you because they love you. My family never even nagged me. It was like I wasn’t there half of the time.”

“I’m sorry about your parents,” he said quietly. “I know it probably doesn’t mean much coming from me, but I’m sorry they don’t understand. I wish they could - I mean, I think you’re awesome,” he smiled, knocking Brendon’s foot with his own.

“Thanks.” Brendon didn’t quite manage to return his smile - Ryan wanted to be the one to make the boy laugh again. He wanted to be the light in his eyes.

“So,” he swallowed, “this Dallon guy – your brother-in-law, correct? He was looking out for you?”

Brendon groaned, and covered his face with his hands. “I don’t want to talk about him. Can we just drop it?”

Ryan looked down at his hands and reddened. “Sure. Sorry. I didn’t mean to pry. I was just trying to get to know you.”

“It’s fine,” the boy sniffed – but the strain in his voice overrode the dismissal of Ryan’s apology. It made Ryan look up at him in time to catch Brendon wiping his eyes. Shit – he hadn’t meant to make Brendon cry.

“Hey… hey,” he soothed, scooting closer towards the man and pulling him in by his shoulders. Much to his surprise, Brendon didn’t push him away. He let himself be wrapped up in Ryan’s arms and curled against him. “What are you crying for, silly?”

Brendon exhaled a shaky breath and then he spoke. “Because my life is just one shitty joke after the other and I can’t catch a break, no matter how hard I try. I made such terrible choices in my life,
Ryan and I just keep getting fucked over by everyone and I’m so tired. I feel like I haven’t slept in months.”

Ryan rubbed his hands over Brendon’s back in reassurance and pulled him tighter against his chest. He could feel the man’s heart thumping slowly behind his ribs. This was it – this was the man Ryan could feel himself falling for. “You’re going to be okay, Brendon.”

He felt the shake of Brendon’s head. “No, I’m not because I have nothing and no one. This is it. I have a bagful of clothes and nothing else.”

“You have me.”

Brendon laughed – it sounded hollow. “You want to know why I was so upset this morning?”

Ryan nodded his head.

“I was having an affair with my brother-in-law and now my family knows and everything is so fucked up. Yesterday, when we were together, Dallon decided to tell his wife about us – my goddamn sister, Ryan. Dallon and I,” he sniffed, “we got history. He was my first love, he was my first everything and now, my entire family knows we were sleeping together and... fuck,” he finished with a bark of laughter. “Jesus, I don’t know whether to laugh or cry.” Brendon pushed his face into Ryan’s side to muffle his tears.

“You were having an affair with your brother-in-law? Jesus, Brendon – you could turn your life into a movie.”

“A shitty fucking movie. I wouldn’t go and watch it.”

Ryan’s lips pulled into a sad smile. So, Brendon was having an affair with his brother-in-law – he’d been screwing his sister’s husband and all of a sudden, those texts made a little more sense to Ryan. He imagined Brendon fucking someone for free and how much that man must’ve meant to him to not charge money. The thought tore through him. Brendon was shaking in his arms, trying to keep himself together and suddenly, Ryan couldn’t force himself to care.

Brendon was human, he was real and tangible and all of a sudden, he was fragile. He had an existence outside of being a whore for the rich. Ryan didn’t feel anger or disappointment or jealousy. He couldn’t feel anything but sympathy for the man’s relentless anguish.

For the first time in a long while, Ryan felt a sorrow so real it hurt right in the center of his chest. He had to screw his face up to prevent the silent tears from escaping his eyes and he kissed the top of Brendon’s head, letting his hair tickle his nose.

“You’re going to be okay, Brendon,” he repeated. “I can help you through this – if you’ll let me.”

Ryan felt unusually strong when he had Brendon in his arms. Maybe this was his new purpose in life - to become Brendon’s salvation; maybe this was what was going to save him? Ryan wanted to become the only person who’d ever gone that extra mile for the boy because evidently no one else cared about him.

After leaving rehab, Ryan had been certain Brendon would become his distraction from taking drugs. He’d been so sure the man could help him through his recovery that he left his program six weeks early to meet up with him, but maybe he got it wrong, maybe he’d been missing the point this entire time? Maybe he needed to learn humility in the form of taking care of someone who needed it – a man who’d been beaten and broken time and time again.
That thing people talked about - friendship, love – that was Ryan’s escape. He could find redemption in that boy’s eyes.

When Brendon pulled away, he was blotchy and red-eyed. “I’m sorry,” he sniffed, his voice still strained. “I’m so, so sorry for dumping all of this on you, Ryan. I know it’s probably the last thing you need – I’ll understand if you want me to leave.”

“No. Hey, no. I don’t want that,” he assured him quietly, reaching out to touch Brendon’s wrist.

He didn’t want Brendon to leave. He didn’t want Brendon to leave.

Brendon gripped his arm and pulled their bodies flush by his elbow. He lay back on the rug in front of the fire and pulled Ryan down on top of him. “I want to feel you inside me again,” he whispered, his voice almost a moan. Quieter this time, with his eyes closed, Brendon said, “I want you to fuck me until I forget about him.”

Ryan’s eyes fluttered shut at Brendon’s demand. Whoever this Dallon guy was, whatever he meant to Brendon, Ryan was more than eager to help him forget.

That night, as he moved inside the boy on the rug in front of the fire, Ryan had to bite his tongue to keep Brendon’s name out of his mouth. He was scared Brendon would hear the desperation in his voice.
Chapter 42

That morning, Brendon awoke before Ryan and turned over on the mattress to watch him. His face was soft and relaxed; his breath hardly even noticeable as he slept. Ryan didn’t move when Brendon reached out and softly trailed his fingertip down his side - they were both naked and the sheets had fallen away in the night, Ryan was exposed to him, his dick soft between his legs and as Brendon’s eyes flicked over the man’s body, his lips pulled into a soft smile. Ryan looked peaceful, so Brendon let him sleep.

He climbed from the bed just in time to see the sun rise through the glass wall of the master bedroom. Brendon had never seen anything so beautiful. The sky was streaked with clouds, the sun shining bright orange through the pink of morning. The colors reflected over the lake, and in the distance, the snow-capped Sierras turned blue as the sun poked above them.

Last night, after he and Ryan eventually retired, they lay awake and talked about Dallon. Brendon told him their story - from the moment they first met and Brendon had fallen in love, right up until their argument at the motel. Ryan didn’t say anything, he didn’t ask unnecessary questions; he simply lay there beside him and let Brendon get it all out without interruption.

It felt good to share his problems with someone. He spent so much of his life trying to ignore his past with Dallon that even Jon had been left in the dark about their relationship. It had been the first time Brendon had spoken of it to anyone and in telling Ryan, he wasn’t looking for sympathy – not really. He was just looking for an outlet for his troubles. He knew how abysmal his actions had been in Las Vegas – fucking your sister’s husband really was unforgivable and he wasn’t looking for compassion, but Ryan had shown him just that. He pressed his lips against Brendon’s temple and smoothed his hands along his shoulders.

“I bet you think I’m a really shitty person for doing what I did,” he sniffed.

“No. I think sometimes, under desperate circumstances, we’ll look for comfort from people who we know aren’t good for us because it beats being alone.” Ryan’s lips moved slowly, pressing kisses along the edge of Brendon’s jaw until they met his mouth. “Like you and me,” he said, pulling back with a smile. “Neither of us wants to be alone.”

Brendon hadn’t been able to help himself from pushing back against Ryan’s lips, opening his mouth as their tongues pressed together. Their kiss was wet and slow and Brendon found himself unable to concentrate on anything other than how wonderful Ryan felt on top of him, how well he could kiss and the thud of his own heart inside of his chest.

“You should get some sleep,” Ryan told him, pulling away and slipping his body behind Brendon’s on the mattress, kissing his shoulder. “Tomorrow’s another day,” he sighed – and it was. The sun had risen as Brendon pulled on his underwear and a crumpled pair of pants and silently left the bedroom - and as he walked out into the lounge he felt thankful that Ryan had shown him so much empathy.

It would’ve been easy for the man to refuse to accommodate him any longer and ask him to leave, but currently, Brendon wasn’t sure who needed who most – it seemed like Ryan was desperate to hold onto him at all costs and Brendon was more than willing to stay for as long as Ryan wanted him to. After all, what the fuck did he have to go back home to in Las Vegas?

He stood out on the deck, elbows resting on the wooden ledge of the balcony and he drank in the view. The beauty of his surroundings made him seem small. It made his problems seem insignificant.
He spent his entire life being suffocated by cities he hated, where there were too many people to let down, too much pressure to be someone he wasn’t. In the breaking dawn of Lake Tahoe, Brendon relished the silence – nothing more than the wind and the birds and the sound of the lake lapping the shore below him. It was certainly a big step up from the Whole Year Inn.

He scanned his eyes across the horizon – the sky was already a bright shade of blue and the morning air was fresh in his lungs. Brendon felt like he could breathe again – the smell of the pines filled his nose and he watched as the trees swayed in the breeze. Life wasn’t so bad after all, he told himself. From way up here, Las Vegas seemed an entire lifetime away.

Brendon heard movement from behind him, the sound of the sliding glass door being pulled open and he turned to see Ryan in his boxers, bed-headed and rubbing sleep from his eyes. He smiled. “It’s beautiful out here, Ryan.”

Ryan shuffled across the decking towards him, his hands falling to rest on Brendon’s hips from behind. He hooked his chin over Brendon’s shoulder and pulled him close – Ryan was hard inside of his boxers.

“It’s more beautiful with you here.” Brendon felt him smile against his ear and arched back to rub himself against Ryan’s erection - he couldn’t help but redden at the man’s words. He turned his head and their lips joined in a kiss. “Good morning. Did you sleep well?”

“Perfectly,” he smiled back. It was a lie. Brendon laid awake for most of the night, worrying about Dallon and only just managing to resist the urge to climb from the warmth of the bed to check his cellphone. It wasn’t easy to just block the man out and not think about him because Brendon cared. He didn’t want to imagine that Dallon would do something drastic to get out of his current situation and memories of the man plagued him for almost the entire night.

Brendon bailed on him because he didn’t want to own up to his actions – Dallon hadn’t forced him into an affair, Brendon entered into one willingly and now he was running away because he was scared. He’d woken up that morning feeling like he’d been bled dry of all of his emotions - but the view was kind of making up for it. So was the company.

Ryan pressed another kiss into the crook of Brendon’s neck. “How are you feeling after last night?” he asked with a distinct amount of trepidation.

Brendon didn’t want to talk about last night – about any of it, about Dallon or their affair or the way Ryan moaned his name right before he came… He decided to distract Ryan in the only way he knew how. “I’m feeling nicely fucked,” he smiled, pushing his ass back against the erection between Ryan’s legs. “Wonderfully satisfied.”

“I didn’t mean that, I meant-”

Brendon cut him off before Ryan could even finish his sentence. “I know what you meant,” he bit slowly, surprising even himself with the terseness of his voice. He felt Ryan tense behind him and decided to say sorry before he ruined the moment. “I’m fine,” he sighed. “I’ll get over it. I always do.”

It was too late. Ryan pulled away. “Do you want a cup of coffee?” he asked as he walked back through the sliding glass door.

“Sure,” Brendon called back, casting his eyes back over the lake.

The problem was that Brendon felt something when Ryan fucked him last night - something more
than he ever felt with any of his previous clients, maybe even something more than he felt with Dallon after they reignited their affair. He didn’t know what it was or how to react to it, but he knew it was something a little more complex than the regular hook-up.

He felt a warmth in his chest that he couldn’t describe. It reminded him of the feeling he always experienced when he and Jon made out – that unavoidable desire for more. With Jon, he always hankered after a much more physical relationship but with Ryan, he had that. Ryan was attractive and he was a confident, capable lover – Brendon wasn’t sure what more the man could offer him or what more he wanted, but the need burned uncomfortably inside his stomach.

With one more look at his surroundings, Brendon followed Ryan back into the house. From the outside, the place was reasonably unassuming – that’s to say it was completely hidden from the main road down a mile-long driveway that opened up to a stone and wood exterior nestled on the mountainside.

Inside, the house was nothing short of breathtaking – the vaulted ceilings and slate tiles gave the place a distinct mountain vibe and Brendon still couldn’t get over the view he’d woken up to. He’d only ever seen places like this in the movies and as Ryan put the coffee on to brew, Brendon allowed himself the fantasy of moving to a place like this permanently. His parents always told him that money wasn’t everything. Brendon agreed, but having money sure eased the troubles of being poor.

“So, is this your favorite place to come on vacation?” Brendon asked, taking a stool at the breakfast bar.

“I haven’t been up here in years. Once you live in Manhattan it’s hard to leave – there are too many parties to go to, too many drugs to take and cute girls and boys to meet. You kind of get stuck there.”

_Fucking tell me about it_, Brendon thought. His memories of Manhattan were a little different to Ryan’s – the city had never been kind to him. It was the dark, sleazy streets and the equally dark and sleazy inhabitants he remembered, not the glamorous parties and their good-looking clientele.

“My family used to come up here in the summer when we were kids - I spent various Thanksgivings and Christmases up here and I used to love this place when I was a boy. My dad bought this place for my stepmom when they got married. This was where they spent their honeymoon.”

Brendon felt himself smile – _Ryan brought him to the same house his dad and stepmother honeymooned in_. There was actually something pretty romantic about that…

“How did your mom die?”

“Cancer,” Ryan shrugged in reply. “It was quick. She was dead within six months of diagnosis. It’s weird; sometimes I feel like there’s certain parts of me that I can’t explain – the way my brain tells me to do things I know I shouldn’t, the fact I’ve always been selfish and egotistic and did things I knew at the time would hurt people. My inability to deal with pain,” he sniffed, “and hurt…”
Sometimes, I feel like if I’d known my real mom it might explain that part of me because I’m nothing like my fucking father.” Ryan laughed quietly and shook his head.

“You think that perhaps you took after your mom?”

“Maybe. I wouldn’t know. My father never talks about her and my siblings and I don’t get on well enough to share stories. I don’t even remember what her voice sounded like – or how she said my name. I don’t remember anything about her.” Ryan sniffed. He looked down at his fingers and picked his nails.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to upset you.”

Ryan brushed his apology off and poured Brendon a mug of strong, black coffee. After his first sip, Brendon said, “My dad’s in remission right now. When I was back in New York, I used to send him and my mom money so they could pay for his treatment. That five grand you paid me when we first met? That all went towards helping them with their bills, and they had no idea how I earned it but my mom was always quick to call me if they needed extra cash.”

Brendon took a breath. “Jon used to hate that I helped them out. He never got on too well with his own parents, especially not his dad and I don’t think he really understood why I couldn’t just sit back and let my father die. He always said they were homophobes who didn’t deserve it. I’m starting to wish I listened to him all those times.”

Ryan looked down into his mug. “You still love Jon, don’t you?”

“No,” Brendon snapped, before he really had time to consider his answer. “Why do you say that?”

Ryan rolled his eyes. “You talk about him a lot.”

Brendon paused to think about his reply. He guessed he’d always love Jon – not romantically and not actively, but he knew he’d always care about the guy. Brendon understood that he and Jon could never be a part of each other’s lives anymore but that didn’t mean he could just forget about the time they spent together. He tried to think of a way to explain it to Ryan.

“You know, sometimes, you just meet someone who leaves such a huge impression on you that you’ll never forget them, no matter what happens. Jon was that guy for me – he and I were together for almost seven years. He was my only friend during the entire time I was in Manhattan. He was a massive part of my life for so long and I’ll always love him – and think about him… and hope he’s doing okay.”

“He cheated on you.”

Brendon’s shoulders stiffened. “Yeah, well. I’d prefer for Jon to be happy with someone else than miserable with me.”

Ryan scratched the side of his face and blinked down into his coffee mug again. “That’s very selfless of you – you’re certainly a better man than I am. I don’t think I’d be showing so much sympathy towards someone who cheated on me.”

He knew what Ryan was trying to do and it wasn’t going to work. Ryan was trying to get Brendon to admit Jon meant nothing to him anymore, that he was an idiot for forgiving him for walking away from their relationship and wanting nothing more than for the guy to be happy. Whether it was through jealousy or the reminder he wasn’t Brendon’s sole priority, he wasn’t going to let Ryan tarnish his Jon’s name. He was already more than aware of the man’s flaws, but he knew he’d get no peace by wishing ill on him.
“Yeah, well, Jon’s already had enough shit happen to him in his life. He deserves to be happy. I’ve actually been thinking about him a lot these past couple of days.”

Brendon reflected back on his run-in with Marc Willis in the parking lot at the bar – that motherfucker said he wished he killed Jon that night and Brendon couldn’t even begin to think how much worse of a state he’d be in if his boyfriend had been murdered. He’d been meaning to call Jon and warn him about the man’s appearance in Las Vegas, but a lot happened since then and it slipped his mind.

Ryan looked up at the ceiling and Brendon could tell that the man was becoming irritated by their conversation. “Oh, please do elaborate,” he sighed, setting his mug down on the kitchen counter a little too heavy-handedly for Brendon not to notice his frustrations. What did Ryan want him to do? Ignore his past and the people in it as if Ryan was the first and only person he ever made a connection with?

“Not long before we broke up, Jon got attacked by a client,” he started, more to show Ryan that being a moody asshole wasn’t going to wash with him – it may have worked on William, Shane and the rest of the people in Ryan’s life, but he wasn’t going to let the man get away with bad behavior simply because he was rich. Needless to say, Ryan looked a little embarrassed at being called out.

“He almost died; this guy who did it, he took Jon to a hotel room and he beat him and raped him and almost killed him. Before he left, this guy took everything that Jon had – his keys, his wallet, all of the fee he promised him - and that’s what being an escort in New York is like for most of us.”

“I didn’t mean-”

“I was lucky. I schmoozed, I networked with clients, I dressed up nice and used to hang out in expensive bars so that rich men would want to fuck me but that wasn’t how it always was. I hated what Jon did to me, but I wouldn’t wish what happened to him on my worst enemy, Ryan. That was our reality – Jon would go out every night and I would just pray that he’d come back home in one piece. It’s not all fancy hotel rooms and passionate evenings spent with someone reasonably stable like you. Sometimes, you meet someone who really doesn’t care who he hurts, so long as he gets to fulfill all of his sick fantasies.”

Brendon took another sip of his coffee and glared at Ryan over the rim. He understood everyone felt pain and heartache in the same way and Ryan felt his fair share of it, but he couldn’t ignore the fact, that despite all of the man’s issues, he still got to overcome them in the comfort of an exclusive rehabilitation facility and a selection of multi-million dollar homes owned by his father.

Ryan reddened – he looked suitably put in his place. He turned his back on Brendon to rinse his mug out in the sink. “Can I ask you a personal question?” he asked over the spray of water.

Brendon shrugged. “Sure.”

Turning off the faucet, Ryan turned to face him. “How many men have you actually slept with, Brendon?”

Ryan’s question took him by surprise – he expected some arbitrary enquiry about Jon and their relationship together. Maybe asking about how the hell they managed to make it work for so long. Brendon himself didn’t even know the answer to that one.

“Does that really matter? You know what I do for a living.”

“I’m not asking you so I can judge you. I’m asking you because I’m genuinely interested in the
answer,” Ryan told him, crossing the kitchen to stand opposite Brendon on the other side of the breakfast bar.

Brendon lost count of the number of men he slept with long, long ago but if Ryan was asking how many men he let fuck him without paying then the answer was just one – Dallon. “I have no idea,” he admitted. “You lose count after a few dozen.”

“Well then, would it be too much to ask for you to take a wild guess?”

Brendon’s shoulders stiffened and his mind went blank – he didn’t like being interrogated. How many men he slept with had never been something he enjoyed keeping score of. He’d been doing it since he was eighteen – he’d forgotten more fucks than he could remember. “I’m sorry, Ryan. I really couldn’t say.”

Ryan frowned at him. “Well, you must have a ballpark number. Higher or lower than five hundred?”

“Higher,” Brendon scoffed. He may not have been able to give an exact figure, but he knew, without a doubt, he slept with way more than just five hundred men.

“One thousand?”

“Higher. Way higher.”

“Five thousand? Six? Surely not.”

Brendon nodded. “You’re probably getting close.”

He saw the shock flicker behind Ryan’s brown eyes but he didn’t react much more than that. Ryan evidently had a very innocent view of what being an escort actually entailed – he had no idea about what Brendon’s life had been like before they met. To him, fucking a whore was something illicit and exciting. It was a forbidden taboo and he was far enough removed from reality that he didn’t have to think about the consequences.

Ryan moved slowly around the breakfast bar, looking down at his feet until he stopped beside Brendon’s stool. He looked up at him and caught his gaze. Brendon watched him carefully – the intimacy he felt with the man the previous evening had all but disappeared. It had been all too easy to forget that Ryan was still just a client.

“And how many of those men made you come?”

“Only you, baby,” he smirked, as Ryan moved between his legs and gripped at his hips. It wasn’t strictly true, because sometimes things just happened, but Ryan didn’t need to know that – not when he was meant to be paying him ten grand.

“So, do you want me to fuck your darling Jon out of you as well or are you just here because you literally have no one else to turn to?” Ryan ran the tip of his finger under Brendon’s jaw. His lips hovered only a few inches above Brendon’s.

He raised his hand to loop his fingers around Ryan’s wrist and pulled him away. “Let’s not forget why we’re here, Ryan,” he said. “I’m an escort – you promised to pay me if I spent a weekend with you. Don’t turn this into something more than it is.”

Brendon had to tell himself the same thing.

“I still remember what you said to me when I took you back to my apartment that one time – I want
to be your fucking whore. Those were your exact words. Does that still stand; are you still my fucking whore, Brendon?"

Ryan’s face was so close to him, Brendon could feel his breath against his lips. He swallowed; despite himself, the intensity of Ryan’s words was turning him on.

“Yes. That was our agreement, wasn’t it?”

“But are you my fucking whore? No one else’s, but mine?” Ryan leaned closer, his lips brushing against Brendon’s jaw, up to his ear. “Say it,” he whispered.

Inside of his chest, Brendon’s heart was beating wildly out of sync and his stomach was twisting in protest of how Ryan was affecting him. He could feel the heat in his cheeks and the warmth between his legs more clearly than ever before.

“Always yours,” he breathed back, dropping his head backwards as Ryan sucked at his neck. His skin tingled under the man’s touch.

“Go and shower,” he said, pulling away from Brendon quickly and turning away. “Clean yourself up, then dry yourself off and when you’re done, let me know. Okay?”

Brendon gave a quiet nod of understanding and slipped from the stool at the breakfast bar. He slowly made his way back in the direction of the master bedroom’s en-suite and disappeared without another word.

As he stood under the powerful jets of the shower, Brendon wondered if he was making the right decision spending this time with Ryan Ross. The man was fresh out of rehab and he definitely had some learning to do. Brendon noticed that Ryan’s ego got in the way of a lot of their interactions, but he couldn’t really blame the guy - he spent his entire life having the less than perfect facets of his personality indulged by family, friends and various other people around him and for a man who’d probably never once been told ‘no’, Ryan Ross was simply a victim of circumstance.

Under the waterfall of the shower, Brendon’s cock got hard as he echoed Ryan’s words to himself. He realized he was already in too deep. He’d broken the one golden rule – never get emotionally involved with a client.

Once he scrubbed himself clean, Brendon dried himself off and returned to the bedroom to sit naked on the edge of the bed as per Ryan’s instructions. The anticipation was killing him. Ryan was going to fuck him again and the thought stirred the arousal all the way through his entire body. Ryan made him feel desirable. He made him feel attractive and worthy, as if he was the only man on earth who could satisfy him – and that was no easy task after years of constantly feeling like he was expendable to the thousands of men who got to him before Ryan had.

Five minutes passed before Ryan appeared in the doorway. Brendon was lying back on the pillow, half hard in anticipation and he could feel Ryan’s eyes roving over his body as he approached the bed. The mattress dipped as he sat down next to him.

“I’m sorry about your ex – about what happened to him,” Ryan said after a moment. The apology came a quite a surprise after their exchange in the kitchen – Brendon really didn’t want to talk about Jon right now. He wrapped his hand softly around his dick to try and maintain his erection. “No one deserves something like that. I don’t want you to think I’m some heartless, rich prick. I’m really trying to understand people better – I’m trying to understand myself better and I enjoy spending time with you, Brendon. Not just the sex – even though the sex is great... I enjoy having you around,” he said, his hand stroking down Brendon’s chest and settling gently just below his belly button.
“I want you to tell me if I slip up,” he continued. “If I say things that upset you, I want to know. I use words as a defense mechanism because I never learned to deal with criticism. When I was a kid, I always had people around me who could never say no to me and now,” he faltered, looking down into his lap, “I’m in the real world and I don’t know how to cope. I am just so scared of being myself.”

“So is everyone else, Ryan,” Brendon told him softly, pulling him down to lie next to him on the mattress. “We’re not all that different you and I.” Ryan’s lips pressed against his shoulder and then along his collarbone. Brendon felt the shiver run through him as Ryan’s palm closed around his cock.

“I’ve never really felt anything for anyone before, but it makes me feel good to know that you feel good,” he said, pressing another gentle kiss against Brendon’s shoulder. “And I’ve never felt that with anyone else. Teach me what to do,” he breathed. “Show me what you need.”

Brendon’s voice got stuck in his throat. The thought of letting Ryan pleasure him in that way made his mouth dry. In the past, Ryan had given him several incredible orgasms but showing Ryan what turned him on, sharing his fantasies like that, was letting down another wall in front of him and Brendon’s defenses were already weak enough.

Ryan’s hand squeezed around Brendon’s cock and moved slowly up and down until he was hard again. Brendon lay there with his eyes closed, concentrating hard on the feeling that shot through his stomach. With his teeth, Ryan bit gentle marks into his shoulder as he worked. He was at Ryan’s mercy – and Brendon fucking loved it.

“Tell me, baby. What is it you want?”

Brendon’s back arched up off the mattress as Ryan’s thumb swiped at the head of his cock. What did he want?

“Your fingers – inside me. One at first – and slowly, with lots of lube,” he sighed, cracking his eyes as he felt the warmth of Ryan’s body disappear from the bed as he left to grab the bottle of lubricant from the dresser. Brendon watched through his hands as Ryan slicked up his fingers and then wrapped them back around his dick - the sound as he jerked him was wet and hot. Ryan’s hand palmed over his balls.

Brendon let his knees fall apart and he sighed as he felt Ryan’s digits press between his legs and run between his cheeks. His fingertips teased his asshole and then pulled away. Brendon was already hard and willing enough to take Ryan’s cock, but the man sat fully clothed between his legs; he poured cold lube straight from the bottle between his ass cheeks and Brendon waited, anxious to feel Ryan inside him.

It turned out Ryan Ross was a little tease; he tormented Brendon with feather light fingers all over his body – down his ribs and across his chest, over his stomach and up his thighs. Ryan didn’t touch his dick, even though Brendon wanted him too. He thrust his hips up eagerly, desperate for the man to pay more attention to his straining erection.

Another few moments passed until Ryan accommodated him. His hand rubbed down the shaft of his dick, around his balls for a couple of seconds and then between his legs to his hole. Gently, with just the tip of his middle finger, Ryan pushed inside him to his first knuckle, flexing slightly to open him up a little more. Brendon moaned in gratitude – he didn’t want Ryan to stop with just the tip and he knew he said he wanted it slow, but this was almost unbearable. The anticipation was burning all over his body.
Ryan pulled his finger out and circled around his asshole. When he pressed into him again, he pushed all the way in, fucking Brendon slowly with his middle finger. This was the type of sex his parents claimed was a sin. Brendon couldn’t see their reasoning behind it when he felt Ryan lean closer to his cock, his breath hot against his skin.

“You want another?” Ryan asked after a moment.

Brendon nodded feverishly. Oh, fuck, did he want it…

Ryan pulled his hand back and added his index finger on the way back in. He pushed into him slowly, the stretch burning as he sunk inside him. One of Ryan’s long fingers was not much of a feat for Brendon – he could take really big dicks, so long as he had enough preparation – but two was a nice stretch, the perfect balance between pleasure and pain. Ryan lubed him up enough that it didn’t hurt too much going in and he fucked him gently as his other hand wrapped around his dick and started to jerk him off in time with the thrusts of his wrist.

Brendon heard Ryan hack saliva from his mouth and looked down between his legs to see the man rubbing it in for extra lubrication. In that one short second, Brendon couldn’t believe this was happening. He was holed away with Ryan Ross, opening himself up in front of someone for the first time in years. Outside the perimeter of the Ross family’s lakeside cabin, Brendon’s life was in ruins but in bed with Ryan, everything faded into the background. Right here, right now – this was the stuff dreams were made of. He felt Ryan’s fingertips nudge against his prostate and gripped at the sheets on the bed with a gasp – this was rare; someone spending enough time pleasing him that Brendon had a chance to enjoy it.

Obviously pleased at the reaction his small movement received, Ryan repeated it, his fingers pressing up against his prostate again, massaging that spot repeatedly until Brendon twisted on the mattress with a guttural groan. Ryan could make him come in seconds if he continued those movements.

Two fingers slowly turned into three and Brendon relished the stretch, shamelessly rolling his hips against the slow and steady pressure inside him each time Ryan moved his hand. Brendon’s senses were on fire, each inch of his skin felt like it was burning with electricity, the hair on his arms stood up on end as Ryan fingered him. Brendon was suddenly aware of Ryan’s hot breath between his legs again. He felt the man suck at the tender flesh on his inner thigh and felt a full body shiver run down his spine. When he opened his eyes again, he saw Ryan’s face between his legs, watching his hole open to accommodate the man’s fingers.

“You’re so sexy like this,” Ryan breathed against his leg, his tongue slipping out between his lips to lick the bruise he just made. “Seeing you so wet and hard and stretched out is such a turn on.” Ryan curled his fingers up again and Brendon let out a desperate moan. He felt his entire body clamp up as Ryan rubbed at his prostate. Ryan held him there on the edge for another five minutes.

“Please,” he moaned when he couldn’t handle it anymore. “I’m ready.” Brendon wanted to be filled up with something bigger – another finger or Ryan’s hard cock. He made a grab between the man’s legs and brushed his fingers against the material of his slacks. Brendon thumbed over the wet patch.

“Not yet,” Ryan hushed, gently knocking Brendon’s hand away. He groaned in frustration when the man pulled his fingers out of him and he felt his balls tighten as he tried to hold back his orgasm. Brendon watched as Ryan settled down between his legs and spread his cheeks apart with both hands. He was burning. Brendon was clenching his entire body as tight as possible - he’d even forgotten to breathe but eventually, to Brendon’s total relief, Ryan traced the tip of his tongue in soft circles around his hole.

Ryan was rimming him again and it felt simply divine. He couldn’t help the quiet plea that fell from
his lips when Ryan’s tongue pushed slowly inside of him – in and out, in and out - fucking him until Brendon was writhing on top of the mattress. He pulled back, swapped his tongue for his fingers again and held his mouth teasingly over Brendon’s leaking cock. *Fuck,* if Ryan Ross sucked him off…

“Tell me what you want, angel.”

*Angel.* Brendon’s concentration scuttled away from the moment. Suddenly, he was back in that motel room watching Dallon break apart.

“Your mouth,” he choked. “Please…”

“My mouth where?”

Brendon moaned in frustration, trying desperately hard to push his brother-in-law from his mind and concentrate solely on the man who was pleasuring him. He wrapped his hand around his dick and jerked his erection for a couple of seconds. Ryan’s fingers fucked into him roughly. Brendon’s muscles melted under his skin.

“My mouth *where,* Brendon?” Ryan repeated, slower this time, his voice thick.

“Suck my cock, Ryan, *please.* God, I want to feel it…”

Right up until the very last second, Brendon thought Ryan was going to shut him down. His tongue licked around his asshole again and up his taint and as Brendon felt the man’s hot breath against his skin, he opened his eyes to watch as Ryan pressed slow, dry kisses along the shaft of his dick. He strained with the effort to lay still, to be a gentleman and resist just pushing his hand into the back of Ryan’s hair and directing him to the head of his cock.

As Ryan mouthed at Brendon’s erection, he flexed his fingers inside him. They immediately located his prostate and pressed up into it the exact same second Ryan’s lips closed around the head of Brendon’s dick, his pointer finger and thumb wrapped tight around its base.

This was just some fantasy – this couldn’t be *real.* He looked down to watch Ryan sucking him off, his hair brushed out of his eyes, his eyes closed, dark lashes fanned over pale skin – wet, pink lips wrapped around the flushed head of Brendon’s cock. Ryan was beautiful and this was *so* much more than either of them was prepared to admit.

Brendon blinked up at the ceiling and felt his body twitch as Ryan sucked hard at the tip of his dick, all the while pressing his fingers relentlessly into his prostate - being on the receiving end of them both was almost unbearable. He felt his arousal surge into his stomach pushing up into his chest and then his heavy limbs as he tried to hold back his orgasm.

Ryan Ross looked good with a cock in his mouth – he kept the blowjob simple and Brendon figured the dude probably wasn’t a practiced dicksucker, nonetheless, the warmth was bubbling inside him and Ryan continued to gently suck at the head without too much effort to properly take Brendon all the way into his mouth. Brendon wanted it but he wasn’t going to push his luck – Ryan *Ross* had his lips around his cock and his fingers in his ass. There were people out there who would *kill* to be in his position. It felt good to finally be treated like he was worthy of pleasure.

“I’m so close, Ryan,” he warned.

Ryan pulled away, licking his lips before he spoke. “You set the pace, baby.”

Brendon’s hand closed around his hard dick and he jerked himself off roughly. Between his legs,
Ryan’s long fingers were still buried deep inside his ass, pushed all the way in to the knuckle and curled up to rub his prostate. The pressure was absolutely maddening.

Brendon tensed as his pleasure peaked. He felt his jaw go slack and his muscles vibrate through his body – and then Ryan helped him over the edge. He leaned forward and lapped his tongue over the head of Brendon’s cock, licking up precome and all it took was a split second of that visual before Brendon had to push Ryan away as he came, spilling his load over his stomach and hand, his asshole tightening around Ryan’s fingers as they milked his prostate.

Brendon’s orgasm seemed to buzz through him forever. He groaned and twisted on the mattress, squeezing the last of his come out of himself with a cry. Ryan’s fingers pulled out and he felt the scratch of the man’s nails across his abs, dragging through the come that was drying there.

He pulled Ryan down against his side and their lips connected in a kiss. That orgasm had been something else – Brendon could already feel himself giving into a satisfied slumber. He caught his breath, his dick still twitching from the aftershocks of his climax.

“Let me help you out,” he mumbled, turning onto his side and unzipping Ryan’s slacks. “Payback for that wonderful performance,” he managed to smile breathlessly.

Ryan shook his head and his lips pulled up at the corners. He winked at him and Brendon felt his stomach flutter – probably just the after-effects of such wonderful sex. That’s what Brendon told himself, anyway. “Go and clean yourself off first. You have all weekend to pay me back.”

All that Brendon really wanted to do was turn over and fall asleep – he was sure he’d be out for hours after that orgasm - but he struggled up from the mattress and walked towards the bathroom, stopping to press a grateful kiss against Ryan’s cheek as he left the bedroom. His legs were still shaky and he could definitely get used to that sort of treatment if he and Ryan were going to hang out with each other any longer.

Once in the en-suite, he locked the door and rinsed his face with cold water. He looked at his reflection and wondered what it was that Ryan saw in him. He wondered if they’d ever stand a chance at being anything more than convenient fuck buddies.

As he wiped the come from his stomach with a washcloth, Brendon noticed a cluster of red scratch marks on his side. He raised his arm over his head to get a better look and there, reflected back at him in the mirror, were two unmistakable initials.

RR.

Brendon traced over them, scratching the letters back into his skin before they faded.
As their first full day in Tahoe together drew to an end, Ryan was reasonably flattered when Brendon offered to cook him dinner – it wasn’t in his job description to play chef, but as he watched him pottering around in the kitchen, Ryan couldn’t help himself from fantasizing about how a more permanent relationship with Brendon would feel. *Something quite a lot like this,* he thought to himself. *Pretty close to perfect.*

The result of Brendon’s cooking was one of the worst meals Ryan ever had – overdone strip steak and undercooked baked potatoes. As Ryan pushed the dinner around his plate and wondered how much he’d have to eat to not appear rude, Brendon bit back a laugh from across the table and dropped his knife and fork on the plate.

“I can tell you don’t like it,” he said. “You don’t have to eat it, you know.”

Ryan looked up at him and wiped the corner of his mouth with a napkin. He didn’t quite know how the guy managed to fuck up baked potatoes, but he had – Ryan was too polite to point out the boy’s mistakes after he tried so hard to cook a meal for the two of them. He sawed into the steak with his knife – everything on his plate was hard and tasteless. Brendon Urie certainly wouldn’t cut it as a master chef.

“No, no. It’s fine – I just don’t eat red meat very often, that’s all,” he lied, looking away from Brendon’s bemused expression to hide his own smile.

“Ryan, even I know it’s a shitty meal and I am hardly a culinary expert. I’m sorry for fucking it up – there’s still crackers and cheese in the refrigerator. We won’t starve.”

Ryan shoveled a forkful of steak into his mouth and chewed – and he chewed and he chewed.

Brendon laughed at him and shook his head. “You don’t have to eat that to appease me. I don’t get offended when a guy doesn’t swallow.”

Ryan spat the food into his napkin and folded it up on the plate. He found it so difficult to battle the grin off his face when he was around Brendon. “You’re right; my jaw was starting to ache.”

“Welcome to my world,” Brendon said with a roll of his eyes and a smile as he got up from the table and cleared their plates. This was comfortable, hanging out like friends, playful teasing and soft flirtation. Ryan felt content for the first time in months. Having Brendon around was beginning to feel like normality.

They fucked, of course and Ryan spilled his load inside the condom after successfully keeping Brendon on edge for over an hour. He loved how pliable the man became after he climaxed. The boy draped his heavy limbs over Ryan’s chest and lay like a dead weight against his side – Brendon was loose and sweaty and he smelled like Ryan.

“Why don’t we play a game?” Brendon mumbled, wet lips moving against Ryan’s shoulder. “I’ve been thinking we should get to know each other a little better – tonight, you can ask me anything you want and I have to answer honestly, but you have to promise to do the same thing when I begin to ask you questions.”

*Sure thing,* Ryan thought. *Bring it on.*

This was *good* – Brendon was finally opening up to him and better still, *he’d* been the one to suggest.
it. Ryan had always been too nervous to suggest anything similar because, despite his feelings for the boy, he was still there as Ryan’s whore. He didn’t know how much he could get away with asking.

Ryan didn’t dwell on the fact that come tomorrow Brendon would probably be asking some intrusive questions of his own – all he cared about was discovering the small facets of Brendon’s life and personality he so far had kept hidden – why was he really here, was he really through with his useless brother-in-law and how would he take it if their relationship ever got leaked to the press?

He decided to play it cool and stick to the subject of sex – the heavy questions could wait. Plus, he thought, it couldn’t hurt finding out what Brendon’s preferences were… “What’s your favorite position?” he asked first.

Brendon hadn’t taken long to answer. “I like being on top. I love riding dick – especially yours, because it’s so thick,” he said, groping Ryan’s flaccid cock under the covers. He was still sticky with his own come after he removed the condom. “I really like doggy-style too; that’s the best when I’m in need of a really good, hard fuck.”

Brendon still talked like a whore. The boy definitely had no shame when it came to expressing himself sexually. Brendon’s filthy mouth turned Ryan on. He rolled onto his side to watch him – he was one lucky son of a bitch.

“What’s your biggest turn on? I mean, what does a guy like me have to do to make you hard?”

The boy took a little longer to consider Ryan’s second question, but after a moment, he turned his head to face him and offered Ryan a lazy smile. “This morning was fun; I loved watching you suck my cock. That was hot as fuck.”

It had been hot as fuck for Ryan too – he hadn’t known what had come over him that morning to make him go down on Brendon so willingly, but Brendon looked irresistible writhing underneath him and his dick looked so tempting, hard and leaking between his legs. The sensation of having a cock in his mouth for the first time since he sucked Marc Willis off as a teenager had been a strange one and he knew he had nothing on Brendon’s fellatio skills, but he tried – and he made Brendon come – and that was the main thing.

It surprised Ryan how much he enjoyed himself and how hard performing the act made him. He’d definitely give it another shot – especially if Brendon’s payback performance a little earlier had been anything to go by…

“So, you’d like me to do that again sometime?”

“Fuck, dude,” Brendon laughed, shaking his head. “Who wouldn’t? You looked hot as hell down there – you rimmed me and you milked my prostate like a pro. How many times have you done that before, huh?”

Ryan reddened – back in his teenage years, he would’ve lied to make himself sound more experienced than he actually was but he doubted that would get him anywhere with Brendon. “That was actually the first time I ever, uh… made someone come like that.”

“Well, you made me feel like I was really worth the effort. Perhaps you could do with a little practice at the dick sucking, but all in all, you were awesome.” Brendon looked him dead in the eye and smiled. “You made me come harder than anyone else ever has before, Ryan.”

He felt the compliment rush to his head. Brendon admitted to sleeping with close to five thousand men earlier on and he just told Ryan he was his favorite screw of them all – he guessed that was
something to be proud of. He might not be able to offer Brendon anything more than money and good orgasms but it was certainly something.

“What about Jon and Dallon? You slept with them for free; they must’ve been pretty special to you.”

Ryan didn’t know why he was bringing up those two characters from Brendon’s past. He guessed it was a sick fascination he had with trying to piece together Brendon’s life – everything that made him tick, the things he thought about at night... Brendon looked away from him and blinked up at the ceiling. Ryan noticed the frown that appeared on his face – he probably overstepped the mark with that question. The bedroom was weighted with silence.

After a moment, Brendon sighed. “I guess Dallon was what you’d call my sexual awakening. He was the guy who made me realize I was gay. I was fourteen when he started dating my sister and I fell in love with him; I thought he was the most handsome man I ever met.” The boy exhaled slowly. “We became pretty close; we used to hang out a lot which pissed my sister off and he used to do little things all the time that made me wonder if he felt the same way about me as I did about him. Dallon was a Mormon missionary from Utah, by the way,” he smiled, glancing over at Ryan.

“Wow, this story keeps getting more and more interesting. Tell me more,” he grinned. This time, Ryan was genuinely interested in what Brendon had to say about his exes. They were both a part of him after all and Ryan wanted to explore all of that. No holds barred.

“Well... I had this stupid crush on him for the longest time, but obviously, I couldn’t tell anyone. I was so worried about my family finding out and about the possibility of him rejecting me if I said anything to him, I just kept it secret for like, two years. I was sixteen when we slept together for the first time – he was twenty-two and still a virgin, so needless to say the sex wasn’t great, but he was slow and gentle; he fucked me bareback and came in my ass.”

Ryan stomach fluttered – now that was hot as fuck. He wanted bareback sex with Brendon. He wanted Brendon to trust him that much that he’d allow him to come inside him.

“We carried on for about a year and a half before he asked my sister to marry him. Dallon broke my heart. I don’t know why I even gave him another chance after that… and as for Jon,” he continued with a sigh. “Fuck... I don’t even know where to start with that one.”

“How did the two of you meet?”

“We shared the same pitch for a while – he was with somebody else at the time but I just thought he was so cool and so funny. This guy Jon was dating...” Brendon told him, looking down at the space between them on the mattress. “Fuck, I hated him – he’d been pimping Jon out since he was about fourteen or fifteen. He was, and undoubtedly still is, a total piece of shit, but Jon and I fell for each other and he ended up leaving his boyfriend for me and we moved in together not long after.”

“He must’ve really liked you,” Ryan added, brushing his fingers down Brendon’s shoulder. "He must've satisfied you more than Dallon."

Brendon fell silent for a moment. “Jon and I never slept together. We never fucked or made love, we never did anything more than kiss – maybe the odd grope every now and then, but... I was lucky when Jon would even let me touch him.”

Ryan blinked in surprise. Brendon had been in a relationship for over six years and had never once been intimate with his partner? Ryan couldn’t fathom that. “You and Jon never slept together? Why? How did that even work?”
The boy smiled sadly. “Well, it didn’t work, did it?” He was quiet for a moment before he spoke up again. “I think that’s why we grew to dislike being together so much. I wanted it and he didn’t. I was able to differentiate between the sex I had for money and the sex we could’ve had for pleasure and I don’t think he could. I think it all bled together for him.”

Ryan thought back to what Brendon told him earlier that morning – about Jon getting attacked by a client and left for dead in a hotel room in Manhattan. Brendon’s ex-boyfriend was a drug-addict, a rape victim and he was evidently more broken than Ryan first thought. The boy evidently had a type.

He hadn’t ever expected to feel sympathy for the man Brendon had once been in love with and if he hadn’t before, he certainly did now. Absolutely no one deserved that kind of life - unable to enjoy pleasure because he’d been hurt so much in the past. He’d been naïve not to consider that Brendon and his ex and thousands of others like them were constantly putting their lives at risk because they had no other way to pay their bills.

Brendon had been broken so many times before but he always got back on his feet. Ryan admired that fighting spirit. It would’ve been easy to mindlessly hate Brendon’s exes based purely on the fact they shared something more with the boy than he had, but Ryan was trying; he was trying so hard to become a good person.

What would Dr. Stump do? he asked himself. Patrick would have the right words. What was it? Treat people better than the way the world’s treated you? He pulled Brendon against him and smoothed down the back of his hair.

“I can help him out if you want me to. I can get some money wired to Jon if it would make you feel a little better.”

Brendon snorted but he didn’t pull away from Ryan’s embrace. Instead, he turned into him, burying his face against Ryan’s chest. “You’re cute, but you have no idea how the real world works, Ryan. You think that wouldn’t raise a million questions about how we know each other?” Brendon looped his arm around Ryan’s middle. Ryan could feel his breath, soft against his skin.
“I think it’d be obvious to him how we know each other. Do you really not want him finding out that much that you’d rather not help him out?”

Brendon exhaled a slow, heavy breath. “Let’s just stick to what we both agreed this would be at the start, shall we? I don’t expect you to support my ex-boyfriend for any reason – and anyway, he’d never accept money from someone like you.”

Ryan stayed quiet for a moment. “Well,” he sighed, as he felt Brendon’s body relax in his arms. “My offer still stands. Besides, what else have I got to offer anyone but money?”

Brendon didn’t answer. He was already asleep.

* *

Ryan awoke slowly the following morning, dozing in and out of sleep for half an hour before he first opened his eyes. It was still early and the sun just finished poking up over the mountains that framed the lake - it truly was a thing of beauty. Brendon was still sleeping next to him.

Ryan turned onto his side to watch the boy. It felt weird watching somebody sleep, looking so closely at them without their knowledge and noticing the softness of their features when they were unaware of themselves. Brendon was so handsome. He was truly wasted as an escort; he should’ve become a model because he certainly had the looks and the body for it but Ryan fucked enough models in his time to know that the majority of them were shallow and vapid, with absolutely nothing to say for themselves, nothing like Brendon. He could’ve sat and listened to Brendon talk all night.

Tomorrow their time together was going to come to an end and Ryan was dreading it. They hadn’t discussed if or when Brendon was going to leave but Ryan was going to try his damnedest to convince the man to stay. He let his gaze fall over the boy lying beside him - his shoulders relaxed, his body loose, almost melted against the mattress. Ryan watched Brendon’s eyes as they moved behind his lids and wondered what he was dreaming about.

He wanted to see inside Brendon’s head. He wanted him to share all of his crazy dreams. He wanted to know what Brendon thought about when their conversations died down and he disappeared into a daydream – Ryan didn’t care how ugly it got, he fucking wanted it. He’d never been more certain about anything before in his life – this was what he needed. This.

Brendon stirred beside him, stretching his limbs and arching his body up off the bed like a feline. He blinked awake, eyes squinting against the sunlight flooding the bedroom. Ryan watched Brendon smile at him sleepily, before turning his face to the pillow and closing his eyes again. He hummed quietly and wet his lips. “Good morning,” he yawned. “How long were you watching me sleep?”

Ryan laughed and reached his hand out to brush at Brendon’s hip. “Only like, a couple of hours,” he teased, brushing Brendon’s bed hair away from his eyes with a smile.

Yes, this was what he wanted.

The boy scoffed and shook his head, laughing against the pillow. “Creep,” he smirked, his eyes still closed.

Ryan leaned forward to peck his nose and the kiss quickly turned into something more – a few moments worth of dry-mouthed morning kisses gave way to a serious make-out. By the time Ryan pulled away, both of them were hard.

“D’you wanna hop on top, baby?” he mumbled against the man’s jaw, remembering their conversation as they laid together last night. Ryan rolled onto his back, pulling Brendon on top of
him – the boy was still wet between his ass cheeks from the previous evening; all it took was a
couple of minutes of preparation before he was slowly lowering himself down on Ryan’s dick.
Neither of them lasted long – within ten minutes they both reached climax and Ryan was watching
as Brendon hobbled towards the en-suite for a shower.

He struggled from the bed and decided he’d make a start on breakfast. He wasn’t much of a cook,
but he was certain he could beat Brendon’s abysmal attempt at steak and potatoes so he walked
towards the kitchen and pulled out the bacon and eggs.

While Brendon was in the shower, Ryan received a phone call. His cellphone had been off since
they left Las Vegas and when the landline rang that morning, Ryan let it ring fourteen times before
he decided to pick up – he didn’t want to talk to anyone, least of all, to either of the only two people
who’d be calling him at this time in the morning – his father or his PA.

It was William calling to remind him that George’s sixtieth birthday was fast approaching and his
presence was requested for a family get together at their house in Manhattan in two week’s time.

“What’s up? George too busy to call me himself to invite me to his own birthday party?” Ryan
asked, irritated his father was palming off such duties to William – but it didn’t surprise him; his
father had always been that way. Anything that concerned Ryan that could be dealt with by someone
else was A-OK in George Ross’s book.

“He’s on vacation with Pamela – they left for Saint-Tropez yesterday morning.”

Ryan rolled his eyes so hard in his sockets his vision blurred. It was clear where his father’s priorities
lay.

“It’s his sixtieth, Ryan,” William said with a sigh. “He wants you there. He said he’d make it a
booze-free birthday if it makes you feel any more comfortable.”

Jesus fucking Christ… Ryan rubbed at his temples. He could just imagine it now – his mother and
father tiptoeing around their alcoholic, drug-addicted son, the rest of the guests pissed they couldn’t
enjoy a drink because Ryan didn’t know how to say no.

“Who else is going?”

“Just your family. Your father wants to keep it small for your sake. He said he didn’t want to throw
you in at the deep end quite yet by throwing a massive rager. He still remembers your performance at
Pamela’s birthday a few months back.”

“Well, it sounds as if I’ll need a drink just to make it through the day.” How the hell was he going to
manage being around his family again after so long? “Tell him it’s fine. I’m sure I can handle myself
around a couple bottles of champagne – I don’t need special treatment. I’ll be there. Tell him I hope
he enjoys his vacation,” he added, unable to keep the sarcasm out of his voice.

William’s voice was bright. “I’ll be sure to pass on your message.” After a moment, William
asked, “So... how’s your friend?”

“He’s fine,” Ryan answered cautiously. “We’re getting along great – I really hope Shane hasn’t been
spreading rumors about him though.”

“Oh, you know Shane – all talk, no action. So, do I need to warn your father you’ll be bringing a
guest?”

Ryan looked towards the bathroom and listened to the drum of water against the wall. Brendon
would never go for it – not in a million years. The boy was meant to be leaving the following morning; their forty-eight hours together was drawing to a close and Ryan, despite how much he enjoyed Brendon’s company, really wasn’t ready to introduce his family to the hooker he’d been fucking.

“No,” he sighed. “That won’t be necessary.”

“Oh, well, that’s a shame. I’m sure he’d get along great with the family.”

“You know, for a straight man, you sure are a fucking bitch on occasions,” Ryan told him.

“Well, for a man in line to inherit a billion dollar fortune, you sure are lacking a whole lotta sense,” William bit.

Yeah, as if Ryan never heard that one before – all dollars, no sense, ha ha. He rolled his eyes. “I’ll be there for my father’s birthday. I’m not sure what Brendon’s plans are after tomorrow, but... You don’t need to worry about me.”

“I know,” his PA sighed, “but I do – and so does everyone else. I just don’t want to see you taken advantage of, that’s all. Your father’s looking forward to seeing you; he told me to send you his best regards and hopes you're looking after yourself.”

Yeah, that’s why he hasn’t called – too busy to take five minutes out of his day to call and find out how his son was managing after leaving rehab. Instead, the fucker swanned off to Europe on vacation. George Ross: hardly a likely contender for Father of the Year.

The longer Ryan spent at the family cabin, the more obvious it became to him why he looked back on his vacations in Tahoe with such fond memories – they were the only occasions where Ryan got to spend any quality time with his father.

George Ross had always been obsessed with his job. His friends and colleagues always called George an overachiever – his family called him a workhorse. Ryan lost track of the amount of little league baseball games and birthday parties his father missed out on, simply because he couldn’t tear himself away from his work.

During Ryan’s childhood, George had been a slave to the empire he created, but he’d always sworn his family was the driving force behind his success. Everything he did, he did it for them – every missed birthday and forgotten piano recital, George Ross always had his kids’ best interests at heart.

The only way to enjoy anything in life is to earn it first, his father used to constantly tell Ryan and his siblings before he’d disappear off to the city for the week, only to return late on Friday evening drained of all energy and enthusiasm for his over-excited, attention-starved children – but of course, George worked to provide for his family, he worked so he’d be able to proudly send each of his children off to the most prestigious schools in the state of New York and definitely not because he was selfish and greedy and materialistic.

Ryan had never been too bothered by his father’s absence when he was a child and even less so when he was a teenager – all the more time to take drugs and get fucked up. His father provided for him and that was all he ever really cared about – anything Ryan wanted, Ryan got; all he had to do was pick up the phone and ask and usually, his father delivered.

That was an example of the love Ryan grew up on. Possessions took the place of his father’s role in his life. Love and affection was shown to him by how expensive his birthday gift was or how much his father spent on him as an apology for going on vacation without him.
On the rare occasion George would spend any amount of quality time with his children, the Ross family would enjoy trips up to Tahoe during the summer months and often for winter holidays. Ryan supposed the reason he held such warm memories of those vacations was because it was the only time his father actually relaxed. It was the only time Pamela didn’t constantly have to remind George to turn his pager off or take a break from the computer.

In Tahoe, George Ross became the father Ryan always wanted and for brief weeks at a time, he and his siblings were showered with love and attention by the man who considered his greatest creation to be his business, rather than his children.

Ryan had been brought up to think money was the most important thing in the world – and that it could get him anything if he had enough of it. During his time in rehab, Ryan realized if all anyone is worth when they die is the amount of green paper they have locked in a safe then they must’ve lead a pretty disappointing life.

Since meeting Brendon, Ryan realized personal wealth was more than money in a bank and the properties his family owned. It was acceptance and tolerance of someone other than yourself. It was the understanding perfection didn’t exist and not caring to look for it after you found someone who was pretty damn close. Ryan had all the money he could ever need, but there were people out there living on the streets who were richer than he was.

As his second night with Brendon drew to a close, Ryan began to wonder how he’d cope when the boy left to pick up the pieces of his own shitstorm of a life. They hadn’t discussed Brendon’s departure, but it had been hanging over his head like a raincloud all day.

They lay together on the deck of the balcony, on top of dozens of cushions and blankets collected from the spare bedrooms. The night was cool, but with the heat of Brendon’s naked body draped across Ryan’s chest, he felt comfortable and content. He was sexually satisfied and relaxed – but the threat of Brendon’s parting was niggling at the back of his head. Two days was simply not enough time to spend with the boy and as the stars shone above them and the crickets chirped around them, Ryan pulled the boy closer against him and kissed the top of his head.

He was happy and Brendon was the sole root of that – the longer they spent together, the harder Ryan found it to discover things he didn’t like about the man. Brendon’s presence in his life these past couple of days pulled Ryan from the pits of his despair. He didn’t want the boy to leave. He really didn’t want the boy to leave.

“It’s so beautiful out here, Ryan,” Brendon sighed after a while. “Goddamn, I could lay out here forever.”

We can, Ryan chimed to himself. We don’t have to go anywhere.

“The stars are amazing, huh?” Ryan added, gazing up at the blanket of navy blue above them.

Brendon hummed in agreement. “They make you feel so insignificant, don’t they? As if nothing really matters because we’re just two guys on a planet of billions, floating in an immeasurable galaxy for such a tiny, tiny fragment of time. Amazing, really.”

Brendon sounded fucking high. Ryan recalled getting philosophical like that with Gabe when they smoked hash together.

“And to think, that despite that we found each other.” Ryan smiled to himself. The stars were shining
“brightly - what was the line again? *I wish I may, I wish I might, have the wish I wish tonight.* “I don’t want you to leave tomorrow,” he said, pressing a lingering kiss against Brendon’s head.

“Neither do I.”

“So stay.”

The following sigh resonated deep and heavy from Brendon’s chest. “I can’t ignore Dallon forever.”

*You can, Ryan* wanted to tell him. *You can and you should. Forget about him. You’re so much better than he is.* “Is he the only reason you feel you have to leave?”

“I guess…”

“Then stay. Until the end of the week, at least.” He paused. Brendon didn’t answer. “Needless to say I’ll pay you appropriately. Fifty grand for the week, how does that sound?”

Brendon raised his head from Ryan’s chest and looked at him. His eyes were dark in the moonlight - huge and unblinking – two beautiful black orbs Ryan felt himself being sucked deeper inside every time Brendon gazed his way. “You, Mr. Ross, have more money than sense,” he said, settling back down on Ryan’s chest.

“So, is that a yes,” he smiled, squeezing Brendon’s shoulders.

The boy laughed, his nails scratching idly at Ryan’s side. “That’s a yes,” he said, pressing a kiss against his chest. "I'll stay for another week, but then I'm going to have to go back to Vegas.” Ryan’s heart jumped into his throat - another *seven* days! Brendon agreed to stay for the week.

Ryan was too scared to admit it, but since they arrived in Lake Tahoe, his more than obvious attraction towards Brendon weaseled its way to the forefront of everything he did – and it wasn’t just physical attraction either. Brendon was damned near perfect in every single aspect – apart from the fact his occupation ran the risk of ruining any amount of credibility their future relationship held in the eyes of his friends and family. It was odd, the process of caring about someone else over himself, of consciously making an effort to make Brendon come, to make him smile and laugh and settle back against him as they slept…

Ryan couldn’t understand it. He never felt this way before. The dizzy euphoria he used to get when on coke was the only thing he could compare it to – but this didn’t fade. The comfort of falling asleep next to Brendon was beaten only by waking up beside him and being around that man for the past couple of days made Ryan seriously reevaluate his priorities.

Drugs had never done anything to fill that empty hole Ryan always felt inside him; the hole had just grown bigger and bigger the older he got - the unaddressed grief at the death of a woman he couldn’t remember, his absent father and shallow friends and the man who raped him at fifteen. Each of those things added another chink in his armor and through his early twenties, he’d grown to think the pain was irreversible. The longer he spent in the company of Brendon Urie, the more Ryan realized how wrong he’d been.

Ryan wanted to experience what he always heard people talking about, the ultimate treasure that even his father’s fortune couldn’t buy. Ryan wanted to experience love – he heard the songs and seen the movies for years and he never truly understood it. With Brendon, maybe, just *maybe* he was beginning to understand what all the fuss was about – because he liked Brendon. He really, really liked him.

Brendon was unknowingly helping Ryan overcome all the hurdles he faced before going into rehab.
He was slowly learning how to accept what happened in the past and that he wasn’t the only person who ever experienced pain and suffering. He wasn’t the first person in the world who wanted to die. There were millions of them out there and Brendon was one of them. Sadness melts. Grief fades.

Marc Willis may have taken everything he had when he was a teenager, but Ryan didn’t want to give him any more as an adult. That shame he always felt should’ve been placed on Marc’s shoulders years before, looped around his neck until he suffocated. That man should’ve been made to face his atrocities a decade ago – but he got away with it. Marc carried on thinking he was indestructible while Ryan had been forced to carry around the weight of the man's actions on his shoulders by himself.

Suddenly, Ryan felt a sharp scratch on his right side. He automatically jerked in surprise of the sensation and grabbed at Brendon’s wrist. “What are you doing down there?”

Brendon rolled against him. “You scratched your initials into me when you made me come yesterday. It turned me on to think you marked me as yours. I didn’t want them to fade,” Brendon whispered sweet and slow into his ear. “Now we match.”

Ryan craned his neck and looked down to catch the sight of a raised, red B, followed by a much smaller x just to the side of it. Wow, he breathed, reaching out to touch his skin – that was hot. Ryan couldn't tear his eyes away from the markings.

“Can I just do something off the clock?”

“What do you mean?” Ryan stuttered, his voice had come out of his mouth smaller than he expected. He cleared his throat.

“Can I do something you don’t have to pay me for?”

Yes, yes, yes. Do it. I'd let you bleed me dry; I am yours, I'm marked with your name. Ryan nodded. “Of course.”

Brendon propped himself up over him, his dark eyes scanning Ryan’s face, concentrating more on his lips than ever before. Ryan felt the tension build. He felt the need bubbling inside his stomach as he waited silently for the man to make his move. It took a few moments, but eventually, Brendon moved his lips towards him so teasingly slowly that Ryan wanted to scream.

Looking this closely, Ryan could see things he never really noticed about Brendon before – the blemish above his left eyebrow, the small scar that cut through his right, the lines around his eyes. All of Brendon’s features worked so well together – he was beautiful, almost pretty but the angle of his jaw and the slope of his nose gave a distinctly more handsome appearance.

“Close your eyes,” Brendon breathed when their lips were almost touching. Ryan did as he was told, his chest rising and falling unevenly under the weight of the man on top of him. Brendon’s hand slid up to caress his cheek. “This one’s on the house.”

Brendon kissed him. They already made out plenty of times before, Ryan didn’t know why this time felt so different. Maybe it was in the way Brendon executed it – he started so gradually, barely brushing their lips together at first, pulling back after each gentle peck.

They kissed slowly, mouths pressing forward without tongue for the first few moments. When Brendon eventually deepened the kiss, Ryan felt his chest explode. As soon as he lifted his hand to brush across the boy’s jaw, Brendon opened up to him, parting his lips to allow Ryan’s tongue to glide against his. Ryan’s chest was on fire.
Brendon bent against him and the boy held control of the situation – Brendon’s tongue, Brendon’s mouth, Brendon’s taste… Ryan wanted nothing more than to drown inside him, to give himself completely for the first time. Brendon was his vice, his virtue. Ryan had never known a simple kiss could be quite so erotic.

It was concentrated. It was measured and focused – it actually had meaning. Brendon’s mouth became wet as they moved, his full lips started to press harder against Ryan’s and his body – fuck, his body… Brendon’s back was arched, his hips slowly rutting against Ryan’s leg. Brendon was hard; he wanted this – a kiss he didn’t expect payment for. This was the real Brendon Urie; Ryan was witnessing that mask he’d always worn slipping slowly away from his face.

Ryan rolled over on top of him, pressing himself down against the boy’s body. “Where does this stop being on the house?” he asked, pulling back to snake his hand between Brendon’s legs.

Brendon looked up at him, his dark eyes dazed, his pink, wet lips slightly parted, his hair falling into his eyes. “I’m not sure I can draw that line anymore, Ryan,” Brendon breathed in reply, pulling him back in for another kiss.

That night, under the stars, Ryan Ross felt himself falling in love. It was small and silent and barely noticeable, but it was there – the slow shift of his world as he felt Brendon consume him.
Ryan and Brendon had been in Tahoe for a week by the time he next talked to William. William, as always, was quick to update Ryan on the latest happenings in the Ross family – Jacob was still playing saintly humanitarian in some destitute European country and his mom and dad were still vacationing in Saint-Tropez. William claimed that his father had been asking after him, but Ryan knew George better than that – out of sight, out of mind.

“Are you bored of being stuck in the mountains yet?” his PA asked him.

“Not at all. It’s beautiful up here. Quiet. It’s exactly what I need right now.”

Ryan enjoyed being away from all the distractions the various cities he called home offered – the endless barrage of social media and celebrity parties and the ceaseless allure to take drugs. He loved the peace and quiet of the mountains, being awoken each morning by the sun rising outside of the window and the soft stirrings of the man who now slept beside him. Yes, Ryan had fallen back in love with Lake Tahoe. That cabin was his sanctuary and Brendon was fast becoming Ryan’s latest addiction – he just couldn’t get enough of him, of his body or his smile or way he felt spooned up in front of him as they fell asleep.

Brendon Urie was absolutely intoxicating to him and as the week drew to a close, Ryan was already beginning to dread the feelings he knew would consume him once Brendon decided to go back to Vegas.

He knew the end was nigh. Brendon brought up his imminent departure a few times that week - always straight after sex. He’d moan in Ryan’s ear how he was dreading his return to Las Vegas or how he really didn’t want to face Dallon again after a full week without contact, but Ryan would never say anything in reply. Brendon was a grown-up, he wasn’t just his to order around – and the boy had a shitty life to go back to, but he guessed it still needed to be sorted.

If Brendon wanted to stay with him then he sure was welcome, but Ryan was secretly already preparing himself for the fallout – he pulled away every time he felt his heart flutter when Brendon kissed him, he mercilessly fucked the boy to distract himself from how much he wanted to make love to him and he was trying really hard not to fall in love with the guy, because he knew that when Brendon eventually left him, he was going to have one hell of a time getting over it.

“So, how’s my father enjoying Saint-Tropez?” he bit. “Nice to see he’s so concerned about how I’m getting on that he fucked off to Europe on vacation and hasn’t bothered to call me since.”

“Well, the phone works both ways, Ryan,” William told him.

“Yeah, but he’s meant to be the dad. That’s his job.”

William sighed. “Well, he did have this vacation booked before you decided to leave rehab. It’s not like he was expecting you to leave six weeks early.” People would always make excuses for George Ross – as if his bank account somehow made up for his shitty parenting skills.

“So, you’re still hanging out with your friend from AA?” William asked him, quickly changing the subject.

“Yes,” Ryan replied. He wasn’t going to elaborate much more than that.

“Well, he must’ve kept quiet about your little… friendship,” William mused on the other end of the
phone, “because there’s been nothing written about the two of you. Are you keeping up to date with
the press?”

“No. I don’t care about any of that. I’m enjoying being away from it all. Whatever people are saying
about me, I probably don’t want to read it.”

His cellphone had been off for a week, but no doubt, news of his early departure from rehab was still
tabloid fodder and he’d bet the Internet was still abuzz with why he checked himself out after only a
month and a half.

So far, they managed to keep their whereabouts a secret and up there in the Sierra Nevada’s, Ryan
felt like he was leading a relatively normal life. He didn’t need the press attention and he didn’t want
the drugs anymore – he only wanted Brendon. The way he’d grown to feel about the man was both
terrifying and soothing – like floating in the middle of the ocean. On the surface, everything was
perfect; they were perfect for each other and spending time with Brendon made him happy, but
deeper down, everything grew a little murky – the threat of the press finding out about their
relationship and about Brendon’s past…

How would the kid even be able to deal with that? Ryan grew up under the glare of the spotlight,
people loved writing about him because he always lived his life in the absolute extremes but
Brendon’s dark skeletons were still locked away in his closet and no doubt the boy didn’t want them
being aired in front of the whole world. Ryan constantly had to remind himself that he and Brendon
were two totally different people, but it was hard when Brendon was the first and only man he made
a connection with in his adult life.

“So, can I ask you something about this kid? Is he really a rent boy? I was kind of hoping Shane just
had his wires crossed.”

Ryan looked over to where he left Brendon reclining on the couch - shirt off, pants slung low around
his hips, nose buried in a three year old copy of Harper’s Bazaar and scratching idly at his belly –
fucking beautiful. Ryan knew he was secretly eavesdropping on his conversation.

“Brendon?” he called, putting his hand over the mouthpiece of the telephone. Brendon looked up at
him, dropping the magazine down onto his chest. “Would you like to take a shower?”

Brendon paused, but only for a split second. “Sure,” he replied with a sigh, pushing himself up from
the couch. Ryan watched him leave, grazed his eyes over the dimples in Brendon’s back and the
sinewy muscles of his shoulders. Wow. He really struck gold with that one. Brendon walked towards
the main bathroom – not the en-suite. It had a sauna and a steam room; he’d probably be in there for
hours.

“Look, I’m going to be straight with you,” he said, once Brendon disappeared into the bathroom and
closed the door. “I really like this guy. He’s really helping me out up here and I really enjoy
spending time with him, but things are… complicated between us. He’s got a lot of weird family shit
going on right now, but he’s a good guy. I really like him, Bill…” Ryan trailed off, listening to the
sound of the shower running from the bathroom. Brendon would be naked by now, wet and soapy
under the water, perhaps even half hard and touching himself… He always smelled so divine straight
out of the shower.

“I get that, Ryan, but that doesn’t answer my question.”

Ryan huffed in frustration. William was so pedantic on occasions. Why was he stood talking to his
nagging PA on the phone when he could be making Brendon writhe beneath him in bed? “Look,
just don’t listen to Shane. He’s full of bullshit.”
“So, your friend’s not a rent boy?”

“No!” Ryan snapped. “Stop listening to the rumors, you’re just as bad as the rest of them. Now, I’m sorry, but I’m busy. I have to go; I’ll talk to you later.”

“Oh, before you go,” William interjected just before Ryan managed to hang up on him. “Your father wants to know what day you’ll be back in New York for his birthday party. It’s this coming Saturday and he really does want to see you there. The guest list is a little bigger than he first planned but Gabriel and his family confirmed, Jacob’s coming home from Europe, your sister and her family will be there… Marc Willis, a couple of your father’s friends from work and their various partners…”

Ryan felt the bile rise up into his throat. William continued, unaware.

“It’s family and close friends only – under twenty-five guests, your father told me. Everyone wants to see you – especially Pamela and your dad.”

The room around him blurred out of focus, he suddenly felt light-headed and shaky on his feet, as if someone plunged their fist right into his stomach and was pulling his guts out, throwing them across the room.

His father invited Marc Willis to his sixtieth birthday party and he couldn’t do anything about it because George Ross knew nothing about their dark history. His mouth went dry as he tried to answer. Take a breath. Count to ten. Breathe, he told himself.

“I can’t make it,” he heard himself mumble. His body was wound up tight; his muscles were burning with the burden that hearing Marc’s name filled him with. He hated that Marc Willis still had such a hold on him after all these years – it wasn’t as if he could just drown his sorrows in alcohol and cocaine anymore either. He certainly felt like taking a fat line right now…

“What? Why not?” William snapped. “Ryan, you have no excuse not to show your face.”

Ryan imagined having to sit around a table with Marc Willis and listen to him joke with his father; he imagined those cold eyes gazing over him, his sick, ugly grin and the way he said his name… He couldn’t put himself in that situation again – the last time he’d seen Marc, he ended up overdosing outside a flophouse in the Bronx because he couldn’t deal with the memories, but he couldn’t go on pretending Marc hadn’t completely ruined him for any longer.

He was staying put. There was no way in hell he was going back to New York.

“I don’t want to be around that many people right now. I can’t come back yet, Bill, I’m not ready.”

William clicked his tongue. “Does this have anything to do with your new friend? Is he trying to convince you to stay up in Tahoe with him? Yeah, I bet he’s enjoying the convenience of living with you…”

“William, please.” Ryan put his head in his hand and closed his eyes. He could see Marc’s ugly smirk behind his lids. Fuck. He wasn’t going to lose control of himself this time. He wasn’t going to lose control…

“Ryan, it’s your father’s sixtieth birthday – please just make an effort. Bring your fucking boyfriend, if it’s that important to you.”

“This has nothing to do with Brendon, William – and he’s not my fucking boyfriend, shut the fuck up,” he barked. “I just… I can’t. I can’t do it. I can’t face the family just yet, I need some more time.”
His PA huffed. “Jesus Christ, Ryan, you’ll be the death of me – a few days ago, you said you’d be there, now all of a sudden, you’ve changed your mind. What’s up with you?”

“Oh, I don’t know, Bill, maybe the fact that I’ve been out of rehab for over a week now and George has made zero effort to even talk to me. He chose to fuck off to Saint-Tropez instead – he’s not a good father. I don’t want to go, okay?” He could feel himself losing control of his emotions – his voice was breaking, wavering. He was losing it. He took a deep breath and spoke slowly. “You’re not going to change my mind. I’m not coming back to New York.”

“Well, you’re going to have to speak to your father about that yourself because I’m fed up of being on the receiving end of the shitty mood you always put him in – he already scheduled the private jet to pick you up at Sacramento International and fly you back to JFK. He wants to see you. He really is concerned about you, Ryan. He just doesn’t know how to show it; it’s just his generation – they’re not as affectionate.”

“Stop making excuses for him. Tell him to whittle down the guest list and I might consider it – family only. I’m not turning up if any of his asshole friends are going to be there.”

William paused, as if in brief consideration of Ryan’s demand. After a second, he clicked his tongue again. Ryan could just imagine the unamused pout on his lips. “I’m not telling him that, Ryan.”

“You’re my PA, you’re meant to-”

“And your father’s my boss!” William interjected. “Call him yourself. You two sound like you have a lot of shit to sort out – and whatever it is, I’m not getting involved.”

“Well, then it’s settled. I’m staying in Tahoe and I won’t be coming back to New York - end of conversation. Goodbye.”

Ryan placed the phone back in its cradle and stared at it for a moment, half expecting William to call him back to try and convince him to return to Manhattan but the phone remained silent and Ryan turned back to the empty lounge and tried to steady his breathing. He should’ve just got off the phone when he had the chance. He dropped his head back and blinked the threat of tears from his eyes.

He should’ve guessed Marc Willis would be at his father’s birthday. He didn’t know why George’s friendship with the guy still even surprised him – it wasn’t as if his father knew about what happened when his son was fifteen. He didn’t blame his dad – not really. He blamed Marc and the sick audacity he always had to keep in touch with the man whose son he attacked just over a decade ago. Yet again, Marc Willis had won - he was still preventing Ryan from living his life. It wasn’t the drugs that were the problem anymore; it was the inability to deal with his past. Now he understood why Patrick had been so eager for him to stay in rehab for the last half of his program – perhaps during that extra six weeks, he’d learn how to cope with his demons.

He wanted to get *fucked up* – the need was inexorable. He looked around the large lounge area, but whoever his father sent to prepare the cabin had done a good job at clearing out anything he could use to get high. There wasn’t a single drop of alcohol in the entire house – even the cleaning products had been removed from the kitchen and bathroom. *Fuck.* He felt himself sweat. The house suddenly seemed all too warm for his liking.

From the bathroom, Ryan heard the shower stop and decided to disappear into the bedroom before Brendon came back out. He didn’t want the boy to see him like this. Perhaps he needed to just lock himself in his room for a couple of hours until his cravings settled down and his head was a little clearer.
Ryan fell down on top of the unmade bed sheets with a huff. They smelled like Brendon. He buried his nose into the boy’s pillow and inhaled. He was in love with the scent. It was totally intoxicating.

There was no doubt about the fact he was falling for the kid and it worried Ryan to think he was opening himself up for heartbreak. As he lay there, he wondered if he was in love with the guy – if he was, then the act of falling in love wasn’t how he imagined it. All the movies made it out to be a dazzling, magical experience. For Ryan, it felt like he finally found his home. Calming. Comfortable. Like he could finally be himself - but Marc Willis left him incapable of loving anything.

He hated himself for so long now, the positive feelings he was experiencing for someone else concerned him. He’d gotten so used to misery, happiness seemed alien to him. Brendon was captivating; he was enthralling – he was the only reason Ryan stayed clean for as long as he had, because Brendon already told him he was better company when he was sober.

Sure, Ryan still got cravings. He’d lay awake at night sometimes, itching to get fucked up. It’d be nice, Ryan thought, to be able to smoke a joint with Brendon before bed or to enjoy a couple of glasses of red wine with dinner. Take acid out on the balcony and watch the stars or get so fucked up on coke his nose bled – that’s what he currently wanted to do, but he was fighting his addictions. No one said the fight was going to be easy.

He didn’t want to die anymore but his past was still killing him.

Ryan heard a knock at the door that interrupted his thoughts and he raised his head to shout he wanted to be left alone but Brendon entered the bedroom uninvited, naked and still speckled with water droplets from the shower.

He dropped his head into the pillow of his arms and silently prayed the boy would just leave him alone for half an hour to sleep off his troubles. Brendon jumped onto the bed and straddled his ass, thrusting his naked hips forward as he rubbed at Ryan’s shoulders.

“What was the phone call about?” he asked.

Ryan wriggled uncomfortably underneath him. He didn’t like feeling so trapped underneath Brendon – he could feel his semi-hard dick digging into his thigh. “None of your goddamn business,” he bit, voice muffled in the pillow.

“Jeez, okay, I was only asking. You’re so tense,” the boy noted, digging his thumbs into Ryan’s shoulder blades through his shirt. “Want me to help you loosen up some?” He untucked Ryan’s shirt from his pants and pushed it up as high as it’d go. Brendon leaned forward, hard dick pressing against Ryan’s ass.

Ryan squirmed in discomfort as Brendon pressed his chest against his back and licked around the shell of his ear. “I started to prep myself when I was in the bathroom,” he whispered. “Perhaps you could give me a hand the rest of the way.”

“Brendon, not now. I’m not in the mood.”

“Oh, come on!” Brendon thrust his hips against Ryan’s ass and moved his head to whisper in his other ear. “I thought you wanted to fuck me. That’s why you asked me to shower, right?” he grinned, slipping down to press against his side. “You’ve kick-started my sex drive since I’ve been up here.”

“I’m serious, Brendon, stop what you’re doing.” He pushed up on his elbows and when he turned his face to berate the man, Brendon caught his lips with a wet peck and pulled back with a smile.
Ryan’s immediate reaction was to lash out. He told Brendon twice that he wasn’t in the mood, what the hell was he doing still bothering him?

Ryan pushed the boy away roughly and glared at him. “Just fuck off out of my room, will you?”

“Jesus.” Ryan felt Brendon climb off the bed and slip into his clothes. “Please just give me an hour or two alone would’ve sufficed,” he bit, crossing the bedroom and slamming the door. The sound rang loud in Ryan’s ears; he winced and immediately regretted pushing the boy away. *Fuck,* what was he doing? The only person who helped him through his first week out of rehab and he acted like an asshole.

Ryan knew his manners could do with a little work but he’d been brought up having to raise his voice to be heard by his father. Everything he’d ever done as a kid had been a cry for attention – the drugs and the alcohol, the arrests and the impertinence were all to piss off his dad. Ryan hadn’t realized it when he was growing up, but he sure understood it now. It was all a desperate cry to warn him – *I’m dying over here. Throw me a rope because I’m fucking drowning.*

He held so much bitterness and resentment towards his father that Ryan was surprised he hadn’t already exploded on him yet. He always kept everything hidden and all of his secrets close to his chest but the one thing he wasn’t going to do, was leave a perfectly good thing he had going on in Tahoe to hobnob with the dude who raped him at fifteen. He wanted Marc Willis to pay for what he’d done. He’d done enough suffering and fuck, did he want that man to suffer. He couldn’t keep getting away with this.

Wiping his eyes clear, Ryan pushed up from the mattress and snatched the landline from its cradle on the bedside and shakily dialed his father’s number. *What the fuck time was it in France?* He looked at the clock on the side table – it was ten past noon, which meant, in his father’s time zone, it was just past 9PM. His dad and Pamela were probably dining in some fancy Saint-Tropez restaurant, surrounded by bottles of champagne, good food and ass-kissing waiters. He waited for the call to connect.

“George Ross.”

Ryan heard the bustle of background noise crackle through the receiver and already knew his father wouldn’t have time to deal with his problems tonight, but he needed to get this off his chest and he felt stronger doing it over the phone than face to face.

“Dad,” he said. “It’s me - Ryan.”

“Ryan!” his father enthused – *obviously he was already a couple of glasses of champagne deep.*

“Pamela and I are just out for dinner. The weather’s wonderful here in Saint-Tropez and you should see this view we have of the Riviera, it’s spectacular. Why are you calling?”

*Yeah, hi dad, I’m fine. Thanks for asking, asshole.*

“I need to talk to you.”

“Oh yeah, what about?” his father asked absently. *“Pamela,”* he heard George say through the earpiece. “*Grab that waiter and order another bottle of this red. Listen, Ryan, if it’s about my birthday, don’t worry about it – there’s not going to be any alcohol there and everyone’s aware of the situation. It’s all good! Merci, monsieur.*”

His father wasn’t even paying attention. “Dad, can you just step away from whatever the fuck is going on there for like, five minutes? I need to talk to you when you’re not distracted.”
Ryan’s father paused and then he let out a big huff. “Is it important, Ryan – because now is really not the best time, son. Pamela and I are in the middle of dinner. She says hi.”

“Dad… Look, I’ve been needing to talk to you for a long time, I’m-”

“Are you thinking about relapsing? If you’re thinking about relapsing, I can send you straight back to rehab.”

“I’m not about to relapse – not if you just listen to me. It’s about-”

Ryan was cut off by a loud roar of laughter from his father through the receiver. “Oh, Ryan,” he chuckled. “You should hear Pamela trying to speak French to this waiter… *Hey, monsieur, *” he heard his father call through the phone, distracted as always by something more important than his son. “*Parlez-vous Anglais?*”

Redirecting his attentions back to his son, he sighed. “Ryan, listen son – I understand that we need to have a chat, but this really isn’t something I can help you with over the phone. If you want me to send William up there, I can but I’m in Saint-Tropez right now and it’s getting late and… I’ve had a bit to drink,” George burped. “Maybe you can call me again in a couple of days? I’m back in Manhattan the day after tomorrow. We can talk then. How does that sound?”

Ryan blinked at the wall in front of him and stayed quiet. He felt his hands fist in the bed sheets until his knuckles turned white.

“Ryan? Can you hear me? You still there?”

Ryan felt his breathing becoming shallow. His nose started to tickle.

“Ryan? I think I’m losing you, buddy… Hello?”

He felt one tear slip slowly down his cheek and placed the phone back on the hook. George Ross didn’t call back.

*

Ryan awoke with a jerk at just past 10PM that evening, as fuzzy images of Marc Willis faded behind his eyelids.

He had a dream where he nervously told his father about what happened when he was fifteen, but in his dream, George didn’t care – he didn’t believe him. Nobody believed him. The dream so painfully reflected Ryan’s real life worries, that the resentment and hopelessness he felt in his subconscious remained for quite some time after waking up. His mind was abuzz with anxieties he couldn’t shift and sleep brought him no comfort.

It was ten o’clock at night – Ryan couldn’t understand how he managed to sleep for quite so long but when he awoke, the bedroom was cold and dark and the house was silent. He hadn’t cried after that almost-conversation with his father, but sorry tears leaked from his eyes until he’d eventually fallen asleep and now his head was hurting from all the repressed emotions rearing their ugly heads.

Ryan turned onto his back and blinked up at the ceiling. He lay there for quarter of an hour reflecting on the way his father avoided conversation from a fancy restaurant in Saint-Tropez. George Ross was such an oblivious bastard; he was so wrapped up in his own little world he couldn’t even tell when his son was attempting to reach out to him. He wondered if Jacob would’ve called George to talk, whether his dad would’ve listened to him or whether he blew all his children off equally. Ryan scrubbed his hand over his face with a sigh.
Deep down, he knew it wasn’t his father’s fault – not really. He couldn’t be held accountable for Marc’s actions over a decade ago but he couldn’t believe how even his own father hadn’t noticed how he’d so obviously been falling apart these last ten years. Marc Willis had all but *devastated* him. He affected his relationships with almost everyone around him and his inability to get over his past was now ruining his future. Ryan was fed up of feeling so *broken* all the time.

Following his refusal to attend his father’s birthday party, no doubt, William now thought he was a selfish prick, a spoiled little kid who knew if he stamped his feet long enough would eventually get his own way. William didn’t get it and neither did Shane, but that was because Ryan had never been brave enough to tell anyone. He’d run from his past successfully for the last ten years, but without the aid of drugs and booze to numb the pain, those feelings of dejection, guilt and self-hatred were all too real.

His father would be breathing down his neck as soon as he was informed that Ryan wanted to stay in Tahoe; he’d be suspicious, he’d want to know Ryan’s reasons and after being put on the backburner by his dad for so many years, Ryan wasn’t even sure he wanted to open up to him. The worst thing about the whole situation was he snapped at Brendon for no good reason and for that he’d just woken up in an empty bed.

Once again, Marc Willis succeeded in ruining Ryan’s life – even the mere mention of his name had thrown him into a deep, dark pit of desperation. He was almost twenty-seven years old and he was having *nightmares*, for Christ’s sake! He briefly considered calling Dr. Stump – but not at ten thirty at night. The guy was off duty and was probably tucked up in bed with his wife, which reminded him… Where was Brendon?

He’d fallen asleep on the boy’s pillow earlier and now the material no longer smelled like him. He buried his nose deep and inhaled – there was just the slightest hint of him remaining, sucked into Ryan’s lungs like a drug.

The one thing that would’ve made him feel better was if he’d woken up next to a sleeping Brendon Urie – but he’d thrown him out from the bedroom hours earlier and needless to say, the boy hadn’t felt the need to check up on him. He felt terrible about acting so hostile towards him. Brendon didn’t deserve that kind of treatment and Ryan was annoyed at himself for being the perpetrator, but when memories of Marc Willis plagued his mind, it was as if all he could see was that man behind his eyes - sick smile and rough hands and the terrible reminder that *Marc* had been the only person to ever tell Ryan he loved him.

Ryan sat up in bed. The bed sheets creased his skin. He’d better go find the boy and apologize, he thought, wiping the sleep from his eyes.

If anyone talked to *him* the way he talked to Brendon, he’d have been *gone*. He wouldn’t stick around with a guy who treated him like that… The sudden thought struck him painfully in the chest – everything in the house was quiet and there was no light slipping under his bedroom door from the lounge. Ryan’s heart clamped up in fear. What if Brendon had finally put up with enough? What if he just walked to the end of the driveway, hopped the gate and hitched a ride to Carson City? Back to Vegas... back to *Dallon*?

Ryan climbed quickly from the bed and shook the grogginess from his limbs. He didn’t even want to imagine what he’d do if Brendon really had upped and left him – not when he put so much blind faith in the boy after arriving at the cabin. He’d have to get so fucked up to deal with *that* rejection. His almost two months sober would be undone in a flash; he’d call a car to drive him to Reno, he’d buy a mountain of coke and he’d be dead in less than twelve hours – he’d make sure of it. Twenty-six years old and found dead from a drug overdose in a crappy motel in Reno, all because he’d been...
rejected by a hooker. He could just imagine the headlines.

Ryan moved quickly towards the door and pushed it open. The lounge was dark, illuminated only by the moon. Ryan flipped the light switch but Brendon was nowhere to be seen. He could feel his heart thumping inside his chest. If Brendon had left – that, coupled with the terror of having to face Marc Willis again in front of an ignorant father, would be the thing that tipped him over the edge.

“Brendon?” he called quietly, listening for a reply that didn’t come.

He repeated the boy’s name a little louder and moved slowly across the lounge, looking for any signs of the boy’s presence. There was nothing.

He didn’t want to panic. He didn’t want to freak out for no reason. He had to keep a hold of himself… Maybe he’d just fallen asleep in one of the spare bedrooms? Ryan walked towards the closest one – it had once been his sister’s bedroom - and he twisted the handle and peered into the darkness. The bed was empty. Ryan flicked on the lights just to make sure. Nothing.

He worked his way along the corridor, checking three empty guest rooms before he reached his old bedroom at the end of the hallway. By the time he stood outside the door and wrapped his hand around the doorknob, he was growing fraught. He twisted the door handle and poked his head into the room.

Sleeping in his shirt and pants, on top of the covers of the neatly made bed that Ryan used to sleep in as a kid, was Brendon. Ryan’s heart surged up into his throat before slowing to a more regular beat. Relief washed over him as he paced towards the bed, gripped at Brendon’s shoulders and shook him gently awake – he’d never been happier to see anyone. Relieved tears spilled out over his eyes.

Brendon looked up at him in a sleepy daze, his eyes only half open as he blinked Ryan into focus. “What are you-?” he mumbled, his words cut off as Ryan pressed forward to kiss him. Brendon kissed back. He kissed back so easily and pliantly Ryan melted against him on the mattress with a groan. He wondered what he’d been so worried about in the first place, Brendon wasn’t going anywhere – but the terror that the boy could’ve so easily disappeared from his life, all because of his inability to deal with Marc Willis and his dark past forced Ryan to seriously reconsider how he handled his problems.

The lie he lived since he was a teenager had run its course and he couldn’t continue on like this - the memories were killing him. This is no way to live your life, he told himself – a mini meltdown every time you hear his name? You got to do something about this. You can’t let the past control you anymore.

“I’m sorry,” he cried in relief, settling himself between the boy’s legs. “I’m so sorry for snapping at you earlier. Fuck, Brendon,” he breathed between kisses. “I thought you might’ve left.”

“Don’t be so silly. Why would I leave?” Brendon laughed quietly, his hand at the back of Ryan’s head, keeping him in place against his lips.

“Because I treated you badly and you don’t deserve it. I’m sorry,” he repeated, moving his hands away from the boy’s shoulders to clutch at his face. “How can I make it up to you? Anything at all.”

The boy was already getting an erection inside his jeans. Ryan palmed at it roughly though the material and moved to suck hard at his neck. Oh, fuck… anything to take his mind off of Marc Willis.

Brendon pushed him back slightly. “Why don’t you kiss me a little slower?” he smiled, looking into Ryan’s eyes – so Ryan did. He kissed the boy gently, sliding his hand around the back of Brendon’s
neck and pulling away to look into his dark eyes after each slow peck. After a few moments, he began a trail of wet kisses along Brendon’s jaw to the lobe of his ear - he paused there, mouth hovering. He wanted to say it, I love you.

But it was too soon and his emotions were not at their most stable. He bit his lip hard between his teeth and pulled away before he said something stupid that he was liable to regret – but the moment had felt so right and he was pretty certain what he felt for the boy was something akin to love.

He waited for the need to admit his feelings to pass, clutching at the material of Brendon’s t-shirt as he rested his head on the boy’s chest. Brendon’s hand came down to brush through the back of his hair.

“What upset you so much today, babe?” he asked into the silence of the room.

Babe – he hadn’t heard that one before, not from anyone who meant it. The term of endearment on Brendon's lips left a fuzzy kind of warmth in the pit of his stomach, but it was soon replaced by reality – within seconds, all he could think about was Marc. Marc, Marc, MarcMarcMarc .

Ryan shook his head. “It’s nothing.” He felt the soft rise and fall of the boy’s chest.

“You know you can tell me anything, right?”

He nodded. “Thanks - but it was nothing you have to worry about.”

He didn’t want to unload any of his issues onto Brendon, because God knows, the boy had enough on his plate to deal with without Ryan crying on his shoulder too - and anyway, if he was to start talking, he wouldn’t be able to stop and he would surely end up in tears. He didn’t want Brendon to see him like that. He was meant to be the strong one.

“Well then, why don’t I believe you?”

Ryan shrugged. Perhaps his façade wasn’t so convincing after all. He sniffed up his emotions and attempted a smile. “Enough of that,” he said, brushing Brendon’s hair back from his eyes and rubbing his palm over the bulge in Brendon's pants. “Let me take care of this.”

Brendon was still half-hard inside of his jeans. Ryan unfastened his button and then unzipped him. Compliantly, Brendon lifted his hips up from the mattress as Ryan pulled them down over his ass and the rest of the way around his ankles. Brendon removed his own t-shirt and threw it down on the floor, settling back on the pillow as Ryan gazed over him.

He was the most beautiful thing he’d ever seen, but his emotions were so conflicted right now that he could hardly even think straight. Not even two minutes before, those three small words had been dancing on the tip of his tongue, it had seemed so right to say them - but not with Marc Willis on his mind. Not tonight. He wanted it to be perfect, not merely the result of a bad day and the need to feel wanted.

What he needed was a distraction and Brendon was proving himself to be just that. He took the boy’s cock in his hand and licked over the head. Brendon was obviously sensitive, because his back arched up immediately and he moaned Ryan’s name.

“Jesus. That feels great. Don’t stop there,” the boy groaned, snaking his hand down to smooth gently though Ryan’s hair. His hips rolled up and his dick slipped into Ryan’s mouth as his lips closed around the shaft. After a few experimental seconds, Ryan slid far enough down Brendon's cock it made him gag and pull off in a panic. He wiped at the saliva that coated his lips.
With his fist around the base, he could mouth at Brendon’s dick with a reasonable amount of control over the situation. He tried not to let Marc Willis infiltrate his thoughts and sucked at the head of Brendon’s cock haphazardly.

“Watch your teeth,” the man pointed out gently. “Go a little slower… Try not to rush it.”

Oh, fuck – he wasn’t very good. Brendon was giving him tips. Perhaps if Marc hadn’t fucked him up so much, he’d have more practice at this… He tried to concentrate on his technique; he swirled his tongue around the head of Brendon’s hard dick, but he couldn’t help it – despite how hot the moans sounded coming from Brendon’s lips, all Ryan could hear ringing in his ears was the way Marc Willis had said his name. He desperately tried to hold back his emotions.

As he worked, he couldn’t help but remember how Marc’s dick felt growing hard inside of his mouth and the way he forced his head down into his lap until he couldn’t even breathe. Marc had been rough and he tasted bitter on his tongue – he ruined him.

He was in danger of losing the one good person who’d come from his addictions because he couldn’t forget his past. He was falling for Brendon and he couldn’t let go of the past long enough to show it. He really wanted to pleasure him; he wanted to make the boy feel good but the self-doubt already set in. He was terrified of rejection. He spent his entire life on his own without even caring, but a week in Tahoe with Brendon rendered him incapable of picturing his future without him – but he was no good for a man like Brendon. He couldn’t even give a good blowjob - he was using too much teeth and not enough tongue; he couldn’t deep throat and he wasn’t practiced enough. He kept holding back because he couldn’t shake the memories of Marc from his head.

He pulled off Brendon’s cock and pressed his face into his hip, squeezing his eyes closed until tears leaked out and they rolled down between the boy’s legs. He wasn’t going to break. He wasn’t going to show Brendon he was still weak…

“Ryan?” Brendon tried, his fingers brushing gently at his shoulder. “Come on, buddy. What’s up?”

“It’s nothing.”

“Well, crying during a blowjob is not usually a good sign, so… Come on,” he soothed, “what happened today?”

Ryan couldn’t help but laugh sadly at the whole rotten situation. He finally sighed in resignation, feeling his shoulders shake as he exhaled a breath. “Did you ever talk to your parents and know they just weren’t listening to anything you say?”

“My parents never listened; they just waited for their turn to talk,” Brendon sighed, pulling up the corners of the comforter and throwing it over them. He rolled over onto his side so they were facing each other and ran his knuckles against Ryan’s cheek. “What’s wrong, huh?” he asked, barely above a whisper, brushing the pad of his thumb over Ryan’s bottom lip. “Tell me. I want to help you.”

Brendon truly was a good soul. He was still here, despite everything. Ryan blinked back tears and bit his lip. He kept it together for this long but he didn’t know how much longer the glue Patrick patched him up with in rehab would stick. “I don’t know how to say it out loud,” he choked. “I don’t know how to put it into words, Brendon.”

The boy paused. “Well, I’ll lie here until you do.”

Sometimes, Ryan realized, you have to nearly kill yourself to learn how to live.

Sometimes, you have to fall apart and fix the gaps before you learn you have a couple of pieces
Ryan knew that if he couldn’t cut himself open in front of Brendon, he wouldn’t be able to do it in front of anyone. The kid was still lying beside him with no obligation. Ryan hoped all this wasn’t merely an act on Brendon’s half; he hoped he wasn’t reading too deeply into all the ways the boy made him feel good, because he was going to open up to him… He was going to admit his deepest, most painful secret to a boy who’d never been anything but honest with him.

He buried his face in the crook of Brendon’s neck and sniffed. He was still holding him - one hand at the back of his head, the other between his shoulder blades, their bodies close and warm, Brendon’s breathing slow and shallow.

“I called my dad earlier,” he started. “I wanted to talk to him but he was too busy to just take five minutes away from what he was doing to listen to me for once.”

“Well, I’m not,” Brendon said, pressing a kiss against the side of Ryan’s head. Ryan clutched a little tighter at Brendon’s shoulders, his fingernails making little crescent-shaped mark on his skin. “I’ll listen to you.”

Ryan took a breath and then the words were on his tongue, slowly making their way out into the open. “When I was fifteen, I was sexually abused by one of my father’s friends. He raped me and I never told anyone and the worst thing about it is that he and my dad still hang out.”

He felt Brendon’s shoulders tense up under his hands and heard his sharp intake of breath, but Brendon kept quiet; he let Ryan continue. “I tried so hard to forget about it, but I can’t… William called me today to tell me this guy is going to be at my father’s sixtieth birthday and everyone expects me to show my face and it kills me. I kept it inside for so long. It affects every single thing I do.” Ryan’s voice started to fray, but Brendon’s arms were still strong around his shoulders.

“I used to take drugs to overcome it, but I can’t even do that anymore and I’m worried it’ll ruin my chances with…” With you. He wanted to say it – with you. “I’m worried keeping it a secret fucked me up enough that I’ll never get to be happy. I’ve never been able to accept what he did to me.”

“Oh, Ryan,” Brendon breathed, smoothing down Ryan’s hair and looping his leg over his hip, pulling their bodies tightly together. “You never told anyone?”

From the crook of Brendon’s neck, Ryan shook his head. “I never had the courage. I was so ashamed. My family has no idea and my dad still treats him like his best friend. I’m expected to go to this party next week and shake his hand when I know exactly what kind of man he is.”

“Oh, Ryan…” Brendon breathed again, pressing his mouth against his ear. “I’m so sorry. I’m so, so sorry you had to go through this on your own for so long,” he whispered. When he pulled back, Ryan noticed that Brendon’s eyes were glassy with tears in the darkness. Ryan never felt more of a connection with another human being.

“I’m going to help you through this, Ryan. I’ll stay here with you for as long as you want me around. We’re going to help each other, okay?” the boy mumbled, pressing their lips together.

Ryan kissed back, desperate to taste more of the boy on his tongue. “Brendon, I want you - in every single way I know I can’t have you.” The words shuddered out from between his lips and Brendon kissed them back into his mouth.

“I know,” Brendon soothed. “I know. You’re going to be okay, Ryan. We’ll talk everything over in the morning. We’ll get through this. Together.” Brendon hushed him, his hands sliding around his
shoulders and down his back. “Sleep now.”

Ryan settled back into the crook of Brendon’s neck and astonishingly, he felt his heart slow to an even beat. It felt strangely cathartic now that he admitted his past to the one man who single-handedly helped him through his first sober week out of rehab.

He felt like they were both trapped inside the eye of a storm together – around them, their lives were spinning out of control and everything was a mess, but together, lying on the bed in each other’s arms, Ryan felt perfectly at peace, calm and silent. His thoughts were quiet, his worries pacified until they had to face reality again.

“It’s funny,” Brendon spoke up quietly, after a moment. “A few weeks ago, I couldn’t see myself making it to the end of the year but up here with you, I’m so glad we met. Before you fall asleep tonight, I want you to know that being with you, up here, with no one else around – it makes me a little happier every day.”

Ryan looked up at him with a teary smile and nodded. “Same,” he said with a sad laugh. Brendon brushed Ryan’s hair slowly out of his face and they kissed again, wet mouths moving together. Ryan’s heart fluttered inside of his chest, his stomach flipped somersaults until Brendon pulled back and settled his head down on the pillow.

“I’ll be here in the morning,” Brendon told him before he closed his eyes. Ryan watched him, grazing his eyes over the boy’s full lips and dark lashes, replaying his words through his head like his favorite record and... oh.

Oh, fuck - there it was. Love. Like a big kick in his guts; it couldn’t be anything less.
Brendon awoke to an empty bed at two o’clock that morning. He rolled onto his side to reach for Ryan and found the sheets to be cold under his palm – Ryan must’ve been up for a while.

He was tired. It had been a turbulent evening and he tried to fall back asleep at first – the bed was warm, despite Ryan’s absence and his body’s need for rest almost outweighed his concern for the man’s whereabouts. Brendon’s eyes slipped closed again and his shoulders relaxed back against the soft mattress of Ryan’s childhood bed but after a moment, his mind woke up – and the recollection of what Ryan told him before they fell asleep infiltrated his consciousness. He opened his eyes again and blinked over at the empty pillow in the darkness. His heart hurt for the man who’d fallen asleep there a few hours prior.

No wonder the dude was so fucked up. He never learned how to live with his past – he never had anyone around to hold his hand and lead him in the right direction. No one ever told him that he was going to be okay. All Ryan ever dealt with were a barrage of people telling him he was too rich to feel sadness, that he had no right to hate his life because he just had it so good.

From where he was standing, Ryan didn’t seem to have it good at all. His mother died before he’d ever been able to remember her as a real woman and his father was too absorbed in his work to ever pay his son any real attention, both as a kid and an adult. He didn’t get on with his siblings, he had a bunch of fair-weather friends who didn’t care for him and he’d been crippled by the abuse he suffered as a teenager. He was miserable, he was conflicted and Brendon realized money and fame didn’t equal happiness. Depression was a nasty, ugly disease and Ryan had been carrying around his sadness on his own for too long.

He guessed some people were like diamonds; they could withstand the pressure for years until one sudden impact shattered them. Brendon rolled over onto his back and listened for any sound coming from outside. The house was silent, a strip of light shining through the just-cracked bedroom door. He sat up on the mattress and swung his legs over the side of the bed.

Ryan trusted him enough to tell him something he never told anyone else and Brendon didn’t know if he was capable of giving the man the help he so obviously needed. He wished there was something he could do to take away Ryan’s hurt – during their week together he’d grown to really enjoy the guy’s company, but he couldn’t let himself fall for Ryan Ross, he couldn’t.

Ryan was falling for him – Brendon wasn’t stupid – and he was flattered, but he didn’t know where it was going to get them. Ryan was world-famous, he was the son of one of the richest men in the world, he owned a penthouse in one of the most expensive zip-code areas in the United States; he deserved someone better than Brendon. Brendon had been raised in a modest house in the suburbs; they always struggled for money and barely a week ago, he’d been staying in the shadiest motel in Las Vegas. Now he was tucked away in one of the most beautiful places in the world, trying desperately hard not to get too involved with Ryan’s personal affairs - but it was hard when everything that man did sent Brendon’s head into a tailspin.

Spending time with Ryan was like taking drugs. He knew he shouldn’t; he knew there were so, so many reasons why he should just say no but that first hit was worth it every time. It was that feeling inside his stomach when Ryan caught his eye and the thump of his heart every time the man initiated contact. He observed Ryan looking at him the same way he noticed Jon looking at Joe back in Manhattan – his gaze always darting between Brendon’s eyes and his lips, his smile when he listened to Brendon talk, as if what he was saying was the most interesting thing in the world.
He always wanted that – he wanted it with Dallon and he wanted it with Jon and now he had it with Ryan, so why did it feel so implausible when he thought about the bigger picture? He wasn’t cut out for fame; he always wanted a simple, quiet life free from drama. He always wanted something exactly like this – a nice house with a beautiful view, shared with a man who loved him, bones and all. Yes, this was nice – but news breaking about his salacious love affair with the son of world-renowned entrepreneur, George Ross, was the very last thing he needed after the disastrous past few months. He curled his toes in the rug and bit the inside of his cheek.

He was involved now. He couldn’t walk away. They were sharing secrets and fears and anxieties and Brendon realized that he stopped doing this for the money a long time ago – the fifty grand Ryan promised him didn’t matter, but Ryan’s welfare did and he couldn’t leave the guy alone after what he told him that evening. Or more, he could but he really didn’t want to.

Whatever they had going on, Brendon was enjoying it. Ryan was the closest thing to a friend he had right now. He lost everyone he ever cared about in just a few short months – Jon, his parents, his sister, Dallon… He wasn’t about to run out on Ryan because of the what-ifs. What if someone finds out? What if this is all just meaningless - hollow promises and pity? What if, as soon as the excitement of fucking a whore ran dry, Ryan dumped him, moved on and left him just as wretched as he had been when they first met?

His heart was torn in two directions. Part of him wanted to run away before shit hit the fan, before anyone found out about their relationship – he still had the chance to live a relatively normal life without all his dirty laundry being aired to the entire world, but on the other hand… he wanted to stay. He looked towards the door and sighed. He wanted to stay and help Ryan cope with his demons because it seemed all he did was leave a trail of miserable men in his wake. He failed Jon and he guessed he failed Dallon too. He didn't want the same to happen with Ryan. Ryan had been there to help him out when he needed it. He’d been more than willing to listen while Brendon moaned about his own issues – the least he could do was repay the favor. He stood from the bed, pulled on his pants and stepped out into the corridor, blinking against the light.

When he reached the lounge, it was empty and silent. Brendon scanned his eyes across the room until he spotted movement out on the balcony – in the moonlight, he could see Ryan’s frame, back towards the window, illuminated against the background of darkness and Brendon smiled to himself. Fuck, he’d never get used to that flutter inside of his stomach. Since they’d been in Tahoe, Ryan had become his moon. Everything was in direct correlation to Ryan – the tides of his emotions, the peace that darkness now brought him, all of it. It was all because of him.

Brendon crossed the room and lingered at the door. Ryan was leaning on the rail of the balcony, his face lit up by the light of his cellphone and it suddenly struck him for the first time – that’s the real Ryan fucking Ross, dude. How many others could say they’d been lucky enough to experience this whole other side to the man people loved to hate? He felt another smile pull at his lips and drew the door back quietly.

The small noise still made Ryan jump. He turned in sudden surprise and slipped his cellphone into the back pocket of his pants.

“Can’t sleep?” he asked before stepping out into the chilly night. The man shook his head. “You should’ve woken me up. I’d’ve kept you company. I could’ve at least kept you warm out here. It’s cold out tonight,” he said, faltering by the glass doors, the goose bumps already appearing on his arms as the breeze hit his skin.

“You looked peaceful,” Ryan shrugged without any further explanation. He turned back to look out at the lake.
“I can leave you alone if you prefer?”

Ryan shook his head slowly and looked over his shoulder, his features soft, hair a mess, his eyes tired. “Come here – and you wouldn’t be so cold if you didn’t walk around half-naked all the time.” He held his hand out and Brendon walked towards him and took it. He felt the spark between them as their fingers touched. He took his place next to Ryan, shoulder-to-shoulder – a little closer than strictly necessary.

“It’s nights like this, I wish I could smoke a little weed,” Ryan smiled, nudging against Brendon. “It’s so beautiful out here - view like this would go well with a joint and a couple of beers, huh?”

Brendon looked up at the sky. Ryan was right – it was beautiful. The stars never shone this bright in New York. “You think if you had a puff on a joint, you’d fall off the wagon again?”

Ryan nodded. “I never was very chill when it came to taking drugs. If I was to get high, I’d want to get drunk; if I was drunk, I’d have to take coke – I guess it’s all or nothing for me now.”

Brendon hummed in quiet agreement. He guessed that was how their relationship was going to be too – all or nothing; none of this murky middle ground they seemed to be treading recently.

“A couple of hits and I’m sure I’d be out like a light though – weed always made me super horny too,” Ryan commented, nudging into Brendon’s shoulder again. “Nothing quite like fucking when stoned, huh?”

“Fucking you when you’re sober is like, infinitely better than when you were high, trust me,” Brendon grinned, “and weed only ever made me really hungry – for really crappy food as well - McDonald's twenty piece nuggets and really shitty 7/11 hotdogs.”

Ryan laughed. Loud. “That’s what cocaine is for – to stave of the hunger pangs.”

Brendon smiled and watched the reflection of the moon in the ripples of the water. They remained silent for a few moments but it wasn’t awkward, it was comfortable. There was something that could be said about that – comfortable silence around another person - but Brendon ignored the thought. He knew he should ask how Ryan was feeling – he had just told Brendon his father’s best friend raped him when he was a teenager, but where the hell was he meant to find the words for that? Nothing he said was ever going to make it better. It was like condolences at a funeral – well-meant but utterly useless.

“Hey,” he mumbled eventually, knocking his elbow into Ryan’s. “Did you want to talk about anything? About what you told me earlier?”

Ryan scrunched up his nose and shook his head. “Not right now. I’m fed up of spending so much of my time thinking about it. I came outside because all I was doing in bed was tossing and turning and I didn’t want to wake you. I thought I could get some peace out here, but it’s a little difficult when I can’t get high.” He put his chin in his hand.

Brendon smiled over at him sadly and noticed once again, how handsome the guy was – soft curls falling over his ears, a sharp jaw, cute nose and prominent Adam’s apple in his slim neck and those fingers – fuck, they drove him insane. He wanted to suck on them, draw each one into his mouth so they were slick enough he could fuck him with them. Brendon felt the warmth pool in his stomach again, the fire that fantasy ignited in him slowly burning.

“There are better things in life than getting high,” he said quietly, sweeping Ryan’s hair behind his ear.
“Yeah. I’m just starting to discover that.”

Brendon didn’t add anything else and neither did Ryan. He listened to the sounds of nature and felt a shiver run down his spine as the man’s hand eventually moved to stroke his back. “You’re freezing,” he noted, moving behind him and wrapping his arms around his waist. Brendon couldn’t stand how natural all of this felt, like a regular, blossoming romance between two hurt souls. It felt so fucking real.

“You’re going to leave me soon to go deal with your brother-in-law. It’s not fair,” the man pouted, pressing kisses against Brendon’s neck as he talked – and yeah, thanks for reminding me, he thought to himself. He was going to have to deal with Dallon sooner or later – but Las Vegas seemed like such a long drive and he could think of a million and one places he’d rather be than back in his hometown, trying to dodge a family who disowned him and his heartbroken first love.

“You knew I was going to leave to do that eventually,” he said, but he was letting his head fall back against Ryan’s shoulder so he could suck at his neck, and he was pushing his ass back into the man’s crotch. He knew why Ryan brought it up. It was a test – he wanted Brendon to have changed his mind; he needed the reassurance that he didn’t have to be alone anymore. Ryan’s teeth attached to Brendon’s earlobe and pulled gently – that small, often forgotten part of foreplay had always driven Brendon crazy. He bit his lip between his teeth to stifle a moan.

“I know,” Ryan sighed, pulling back and hooking his chin over Brendon’s shoulder. “I just don’t want this week to come to an end – having to go back to New York… seeing my parents again… It’s all so much easier to deal with when I think of having you there with me.”

“But I have to face up to my mistakes – just like you did when you went to rehab.” He felt Ryan sigh against his shoulder and faltered over what to say next. He didn’t want to go back to Vegas to talk with Dallon – he walked out of that man’s life before and he guessed he could do it again, but things were different this time.

Brendon’s sister knew, his parents… He decided to be honest. “I’m so scared of going back, Ryan. I don’t want to face it but I know I’ll never forgive myself if I don’t.” He briefly imagined how awful his reunion with Dallon would be, about Dallon's teary eyes and sad declarations of love – the thought unsettled him as soon as his mind lingered on it.

Ryan moved back to his position next to Brendon and sighed. “You’re right. I guess we all have to face up to our responsibilities eventually. If I hadn’t gone to rehab when I did, I’d probably be dead by now. I always thought I was in control and then I ended up OD’d outside some drug-dealer’s apartment in the Bronx and I realized perhaps I really wasn’t in control of my addictions - that they were actually in control of me, of every single facet of my life.”

Brendon kept forgetting Pete Wentz somehow played a role in Ryan’s slip-up before he was admitted to rehab. The thought of the man still made him uneasy, especially now he knew he hung out with Ryan and, if Brendon recalled the story correctly, sucked his dick too. That motherfucker. How was it that his name was still haunting him long after he’d broken up with Jon? He shouldn’t still be jealous of a scummy, untrustworthy, morally questionable ex-of-an-ex who just so happened to deal drugs to his latest love interest. Not that he could call Ryan that. Love interest – how ridiculous.

“This guy, the drug-dealer? Pete Wentz, right - short, dark hair, a bunch of crappy tattoos? A big shit-eating grin?”

Ryan looked at him with a furrowed brow. “You know him? How?”
Brendon sighed and averted his eyes out over the water. “He’s Jon’s ex. I only really hate a very select amount of people and he’s one of them. I always thought Jon regretted leaving him for me. He caused so many arguments between us, you wouldn’t believe…”

“When I first started hooking,” he continued, looking down at where his hands gripped the wooden edge of the balcony, “I guess he was what you’d call my pimp – for a couple of weeks anyway. I’m not sure what he did, but he took thirty percent of my fee the first time I fucked someone. I sometimes think Jon was just there to initiate me into his ring, you know? I don’t think we were meant to fall in love.”

He sighed into the silence. “It’s funny; Jon and Pete were hooking up when Jon was only fourteen or fifteen – Pete was older, by quite a few years and I used to tell him all the time how fucked up that was, how creepy it was that there was such a big age difference when Jon was so young. It was only recently I realized it was the exact same thing between me and Dallon – it never felt weird with him though.”

“Wow,” Ryan breathed, shaking his head slightly. “I had no idea. Small world, huh?”

He sucked in a breath. “You bet.”

Brendon decided he didn’t want to bring the conversation back to himself again. He was fed up of complaining about his life and Ryan had much more pressing matters to deal with. He bumped against Ryan’s shoulder. “I just find it funny, that despite everything, we still move in the same circles,” he smiled. Ryan rolled his eyes and tried to hide a guilty smile.

He left it like that; he didn’t want to elaborate. He never enjoyed having Pete’s name on his tongue and reflecting back on his last weeks in New York wasn’t his favorite pastime. How the hell had he made it this far alive? Not only had Jon been attacked, but he’d also fallen in love with another man right under his nose. How did Ryan expect him to help him through his issues? He couldn’t even deal with his own. He’d run away from his own boyfriend in the wake of his attack by Marc Willis because he couldn’t deal with the tidal wave of emotions the situation dredged up in him.

Brendon cleared his throat. “Are you sure you don’t want to talk about what you told me before we fell asleep tonight? I always feel like I bleat on and on about everything that’s going on in my life and it helps, y’know, having someone around to listen. I can be that someone if you want.”

A short silence fell over the two of them. Brendon could hear the crickets chirping and the soft lap of the lake on the shore beneath them. “I don’t know where to start,” Ryan breathed after a moment. “I’ve pushed those memories so deep down inside me that I don’t even know where to begin.”

“What happened?” His little finger brushed against Ryan’s but he kept his eyes fixed on the dark mountains on the other side of the lake. “You can tell me. I’m not going to tell anyone.”

The man sighed. “I think when I was younger, I went through a tough time trying to discover who I was. I was rebellious and just beginning to challenge my sexuality. I never listened to my mom and dad – anything they told me to do, I’d always do the exact opposite and this guy, my dad’s friend, I knew he liked me. I hate to admit it now, but I guess I had a crush on him – he was in his forties when it happened, but he was pretty good-looking for an old dude. I think I just wanted him to be my dad. George was never very loving or very cool, but this guy was. I cock-teased him. I knew he had a hard-on for me, so I played up to it. I loved the attention.”

“So, were you willing up to a point?” Brendon asked cautiously.

Slowly Ryan nodded. His eyes were focused on the distance; his knuckles were white around the
edge of the balcony. “I showed up to his apartment one evening when his wife was away on business. I planned it – I thought I wanted it.”

“But when you said no, he should’ve stopped.”

Brendon noticed Ryan’s Adam’s apple bounce in his throat. “I sucked him off because I was fifteen and I had something to prove. I fucking craved attention because my dad never gave me any. He was so rough though…” Ryan trailed off, blinking out across the lake, reflecting on painful memories. “He held my head down and came in my mouth without warning and I remember being so disgusted by it all. He changed, just like that,” Ryan said, clicking his fingers. “He was always so kind to me and as soon as he had me where he wanted me, he changed. He called me a loose-jawed faggot – I’ll always remember that - and I think I called him a pedophile and after that, he just lost it. He knocked his fist into my face and gave me a black eye, a busted nose and then he told me he loved me while he raped me.”

“Jesus,” Brendon breathed after a moment. No one knew – Ryan had been carrying that around for the last decade on his own.

“I hate myself so much for not telling anyone until now. The day after it happened, the guy put quarter of a million dollars into my bank account and claimed it was for my sixteenth birthday. I knew it was hush money but I didn’t tell anyone. He told me no one would believe me anyway.”

“Jesus, Ryan,” he said again. “I’m sorry.” He watched as Ryan’s head fell back and he blinked up at the stars with silent tears in his eyes. “You know it’s not your fault, don’t you? No matter what happened during the lead-up, you said no. He should’ve stopped and he didn’t. You can’t blame yourself for that.”

“I know. I just hate that I let him get away with it… It’s at the root of everything – all this pain and hurt and anger - the fact that I have such a shitty relationship with my father… It’s all because of him.” Ryan’s voice sounded like it was about to break, but he took a breath, bit his lip and the tears slowly retreated.

Brendon couldn’t help but find similarities between the story Ryan told him, his own attack and what happened to Jon – but that was way too much of a coincidence. The chances it was the same man were minimal – Manhattan was a city of millions and Brendon, more than anyone, knew there were plenty of monsters living there.

“It’s not too late to tell someone, you know? Your dad or someone who can help - the cops, a psychiatrist…”

“George Ross is always way too busy to bother with me – and you don’t understand how the media works. It would go public, everyone would know, it’d be all people asked me about for the rest of my life. At least when no one knows, I can pretend like it didn’t happen.”

“But it did happen, Ryan – and it’s hurting you keeping it secret, especially from your father. Besides, what’s wrong with people finding out?” he asked. “If I was you, I’d want the entire world to know what a piece of shit this dude is. I’d want to ruin his entire fucking life,” he spat, suddenly incensed. He thought back to Marc Willis and how furious he’d been about what he’d done to Jon.

He should’ve gone public, he thought. He should’ve stood united with Joe and tried to convince Jon to go to the cops to get that motherfucker sent down. He could’ve been rotting in a prison cell right now, instead of gallivanting around Vegas or New York, looking for another easy target to assault and although Brendon had gone to his wife and told her of the attack, the man had essentially gotten away with it.
That dumb cunt still hadn’t learned his lesson. He was free to roam the streets and Jon’s assault had gone unreported – but it wasn’t his job to worry about Jon anymore. Jon Walker was a fully-grown man – he was capable of making his own decisions. As was Ryan.

“I can’t go public about something like that. I mean, just think of the one thing you’re most ashamed of and then imagine everyone you know finding out about it - pitying you for it or passing judgment. No one would ever look at me the same way again – it’d be just another big headline the papers would use to make money. That’s the reason I don’t want to go public.”

Brendon nodded. He understood. The thing he was most ashamed of was the time he spent as a whore – that and the fact he fucked his brother-in-law behind his sister’s back, which would, no doubt, be the one thing people would claim made him a bad person, unworthy of Ryan’s love, if ever details of their relationship leaked to the press.

How the hell were they ever going to walk away from each other after all this? Brendon hated to admit it, but he was as reliant on Ryan as the man was on him. He enjoyed spending time with him; he loved getting fucked by him and waking up in someone’s arms wasn’t too bad either. He wanted to help Ryan, but he was torn.

He knew what he needed to do. He needed to get a hold of himself and walk away with his head and his heart more or less intact before it got too serious, but there was something, some invisible string that kept pulling the two of them together. Brendon didn’t understand it and he sure as hell couldn’t explain it, but it was there, as tangible as the stars in the sky. Brendon was terrified. He was terrified of falling in love and opening himself up again for more pain. Dallon and Jon had hurt him enough. He couldn’t cope with another heartbreak.

“When are you going to go back to Vegas?” Ryan asked eventually.

He thought about it. “Probably within the next few days.”

There was silence and then, “I don’t want you to leave.”

Brendon’s shoulders sank. Neither did he, but this was exactly what he was afraid of – Ryan growing too attached when they were so obviously mismatched. They didn’t belong together; despite all the feelings Brendon had been experiencing over the last few days, they didn’t belong together. They didn’t. Not in the eyes of almost everyone around them anyway.

“I have to. I probably already spent too long up here. I’ll bet Dallon’s going crazy down there on his own.” He wondered what the man was doing with himself back in Las Vegas and how he was coping without Brendon there to hold his hand.

“Well, I’ll set you up in a hotel when you go back – not my dad’s place, he’ll only ask questions if he finds out but I’ll pay for a room somewhere nice for however long you need to sort things out – just promise me you won’t fuck him in a room I’m paying for. I don’t think I’m down with that.”

Brendon laughed, but when he shifted his gaze, Ryan looked serious. “Would that make you jealous?” he asked, a smile flickering on his lips. Ryan’s crush was actually kind of adorable. He nudged his elbow into Ryan’s ribs, but the man’s face remained unreadable, his eyes cast out over the lake.

“That would kill me,” he said - slowly, his jaw tense, his body stiff.

Brendon’s gut dropped. He watched the man carefully and had to remind himself once again, he couldn’t let Ryan’s words go to his head. “You don’t need to pay my way, Ryan. I don’t expect that.
I can take care of myself, you know?"

Ryan nodded. “I know. I just don’t want you staying in some crappy motel somewhere. I got the money,” he shrugged. “Who cares how I spend it?”

Brendon paused, looking over at him in the darkness. That really was all Ryan thought he was worth to anyone, wasn’t it? “You know I’m not here for the money anymore, don’t you?” Ryan looked over at him for the first time in a while, tired eyes and furrowed brow. He looked exhausted, as if he spent too much of the night thinking. “I’m here because I want to be, because I enjoy your company. I wouldn’t do this for anyone else, Ryan.” Brendon turned his eyes back over the water, focusing on the ripples reflecting the light of the moon. “I keep forgetting about the money,” he sighed. “I keep forgetting the real reason I’m here.”

“Well then, maybe you should just accept my offer as a friend?”

“And how on earth could I explain that to Dallon? He’ll probably ask where I’m staying, Ryan – you think he might be a little suspicious if he finds out I’m staying at one of the nicest hotels on the Strip? A few weeks ago, I couldn’t even afford thirty bucks a night at one of the worst motels in Vegas.”

Ryan was quiet for a second. “Just tell him about me.”

Brendon shook his head and laughed, looking up at the sky. “I don’t think that’s a very good idea.”

The man shrugged, looking a little dejected. Ryan Ross was probably used to getting everything he wanted in life, he was probably used to calling the shots but Brendon definitely noticed a change in him since he’d been to rehab. He was infinitely nicer to hang out with when he wasn’t high – he wasn’t as selfish, he was more considerate of other people’s feelings and it turned out, he had a reason for all that pain. Brendon wanted to wait it out and see where the next few weeks took them – perhaps entering into this relationship with no expectations was the best thing for him right now.

“All I’m saying is, I have the means to help you out – don’t be too proud to accept it because I’m not too proud to admit I want to look after you.” The man turned to him and Brendon saw how his eyes darted down to his lips every few seconds. Ryan’s words left an uneasy excitement inside his belly – he was flattered and he was hopeful but that voice at the back of his head kept warning him not to be swept away by them.

It was cold out on the balcony, the breeze shifted slightly and the goose bumps rose up on Brendon’s arms once more. He gazed up into Ryan’s eyes and waited for him to make the first move. He felt the brush of the man’s fingers against his and their hands linked together. Ryan took a step forward and closed the distance between them, his warm body pressing against Brendon’s naked torso. Brendon could feel his heartbeat.

“How about another one of those on the house make-outs, huh?” he asked, hooking his finger under Brendon’s chin and pulling their lips close.

“That’d be my pleasure,” Brendon smiled before they kissed, slow and precise until their arms wrapped around each other and their bodies pressed flush. Brendon arched into it, rolling his hips desperately against Ryan’s as their tongues slid together, lips wet, head swimming. Suddenly, Brendon had never been more certain about anything else in his life – he wanted this. All of it. He wanted Ryan and his back catalog of turmoil.

The kiss grew more heated. Brendon could feel his body drain of tension as they made out. He felt Ryan’s cock harden against his hip. Ryan pulled him away from the edge of the balcony after a few
moments and they stumbled together towards the pile of cushions and blankets that still lay on the
decking just outside the sliding doors. Their kiss continued, only breaking away when Brendon fell
back against the soft covers and pulled Ryan down on top of him.

Ryan looked into his eyes. “Fuck,” he breathed. “I’ll never get tired of this feeling I get when I’m
with you.”

_You will_, Brendon thought to himself. _Everyone does_. He could allow himself the fantasy though -
for just another night.

The man’s thumb brushed over Brendon’s bruised bottom lip. “You’re beautiful,” he smiled,
pressing a gentle kiss to the corner of Brendon’s mouth. Brendon couldn’t help but shake his head
slightly – he didn’t feel beautiful. Not recently. “You are. I wish you could see yourself through my
eyes. I wish you could see what I see right now.”

He attempted a laugh, but it sounded alien coming from his mouth – the moment wasn’t some
throwaway joke – not to Ryan at least. The tension between them was too high and Ryan was
looking at him with soft eyes. “You mean you don’t see a down-and-out escort, a guy who fucks up
everything around him?”

Ryan shook his head slowly. “I see a guy who’s been through so much, but who keeps on fighting,
no matter what. I see someone who’s kind-hearted and wonderful to be around, someone smart and
funny and sexy…” Brendon blushed, trying to battle the flattered grin from his lips. He could
definitely get used to being around Ryan – especially if this was how he treated him. “I see someone
who helped me so much more than he’ll ever realize. I see _you_, Brendon – and before you go back to
Las Vegas, I want you to know I accept you. I accept everything about you - and whatever this is,
whatever this thing I feel when I’m around you is… I want to hold onto it. I don’t want to let go.”

Brendon was lost for words. He suddenly felt like his heart was beating out of time. He couldn’t
ignore the tickle behind his nose. He pushed his hand through the back of Ryan’s hair and pulled
him back against his mouth to continue their kiss. Ryan’s body relaxed against his against the
blankets.

He felt something he never felt before. In the past, Brendon wanted Dallon to be brave enough to
give himself completely to him and he wanted something Jon couldn’t ever offer. He lived his entire
life always dreaming of something more and out on the porch, under the stars that night, for the first
time in his life, he felt like he had it with Ryan.

He couldn’t deny it anymore. _This_ was what he’d always been looking for.
Chapter 46

The first few seconds of consciousness that morning had been perfect bliss for Ryan Ross. A warm pair of lips lingered at the back of his neck and a soft, steady hand brushed at his hip as he stirred. He felt three slow kisses press along his shoulder blade before he opened his eyes. He could live in those silent seconds forever.

“Mornin’, handsome,” Brendon chimed softly in his ear.

Ryan turned his head to kiss the boy over his shoulder and tried to fight off the threat of reality, of all the negative thoughts that usually infiltrated his brain not long after waking up – thoughts of Marc Willis and his frayed relationship with his father and the fact that he was soon expected to return to New York, which was the last place on earth he currently wanted to be. Curled up in bed with Brendon was the only place he could escape those worries. Between the sheets was somewhere his head wasn’t constantly consumed with memories of the past.

“Good morning,” he smiled at the man behind him, enjoying the warmth of his body and the press of his fingertips against his hip.

“You’re a late riser this morning.”

“What’s the time?” he asked, turning onto his back and stretching on the mattress, sleep still clouding his voice. His bones cricked as he stretched – he was tense, his muscles were wound up tight, but he chose to ignore his aches and pains.

His eyes fell on Brendon reclining naked beside him. The late morning sun was filtering in through the window, casting dusty bands of light across the tangled bed sheets and painting the boy next to him with an ethereal glow. He looked like an angel.

“It’s a little after eleven,” Brendon replied with a soft smile.

Since arriving in Tahoe, Ryan and Brendon usually woke not long after sunrise – they slept with the curtains open and would stir when daylight broke. It was unusual for him to sleep so late into the morning, but he was in no hurry to vacate the bed just yet.

After retreating to the master bedroom in the early hours of that morning, Ryan had fallen asleep almost instantaneously. He’d exhausted himself thinking too much about Marc Willis and his tumultuous relations with his father but with Brendon’s reassuring presence by his side, sleep had swept over him like a thick fog. He’d enjoyed a night completely devoid of dreams.

He pulled Brendon into his chest and felt the boy relax against him, his breaths slow and even. The man was perfect in the most abstract sense. Ryan understood that the boy came with his fair share of baggage, but despite that he found himself having to bite back those three small words over and over again. He was surprised at the intensity with which they played on his tongue, because the feelings he experienced at night usually didn’t exist by morning – but this one did. He was in love. He was in love. He was fucking in love! There was absolutely no doubt about it. He felt it in his heart and his head and the very pit of his stomach. He felt it tingling over his skin every time Brendon looked at him – it was the simple act of falling in love, face first and head over heels. Ryan wouldn’t have it any other way.

Falling for Brendon hadn’t been part of their agreement. Brendon was still an escort and he was still a recovering drug-addict – there were plenty of reasons why they shouldn’t be together and all of
them would no doubt have disastrous consequences on his and Brendon’s well being as soon as the world found out about it. He’d never imagined that the man he’d met by chance in a fancy Manhattan restaurant would become such a huge part of his life. He’d felt that shift in their relationship that neither of them had acknowledged out loud and during the silent moments they shared together, Ryan just prayed that he wasn’t reading too much into what they’d forged together.

He looked down at the boy in his arms – this wasn’t just some act, this wasn’t Brendon working hard to earn a tip, this was real. Either that or Brendon Urie was a great actor who deserved an Oscar for his current performance. Brendon had become Ryan’s lifeline – out of all the people in his life, Brendon had been the one to support him through his first tough week out of rehab and that had to mean something. He refused to believe that all of this meant nothing to the boy who made him feel like his life wasn’t falling apart.

The two of them lay together for the next hour, dozing in and out of light sleep until Ryan’s growling stomach disturbed them both.

“Someone’s hungry,” Brendon laughed. “I could bake you some cookies. Cheer you up a little after yesterday?”

“With your cooking skills? I don’t think so.”

Brendon muffled his laughter against Ryan’s shoulder. “Fine. Suit yourself, asshole, but that’s what my mom used to do for me when I’d had a bad day. I like to think all the baking and crafting she did with me when I was a kid was what turned me gay. I think that’d really piss her off,” he joked, his hand sliding down Ryan’s chest and coming to a rest just below his belly button.

Ryan chuckled before he felt his smile fade abruptly. He kept forgetting that Brendon’s parents were a pair of homophobic assholes. His own father might’ve been an irresponsible and distant parent, but at least he’d never disowned him like Brendon’s had. Brendon was a good man; he had a soul that was so easy to love that he couldn’t understand how other people didn’t see it.

The man pulled away from Ryan’s embrace and sat up on the edge of the bed. Ryan watched him stretch, watched the muscles in his arms and back flex underneath his skin; perfect and flawless and tempting. Ryan wanted to pull him back down onto the mattress, lick over every inch of him and make the boy feel like he was the most important person in the world. Brendon yawned and looked back over his shoulder at him.

“Well, there’s some cookie dough in the refrigerator, is all I’m saying – all I have to do it cut it up and throw it on a baking sheet. Ten minutes in the oven; it shouldn’t be that difficult,” he shrugged.

“Are you sure you can manage that?” Ryan stuck out his tongue and raised his eyebrows playfully. “I know how much you struggle in the kitchen.”

Brendon tipped his head back and laughed at himself. Fuck, Ryan loved that sound. The boy fell back down on the mattress against Ryan’s chest. “You’re getting a little bit cheeky now, mister,” he smiled, dark eyes trained on Ryan’s, creased at the corners. Soft light illuminated the boy from behind as he smiled down at him. He was simply breathtaking – and those three words almost came spilling out every time Ryan opened his mouth.

“I’m sorry,” he mouthed, the smile impossible to battle from his lips. “Forgive me. Pretty please.” He let his hand move up to cup Brendon’s jaw. You fucking love this kid, his head chimed silently. You’d be a fool to let him walk away without a fight.

“I forgive you,” Brendon whispered in reply, leaning forward to connect their lips. Ryan’s eyes
slipped shut; he arched up against Brendon’s hips and opened his mouth in a groan when Brendon thrust back. By the time he pulled away, Ryan’s dick was hard. Brendon grazed his hand over the bulge in Ryan’s underwear but suddenly pulled away and sat back on his heels. Ryan couldn’t help but pout at the loss of physical contact.

He watched as the boy climbed from the bed, stepped into his jeans without putting on his underwear and zipped up the fly. He looked back at the bed expectantly. “So, do you want me to bake some cookies or what?”

“What are we, five years old?” he laughed, stretching out on the mattress with an exaggerated yawn. “You don’t have to fill me up with sugary treats to make me feel better, Brendon – you’re sweet enough as it is.”

Brendon rolled his eyes but his lips pulled into a bashful smile. Ryan loved making Brendon blush. “And you’re corny as fuck recently,” he said, making his way to the door. “I kinda like it. Come give me a hand,” he called back over his shoulder, throwing Ryan a pout. “I’m trying to be romantic here.”

Ryan watched the man leave the bedroom and had to bury his face into his pillow to hide his grin. If Brendon Urie wanted romance then Ryan sure as hell could give it to him – after all, they’d already established that their relationship had turned into something more than either of them first expected, what was one more admission in the grand scheme of things? But an admission of love...

Ryan had spent his entire life running from the truth, hiding from his problems and burying his true emotions. Brendon was the first person to make him feel complete without drugs. He made him feel at ease, he made life feel worthwhile and he’d be damned if he let the boy go back to Vegas without telling him that.

He wondered how much longer they could stay tucked away like this together before they inevitably parted ways or the press discovered them. He’d arrived in Tahoe with the selfish need for Brendon to become dependent on him – for the boy to become so reliant on him that he’d never leave but he still had the issue of his brother-in-law to deal with back in Las Vegas and it was going to kill him watching Brendon walk away.

Ryan refused to believe that could be the end of their relationship – they’d made a connection that couldn’t be disputed and now Ryan couldn’t picture himself finding happiness with anyone else. Brendon had etched himself into his psyche; his memory was tattooed there, permanent and eternal. He began to wonder how he’d cope if he never saw Brendon again after he left for Vegas. Ryan couldn’t even fathom that thought.

Last night on the balcony, Brendon had told him; *I’m not here for the money anymore* and that meant that the boy had discovered something inside Ryan that was worth sticking around for other than his father’s multi billion-dollar fortune. Unchartered territory, so to speak. The thought sent Ryan’s mind into a tailspin.

He wanted to make it impossible for the man to walk away from him – not for selfish reasons anymore, but because he knew he could be the one to whisk Brendon off his feet. He knew he could be the man who could finally make Brendon happy, treat him right and ease his troubles.

With Brendon at his side, Ryan slept. He slept like he never had before. He’d crashed, but in the most beautiful way – he now felt free to let go of all the false ideas of his late teens and early twenties, the construct of who he was and who he thought he should be. That struggle was over. *This* was who he was and a life with Brendon was what he wanted.

Ryan climbed from the bed, dressed and exited the bedroom to find Brendon cutting up cookie
dough in the kitchen. He approached him from behind and wrapped his arms around him, hooking his chin over the boy’s shoulder.

“I left you hanging last night, huh?” he said into the crook of Brendon’s neck. He inhaled, his breath shaking - the boy always smelled so good. He was intoxicating. The attempted blowjob last night had gone unfinished after Ryan admitted what had happened to him when he was a teenager and Ryan sure knew just how frustrating that could be. “Let me make it up to you,” he whispered, kissing Brendon’s neck, pressing his lips over his bare shoulders and trailing his fingers down his ribs. Brendon shivered and let his head fall back, his hand going lose around the knife handle.

“You don’t have to,” he said softly, but he groaned when Ryan bared his teeth against the sensitive spot between his neck and his shoulder. Ryan wondered if Brendon realized just how much all of this meant to him.

“But I want to.” Ryan’s hands slipped down to his hips and pulled Brendon’s ass back against him – he was beginning to get hard inside his pants and he unzipped Brendon’s jeans slowly, pushing them down just under his ass – and what a beautiful ass it was, round and firm and perfectly smooth. Brendon’s dick fell free and Ryan kneaded the boy’s cheeks between his palms, continuing his assault on his neck, always kissing, his wet lips never stopping or lingering for too long.

When Brendon arched back into him with a moan, pressing his ass back into Ryan’s erection, Ryan decided to take charge of the situation and led him by the hand towards the lounge. They fell back against the couch cushions together in silence. Their lips joined in a slow, measured kiss and Ryan tugged at Brendon’s pants until they were around his ankles. Brendon kicked them off the rest of the way. The boy was now exposed to him, perfectly naked and half hard between his legs. Brendon looked up at him with half-lidded eyes, his chest rising and falling slowly as Ryan hovered over him.

He wanted to say it; he wanted to tell the boy how much he meant to him, how quickly he’d become his entire world since they’d arrived in Tahoe together, but he was scared. He was so scared of not hearing those words back that he pressed his mouth against Brendon’s neck and sucked at the skin to stop them falling from his lips.

“It feels good when you treat me like this,” Brendon sighed, a coy smile playing at the corners of his lips.

“I want to treat you like this forever.” Ryan guessed that was almost as good as I Love You. Not quite, but almost.

Brendon keened in frustration, urgently yanking Ryan’s shirttails from inside his slacks. “Fuck Ryan,” he groaned, “please take your clothes off. I want to feel you.” Brendon sounded just about as desperate as he looked.

Ryan took the boy’s wrists and pinned them above his head with his hand. “Not yet, baby,” he smiled.

Brendon pouted underneath him, his dick now fully hard between his legs. “Why not?”

“Because that’s what you want and I want to make you wait.”

He wanted to please Brendon. He wanted to pleasure and tease him and fill the boy with desire. He wanted to send him back off to Vegas knowing that the best thing he’s ever had was waiting for him right here in Tahoe.

Ryan pulled gently at Brendon’s dick – he knew the boy had been starved of blowjobs these past
few years and *fuck* - he sure needed the practice if he wanted to hold down a relationship with a man as much as his heart told him he did. Ryan slipped off the couch to his knees and pulled Brendon up so that he could settle between his thighs. He watched as his cock bobbed in front of his lips.

He wasn’t very confident in this area of gay sex. He was good at eating pussy – at least he’d never had any complaints – but he was unpracticed in the art of fellatio. He guessed he’d always been a pretty selfish lover when he was on drugs, but he knew enough about blowjobs simply from being a man and watching a lot of porn that he could certainly try and wing it – especially for someone like Brendon. He wrapped his fingers around the base of Brendon’s erection and flicked his eyes up to see the boy gazing down at him, his lips wet and his mouth slightly open.

*I love you* – the words screamed through his head, he was going to end up admitting his feelings by accident if he wasn’t careful... Ryan leant closer, close enough to sweep his tongue over the leaking head of Brendon’s cock once, twice, three times before he hollowed his cheeks around him to suck, his eyes still attached to Brendon’s as he worked. He watched as Brendon bit his lip, the skin turning white under the pressure of his teeth.

It took a few moments to get into it; he definitely didn’t have the right skills to deep throat yet, but maybe they could work on that together – he certainly had a good teacher in the form of Brendon Urie. He pulled away, pressing soft kisses down the shaft of Brendon’s cock until he reached his balls. Brendon groaned in appreciation as he tongued them, his back arching up from the soft couch, his toes curling either side of Ryan’s knees – but Ryan was still cautious. He knew whose fault it was that he hadn’t had more practice at this...

He sucked around the head of Brendon’s cock again, pushing forward slowly, taking the boy into his mouth inch by inch; watching, listening for his reaction. Ryan tested his gag-reflex and found that five, perhaps even six inches was his limit before he began to feel uncomfortable. He squeezed the base of Brendon’s dick and felt the man’s hand come to a soft rest on his shoulder. He pushed forward until he gagged, pulled away and then repeated the entire string of actions once more.

The boy moaned above him, his grip tightening around Ryan’s shoulder, nails digging into skin and leaving their mark. Brendon’s thighs were starting to shake – he guessed he was doing something right.

“You want me to lick your asshole?” he asked breathlessly, pulling away with a wet pop and wiping his mouth.

Brendon groaned in response, barely managing to nod his head as he pushed his body up and around, his knees balancing on the very edge of the couch, elbows supporting himself on the back cushions. Ryan watched his hands as they smoothed around Brendon’s ass, cupping and pinching until he spread his cheeks and ran his thumb teasingly over the boy’s perfect, tight hole. Brendon shivered again, asshole puckering under the soft pressure. Ryan spat against it, buried his face between his ass cheeks and started to rim him.

Ryan was lost in the sensuality of it all – eating Brendon out in the middle of the lounge, making the boy moan and cuss above him. Inside of his pants Ryan’s dick was rock hard and leaking. He motioned silently for Brendon to pull himself apart so he could palm himself through the material of his slacks. Ryan’s tongue circled around his hole and he felt his stomach clench as Brendon thrust back into it. *Fuck, he was enjoying this*... He never knew it could be this hot to give someone else so much pleasure. He felt *sexy* performing this act – it was erotic and carnal to fully concentrate on someone besides himself. Ryan snaked his hand around Brendon’s hip and jerked his cock with a strong wrist. The moan that fell from Brendon’s mouth was *sinful.*

His tongue was pushed deep, he was reveling in the feeling of Brendon’s hole giving way to the
intrusion when he next opened his eyes. Brendon’s fingers covered his around his dick, taking over and setting a new pace and Ryan’s hands both moved to pull his cheeks apart again, licking up Brendon’s taint from his balls before lubing the boy up with more saliva and circling his asshole with his tongue until all he could taste was skin and his own spit.

He’d been working Brendon for about a minute when he felt his muscles tense under his hands. Brendon’s own fingers had fallen away from his erection but it still bobbed, hard between his legs. He grazed the pad of his thumb over the head of Brendon’s cock and pushed his tongue inside him – he groaned, long and loud, punctuated by a curse of his name that sent fireworks to the very pit of his stomach – but then Ryan became aware of something else, another call of his name, but from further back in the house and then right behind him.

When he pulled back and turned towards the sound, George Ross was stood in the threshold of the lounge, brown eyes wide and face pale, stunned into silence as he took in the scene in front of him. Ryan’s entire body clamped up, his face draining of color as his eyes connected with his father’s from over his shoulder. He wiped at his mouth with one hand and tried to protect Brendon’s modesty with the other. “Dad?” he choked, his mouth still open in shock at his father’s surprise appearance. “What are you doing here? I thought you were in Saint-Tropez,” he rambled, scrambling to his feet and adjusting his pants, grabbing Brendon’s jeans and throwing them to him on the couch. Brendon curled up on himself, burying his own embarrassment in the cushions.

His father blinked and shook his head in a daze. “Oh, jeez, I’m sorry,” he said, turning quickly away from the lounge and retreating back into the hallway. “I didn’t know you had company,” he called. “I guess I should’ve called ahead.” “Yeah, no shit,” Ryan mumbled, pushing his hair back from his face with his fingers.

“I just realized I forgot something in the car. I’ll be back in a minute,” he heard his father call from the front door. It slammed behind him and plunged the house into silence. He turned to look at Brendon who was struggling into his jeans on the couch.

“That’s not exactly how I pictured my first meeting with your dad, Ryan,” Brendon huffed, his face red from either embarrassment or the remnants of arousal, Ryan couldn’t tell – maybe a little of both. He couldn’t help but laugh in sheer shock of the moment. Brendon’s eyes were wide and cautious and Ryan fell down onto the couch next to him, groaning into his shoulder.

“This is the very last thing I need right now,” he sighed, closing his eyes as he felt Brendon’s arm wrap around his shoulder. “I can’t believe he just turned up here without calling – oh, fuck… how the hell am I going to explain all this?”

It suddenly dawned on him that his father would want an explanation as to who Brendon was. He’d bet that George had been talking to William about Ryan’s sudden refusal to turn up at his sixtieth and not only was he going to have to defend his decision not to return to New York at the weekend, but he was going to have to explain Brendon’s presence in his life as well – and that was opening up a whole new can of worms. The thought of being honest with his father after all this time pushed a sudden stream of tears to the front of Ryan’s eyes but he quickly blinked them away.

Brendon rubbed at his back and said, “Are you going to be okay? Did you need me to stay with you or something?” He sniffed, giving Brendon’s shoulder a quick squeeze. “No. I’ll be fine.” He felt like he was the one who needed reassurance though, not the other way around. “Go shower up or something. I’ll talk to him.”
Brendon didn’t need to be told twice. Needless to say, the boy was keen to escape to the bathroom and avoid George Ross for as long as possible. Ryan watched him walk away and sat in tense silence awaiting his father’s return.

He didn’t want to face George right now – not after his father had just witnessed him rimming another dude. Fuck, he was mortified; how was he ever going to live that one down? He heard his dad come back in through the front door and watched him cautiously enter the longue, looking around as if he expected to see a similar scene as the one he’d just stumbled in on. He didn’t know who was more embarrassed; George or himself?

“So…” his father started, flashing his son a big, faux smile. “How are you?”

“Fine,” he nodded, crossing his arms. “Feeling good.” Ryan’s face was still burning red with embarrassment. He was actually a little pissed at his dad for interrupting them because another couple of minutes and he probably could’ve had the boy coming right over his fingers – despite his father’s presence, that thought still twisted the last fragments of excitement inside his belly.

“You look good,” George noted, surreptitiously checking the couch for stains before sitting down heavily next to him. “You staying clean?”

“So far, so good… I thought you’d’ve least called me to tell me you were dropping by. I spoke to you yesterday and you didn’t mention anything about coming by here.”

Ryan thought briefly back to the phone call he’d made to his father in Saint-Tropez the previous afternoon and recalled the way George had blown him off in favor of getting drunk on red wine with his stepmother. He couldn’t help but hold a grudge against the man – he was going to tell George about Marc Willis and he'd been too busy to deal with him. That seemed to be the story of Ryan’s life.

“Well, Pamela and I decided to come home early. William called to tell me you don’t want to come back to New York for my birthday, so I flew from JFK to Sac straight after our redeye and drove up here to see what’s up.” George paused and then sighed, wiping over his face with his hand. His dad looked a little jaded. “I realize I’ve probably not been the most supportive father recently and I feel bad about that, so I wanted to make it up to you. I thought we could hang out and talk… William didn’t tell me you had a guest. How long has he been up here with you?”

“About a week,” Ryan shrugged, his lips twitching. “Perhaps call next time? Or at least knock and wait for me to answer the door.”

George ruefully held up his hands. “Lesson learned. Trust me.” He looked over at Ryan with apologetic eyes. “So. You enjoying it up here?”

“Yes,” he admitted. “Yeah, I really am. I’d forgotten how beautiful it is up here.”

George hummed in agreement. “I brought Pamela up here after we got married. It’s one of the only places that doesn’t remind me of your mother. I still miss her sometimes, you know?”

Ryan shrugged, but it didn’t stop him from feeling that tickle behind his nose. George never talked about Ryan’s mother and he didn’t know why he was starting now.

“Before she died she said to me – and I’ll never forget it, she said; you look after Ryan for me. You make sure he grows up happy and knows how much I love him… Sometimes I think I failed her, son. Don’t get me wrong, I love Pamela, she’s an incredible woman – but so was your mom.” His father paused. “You remind me so much of her it’s unreal…” George sniffed and wiped his hand over his
eyes. Ryan noticed that he was wiping away tears.

“The worst day of my life was the day she died – six months between finding out she was sick and having to bury her. It was so fast, I hardly had any time to prepare for it – and you were only eighteen months old; you didn’t understand it. I couldn’t even explain it to you.” His father sighed at the memory. “You cried for her for about a month.”

Ryan could feel the emotions welling up inside him, constricting his throat – the grief he’d never really got to experience unearthed by his father’s confessions.

“When she got sick it was probably the first time I truly realized that money can’t always get you what you need – I mean, I couldn’t make her better and when she died I couldn’t bring her back. I was scared of raising you lot on my own. It was a really tough year – until I met Pamela.” George smiled fondly, reaching out to rub at Ryan’s shoulder. “You know what the other worst day of my life was?”

Ryan shook his head. He could hazard a guess, but knew his voice wasn’t strong enough to commit to words.

“The only time I ever came close to experiencing what I did when your mother passed was when I got that phone call to tell me you’d been found unconscious and were on your way to hospital – I was absolutely beside myself. I thought I was going to lose you too – burying my first wife way before her time was hard enough… the thought of having to do the same to my son was fucking gut-wrenching, Ryan.” George choked back a sob and gripped at Ryan’s shoulder, but he quickly sniffed back his emotions. His father had never been a particularly expressive man and watching him cry was kind of like watching a puppy get kicked. He suddenly felt guilty for putting his father through so much heartache.

“God. I’m sorry. I don’t know what came over me.” George scrubbed his hand over his face and took a deep breath, squaring his shoulders. Maybe the two men were alike after all – neither of them liked to admit when they were fragile.

“I’m sorry for turning up here unannounced. I’m really proud that you’re staying clean. I know I don’t say it as much as I should but – I love you, Ryan. I love you so much.” The man pulled his son against him in a strong embrace. It felt awkward for the first few seconds, but then it just felt painful. His chest hurt as he tried not to think of how long he’d yearned for affection from his father. When he pulled away a few moments later, George Ross had tears in his eyes again.

“So, who’s your friend?” he asked cautiously.

Ryan was thankful for the change of subject, but he wasn’t sure he wanted to talk about Brendon with his dad just yet. He debated ignoring the question – his father didn’t need to know about that particular liaison, did he? Keeping it secret though almost felt like it cheapened their relationship. He wanted his father to realize that he was human, capable of human emotions.

“His name’s Brendon,” he said stiffly. “We’ve been hanging out a lot since I left rehab.”

George nodded and there followed a lull in their conversation. Ryan wondered what his father was thinking, but he guessed it was a question that he didn’t want to answer. “What does he do?” he asked eventually – and of course George would want to know all about Brendon’s occupation. Surprisingly, the lie rolled off his tongue with relative ease.

“He’s a model,” he said – Brendon sure had the looks and the body for it. Even his father couldn’t dispute that. “He’s pretty modest though – he doesn’t like talking about it. We met in NA a couple of
months before I went into rehab.” He was going to keep that particular lie up too.

“So, he’s clean?”

“He’s clean,” Ryan repeated, nodding his head slowly. He was thankful that his father didn’t ask him to exaggerate on his story, because he didn’t know what else he could tell him – he’s an excellent dick-sucker? He fucked his sister’s husband and he’s leaving me soon to go back to Vegas to sort things out with him? He’s a goddamn hooker? Without a doubt, Brendon sounded like a piece of shit if you didn’t know the true story – he doubted his father would be too happy about them hanging out.

“And he’s been helping you out?”

“He’s been a huge help actually.”

I think I’m in love with him, he wanted to tell his dad. This is real, this isn’t just something sexual – I’ve never felt like this before. I’m in love with the boy. George obviously loved Pamela and he apparently still held a torch for his mother – Ryan wanted to ask what if felt like; what the tell tail signs were, how to cope if his love was unrequited… The notion absolutely terrified him. It was a fear way beyond living his life as a sober man; it was the terror of living his life as a lonely one.

“Well, it’s good to hear you’ve had someone around who knows what it’s like. Bet you didn’t want your old man around anyway, huh? I’d cramp your style. Right?” his father joked, elbowing Ryan in the ribs once, twice, three times until Ryan cracked a smile. George was right – Ryan hadn’t really wanted him around, but a phone call would’ve still been nice.

“So, what’s this William tells me about you not wanting to come to my birthday party? I thought you’d be stoked to see the family.”

Ryan sighed. He should’ve known this conversation wouldn’t be too far away – and he didn’t want to talk about Marc Willis, he couldn’t face that conversation right now. “I just think it’s a little too soon. I’m really enjoying being up here, to be honest. It’s quiet, it’s peaceful – two things which Manhattan is certainly not.” It wasn’t as if he was lying – he really did enjoy being up in Tahoe, especially with the company he was currently keeping. It was a good an excuse as any. He didn’t know how his father could argue with him, but of course he did...

“It’s my sixtieth, Ryan,” George reminded him gently. “The whole family wants to see you. I was keeping it small and alcohol free for you.”

“That’s what William told me at first and then he called up yesterday saying you’d invited friends from work and, you know… their families and shit. I can’t deal with that right now, dad, I don’t think you understand.” Ryan pulled away from his father on the couch and scooted to the end of it, putting his head in his hand. “They’ll all be asking me about rehab and shit – I don’t want to talk to them.”

“Fine. Okay. I know it must feel a little daunting – but you’ve hardly seen anyone in the two months, it might be good for you to start integrating with people again. I’ve been talking to my shrink and he says that one of the biggest reasons drug-addicts slip back into addiction is because they don’t have a supportive network around them…”

Ryan shook his head, irritated at his father’s inability to grasp what he was trying to tell him.

“Listen, I’ll cut it down to just family and close friends. Gabriel’s going to be there.”

“Fuck Gabe. Gabe’s not family,” Ryan snapped. He’d been out of rehab for over a week and Gabe
hadn’t bothered contacting him, the selfish asshole. Too busy jetting off to Barbados and Paris with that girlfriend of his. Ryan wondered how Gabe first told Erin he loved her, whether it was as difficult for him as it seemed to be for Ryan.

George Ross exhaled a heavy sigh and looked down at his knees. “Alright,” he sighed. “You win. We’ll keep it small – just family. I’ll reorganize everything; I’ll tell the caterers there’s been a change of plan.”

Ryan knew that his father was trying to make him feel guilty, but he wasn’t falling into that trap. He nodded his head and turned back to face him. “Thank you,” he said. “I appreciate you doing that for me.”

“Does that sound a little less scary? Me, Pamela, Jake, your sister… You can invite your friend if you want.” George must’ve read the apprehension in his son’s face because he quickly added, “I don’t know if you’ve got that sort of relationship, but he’s more than welcome.”

Ryan briefly thought about how awkward it’d be introducing Brendon to his family – all the intrusive questions they’d ask, how they’d look down their noses at him as soon as they found out his last name had no net worth. The guy was a hooker, he’d been brought up by god-fearing parents in the suburbs of Las Vegas, their lives were still worlds apart – but at the back of his mind, Ryan realized he wanted nothing more than for his father and Pamela and Jacob and his sister to accept Brendon into the family. He just wished his life could be simple. He wished he didn’t have to worry about the media and his family finding out about what Brendon had once done for a living or how they really knew each other…

“I don’t know… I think Brendon has plans to go visit his step-brother or something within the next few days,” he mumbled. He still wasn’t sold on Brendon’s plans to go talk to Dallon back in Vegas, but he knew he couldn’t stop the guy – it wasn’t like Brendon was his boyfriend…

“Well, why don’t you introduce us?” George asked. “I’d like to meet him.”

Ryan couldn’t think of a more awkward situation he could plunge Brendon into right now – not after his father had just seen him tongue-deep inside that boy’s ass. That had been more than a little embarrassing, but he guessed this was crunch time – meeting the parents. Perhaps this would give him more of an idea about how Brendon felt about him. He looked back at the bedroom and sighed.

In the wake of his father turning up unannounced that afternoon, Ryan felt like his secret tryst with Brendon had been shattered. It was no longer classified to just the two of them – now his father knew about it and his father would want answers to his questions. It seemed like their relationship had quickly gone from an exciting fling to something a lot more serious. Everything, all the questions he’d been asking himself for the past few days, it suddenly all seemed way more real, fine tuned, as if he had to put a name on it – but if he wanted Brendon to continue to be a part of his life then his family was bound to find out about him eventually. Better to bite the bullet now, Ryan told himself as he pushed up from the couch.

“I’ll go check on him,” he sighed as he walked towards the bedroom door. “See if he wants to come out.”

Last night, Brendon had promised to stick around and help him work through his problems, but perhaps that was nighttime talk? Everything seemed a little more intimate a night – as if the darkness was a shroud around them and only them, protecting them from the ugly reality of the outside world. Ryan wondered if Brendon would still want to support him now he knew that George had found out about their affair or whether he’d go running back to Vegas, straight into Dallon’s arms or back to New York to find Jon.
Now Brendon was set to meet his father for the first time. Meeting the parents was a huge step – that’s something you did with a boyfriend. Ryan didn’t even know if Brendon was down with that.

He walked towards the bedroom and gently pushed open the door, slipping inside. Brendon was stood naked at the foot of the unmade bed, towel drying his hair. When Ryan shut the door behind him, Brendon looked over at him, dark eyes sparkling, droplets of water still speckling his chest and shoulders. Ryan wanted to fuck him right there and then – just push him down onto the bed and slip inside him, his hand over Brendon’s mouth to muffle his moans…

Brendon tried to hide a bemused grin. “Has he gone?”

“How’s it going?” Ryan asked. “He wants to meet you.”

Brendon’s eyebrows rose but the smile didn’t fall from his face. He looked surprised but not horrified at the idea. “Seriously? After seeing me bent over, getting rimmed by his son, he wants to meet me? How are we going to explain this?” Brendon’s finger gestured randomly between them.

“I told him you model. I told him we met in NA in New York a few months before I went to rehab.”

That confession made Brendon’s smile falter. The man clicked his tongue and pursed his lips and Ryan knew he’d said the wrong thing. He dropped the towel to the floor at his feet and moved to his duffel bag at the foot of the bed to retrieve some clean pants.

“So your dad thinks I’m an ex-druggie now? Thanks, Ryan,” he bit, stepping into his jeans. “What did you tell him I’m addicted to, because I can do a really good impression of a heroin addict.”

“Fuck, man, what did you want me to do? It’s better than him knowing that the only reason we met was because I fucking paid you to sleep with me.” Saying those words out loud plunged the room into silence. Sure, they may’ve shared some sweet moments together, but it didn’t erase the fact that Brendon was a whore who Ryan had picked up in a restaurant one day and paid him five thousand dollars for a drug-induced night of dirty sex.

He watched as the boy pulled on his pants and buckled his belt. He stayed quiet. He didn’t say anything. Ryan began to grow anxious. Perhaps this really was crunch time for the two of them? Perhaps the appearance of George Ross was all too real for Brendon? Perhaps he was finally going to leave him…

“Brendon. Please don’t be mad at me.”

“I’m not mad at you,” the boy snapped. “I’m just… Couldn’t you have told him we met somewhere other than a Narcotics Anonymous meeting?”

“I told him you’re clean – he’ll admire you for that, trust me.” The man didn’t react. Ryan huffed, watching as Brendon pulled a white t-shirt over his head and checked himself out in the mirror. You look great, babe, Ryan wanted to tell him, don’t even sweat it. “Brendon, please – just come and talk to him for five minutes… Introduce yourself, bullshit with him about New York or Vegas or whatever. Please. Do this for me. I want this.”

Brendon rolled his eyes but his lips pulled up at the edges. “You’re lucky I’m so well versed in knowing how to talk to old dudes in suits,” he commented, walking towards Ryan and looping his arms around his neck. Brendon dipped his head but looked up at Ryan, mouth slightly open, dark eyes gleaming. “If I do this for you how are you going to repay me?” he asked, a faux-innocent tone to his voice.
Ryan swallowed. “In any way you want me to.”

Brendon gazed up at him for another long moment before he leaned his mouth against his ear and whispered. “Make love to me tonight. Give me a reason to stay.” Ryan’s eyes closed. The boy’s arms slipped from around his neck and he walked around him towards the door. Ryan grabbed his wrist and pulled him back. When their eyes met, he almost said it – those three small words always on the tip of his tongue.

“Thank you,” he said instead of I Love You, holding Brendon’s gaze. Brendon nodded at him once before shaking his wrist free and walking out of the bedroom, head held high, shoulders squared. By the time Ryan followed him out, he was already gripping his father’s hand with both of his, smiling wide in greeting.

“Mr. Ross, it’s an honor to meet you finally. Ryan’s talked an awful lot about you.” Ryan approached from behind and folded his arms, watching the scene unfold. “I love this suit,” Brendon gushed. “What it is; Versace? Armani? Very stylish,” he nodded in approval.

Ryan watched in bemusement as his father - George Ross – blushed at the compliment and adjusted his suit jacket, brushing at the arms. “Thank you – it’s actually a regular old Calvin Klein though.”

“Well, now I know where Ryan gets his style from,” he smiled, looking back over his shoulder at Ryan. Ryan couldn’t help but be a little taken aback at the way Brendon worked George Ross – he was charismatic and affable; Ryan guessed it was years of charming old men into paying him for sex that did it. The thought soon sent an ugly jealousy into the pit of Ryan’s stomach.

“This is a wonderful place you have here too, Mr. Ross, I must say. It’s a nice chance from the city.”

“Oh, please – call me George. Are you from New York?” his father asked.

“I lived in New York for a long time but I was raised in Las Vegas. Ryan and I met a few months ago back in Manhattan and we kept in touch while he was in rehab – sporadically, but enough to keep up to date with each other. While he was in California I moved back home and then he called me up and asked if I wanted to come up here and I jumped at the chance to leave Vegas for a few weeks.” Brendon’s smile almost looked like it was etched on, but he was fucking working it. His father was falling for Brendon’s charm hook, line and sinker.

George looked over at his son knowingly and chuckled. “So, that’s the reason Ryan flew straight to Las Vegas after leaving rehab… I did wonder. I was trying to convince my son here to come back to New York for my birthday this weekend – the whole family’s really missed him.”

“I’ll bet they have. He’s missed you guys too,” Brendon commented, nudging his elbow into George’s as if they shared some sort of bond already. “He talks about it all the time – how much he’s needed a catch up chat with his dad…”

Ryan’s shoulders stiffened. He was going to kill Brendon for throwing him under the bus like that, the bastard – but perhaps Brendon was doing him a favor? He couldn’t avoid the subject of Marc Willis for the rest of his life.

“Why don’t you come back to New York with him, Brandon? You’ll be more than welcome at my birthday party.”

“Firstly,” Ryan interrupted, “it’s Brendon, not Brandon. Secondly, I don’t think he’s interested in going back to New York for your birthday party and thirdly, you just claimed it’d be family only – I don’t know why you’re still calling it a party.”
George rolled his eyes in Brendon’s direction. “Is he this argumentative with you? Brendon, I’m sorry, I apologize. I’ll rephrase that – I’m having a gathering for my sixtieth this weekend – family only,” he said, looking over at Ryan. “It’d be nice to see you there and get to know you a little better but of course, that’s totally up to you two.”

“Brendon has to go back to Vegas, though, don’t you?”

It was a test; of course it was a test. Ryan didn’t want Brendon to go back to Vegas. What if he never called him again? What if this was the extent of their love affair – guarded feelings and repressed emotions? Ryan couldn’t picture a future without Brendon in it and the thought of returning to Manhattan alone was petrifying.

“I can come back to New York with you,” Brendon replied. “I mean, if that’s what you want…”

Fuck, of course that’s what he wanted. He didn’t want to leave Brendon without knowing where he stood with the man – Brendon had told him back there in the bedroom, give me a reason to stay. Maybe that was it? Maybe Brendon was looking for love too.

“I thought you had to go back to Vegas?”

“I can do that and then come meet you out in New York…” Brendon said out of the corner of his mouth, almost under his breath – as if he really didn’t want to have this conversation in front of Ryan’s father. George purposefully ignored their altercation.

“Well, that’s settled then,” George enthused, clapping his hands, happy at the result. “I’ll have William call you a little later this week to organize travel arrangements. You know, I think I’ll leave you boys to it. It was great meeting you, Brendon. You make sure my son doesn’t change his mind about Saturday.”

After a couple more minutes of goodbyes and backslaps, George Ross left the house and Ryan listened to his car disappear down the driveway. His father’s visits always were fleeting. Brendon turned to him, closing the distance between their bodies and arched his hips against his. “That was fun,” he smiled, kissing Ryan’s lips. “You’ve got to be looking forward just a little bit about going back home.”

Ryan shook his head, avoiding Brendon’s gaze. “I’m worried that his friend’s going to be there. I don’t trust that he won’t just turn up.”

The smile remained on Brendon’s lips, soft, barely there. “How about I promise to kick his ass if he does show up?”

The image made Ryan’s lip curl at the corner and he kissed back, his hands holding Brendon’s hips, moving his mouth to nuzzle at the boy’s neck. “I want to tell you how much this means to me.” He spoke the words against Brendon’s skin. “You coming back to New York with me means a lot.”

“Well… this is serious stuff. I’ve met your dad,” the boy laughed. “Fucking George Ross!”

Ryan cupped Brendon’s jaw and kissed him. His lips were soft. He tasted like mouthwash. Ryan felt the thud of his heart inside his chest, the way their bodies molded together, a perfect fit for each other. Brendon was warm and grounding. He felt like he couldn’t let go, like they were stuck together, vines twisting between them, forcing them closer and closer and closer... He pulled away from Brendon's lips and pressed his mouth against the boy’s ear.

“I love you,” he said.
His words were quiet but the silence that followed was deafening. All Ryan could hear was the thud, thud, thud of a heart beating out of time behind his ribs.
Listen, it’s not that I don’t care about you, it’s not as if I don’t like you - because I do… I like you, I just… it’s complicated.

Fuck. No. That was lousy. ‘Like’ meant nothing to a man who’d just admitted he was in love – and how cliché was ‘it’s complicated’? Brendon filtered through the options in his head and then sighed. Nothing was going to be good enough; nothing was going to rectify the silence that had flooded the room after Ryan’s confession. Those three words were still pinballing around Brendon’s head.

*I love spending time with you. I really enjoy your company; I just need some time out to think about things... We can talk more about this in New York...*

And what was wrong with that? Brendon had a right to be cautious – he’d be risking everything by entering into a relationship with Ryan Ross; his name, his reputation, his privacy. *Everything*. Ryan didn’t expect him to jump feet first into a new relationship after a simple declaration of love, did he?

The truth was that Ryan admitting he was in love was anything but simple. After spending a week alone with the man, Brendon had experienced firsthand how complex his emotions could be - Ryan had all sorts of unaddressed emotional conflict and after finding out what had happened to him as a teenager, Brendon truly did want to help him out, but love-? Love just complicated everything.

Brendon took a deep breath and closed his eyes, knuckles held a few inches in front of the bedroom door. It was only Ryan behind there; he didn’t know why he was so nervous about knocking.

*There’s no rush; we can take things slow... You’re just emotional, you don’t mean it. How could someone like you ever fall in love with a boy like me?*

Part of him wanted to run, leave the house, hitch a ride and never look back. The prospect of *falling in love* absolutely terrified him. It had brought him nothing but pain in the past and he wasn’t naïve enough to think that any relationship he entered into with Ryan would be free of drama – but the truth was that everything that Brendon felt was fine-tuned with Ryan. Everything had meaning; even the small things like baking or sitting out on the deck, watching the stars. Ryan’s company brought value to all of them and it *terrified* Brendon to admit it, because he knew – he knew that what they had could never work in the real world.

Up in Tahoe, sharing quiet nights with Ryan Ross, it often felt like he was trapped inside a dream; it was lucid, subliminal even. Brendon said and did things not because he had to but because he *could* – and he *wanted* to. He'd never been allowed that privilege before now but he knew how quickly the dream could turn sour if they ever went public.

*Jesus* – the task ahead of him seemed virtually impossible. Brendon knocked at the bedroom door and waited for a reply.

“What?” Ryan’s voice came muffled from behind the door – he was moping in bed, feeling sorry for
himself. Brendon hadn’t really known what to do after the man’s quiet declaration, he hadn’t known what to say, so he’d buried his face into the crook of Ryan’s neck and stayed silent until the man pulled away and locked himself in the bedroom. He’d spent the following half an hour baking those stupid cookies as a peace offering, but they were burnt on the underside and as hard as bullets. Some peace offering.

“Hey, you… you gonna let me in or what? I baked you something.” He waited for Ryan’s response, fully expecting the man to direct a curt _fuck off_ his way, but it didn’t come. From inside the bedroom walls, the silence was clear. Brendon would’ve preferred the obscenity.

He’d never been able to lie about love – not with Dallon or with Jon. The words had always come rolling so easily off Dallon’s tongue after he’d returned to Vegas that Brendon wondered how much he actually meant them - either way, Brendon hadn’t felt them like he had when he was a teenager. He’d never stopped Dallon from telling him he was in love, he’d never given the guy a much needed clip around the ear and reminded him that what they had was _just_ sex but he hadn’t actively encouraged it either. Not really.

With Jon it was the opposite. He’d have quite liked to give Jon a big middle finger after he realized there was something going on between him and Joe and said _fuck you, asshole. I don’t need you anymore. I don’t love you_ – but he couldn’t, because it wasn’t true. He couldn’t lie about _not_ loving Jon Walker, even when Jon had made it obvious that his heart had found its home with someone else.

Did he love Ryan? Brendon didn’t know. When Ryan kissed him, when Ryan held him at night and told him his secrets, he couldn’t help but feel an outpouring of fondness for the man, but _love_? They were so fucking _different_ from each other...

“Ryan,” he sighed, rattling the doorknob, “let me in. We need to talk.”

“I don’t want to talk. Just forget about it, would you?”

“Dude, just open the fucking door,” Brendon barked, his patience quickly fraying. He pinched at the bridge of his nose and made an attempt to steady his voice. “I baked you those cookies. They’re really shitty though. You were right – I think I’ll stay out of the kitchen from now on.” He listened closely for any movement from behind the door, but there was nothing. “They might be terrible but I’ve already eaten three out of pure self-hatred. Come on, you’ve got to help me out here…”

From inside the bedroom, Brendon heard an irritated huff and then a pair of feet shuffling slowly towards the door. He stood there waiting for it to open and rolled nervously on his heels. When Ryan opened up and stood in front of him he looked red-eyed and underslept – Brendon really hoped the man hadn’t been crying, he was trying to be as fair as possible… Nonetheless, Brendon smiled at him and held out the plate of overdone cookies. Ryan looked down at the pile with an unamused arch of his brow.

“What did I say? I knew you couldn’t cook for shit,” Ryan sighed, monotone, barely cracking a smile. He ignored the proffered plate and walked over to the bed, falling down onto the mattress with a huff.

“You okay?” Brendon asked after a moment, a little cautious at the renewed tension between the two of them.

“Fine.” Ryan nodded into the pillow but Brendon could see the tension in his shoulders. He pulled the bed sheets up to cover his mouth and turned to face the wall. Brendon couldn’t help but roll his eyes – Ryan was going to be almost impossible to pull out of this funk.
“You don’t sound fine.”

“You’re right. I’m fucking not. I’m fucking embarrassed.”

Brendon discarded the plate on the dresser and moved towards the bed. He lay down on the mattress and slotted his body against Ryan’s, pulling the man’s ass into his hips. Ryan was still and unyielding in his arms and Brendon linked their fingers, hoping to feel him relax a little, but no – Ryan was being purposefully obstinate.

“Why are you embarrassed? I don’t think it’s anything to be embarrassed about,” he said, kissing Ryan’s shoulder. “Unless you regret saying it?”

Ryan remained quiet. After a long moment Brendon felt him sigh. “Well, you didn’t say it back, so…”

Ryan was right. Words had failed him. He’d been telling himself for days now that he couldn’t fall for Ryan Ross. How on earth was their relationship meant to translate to anything more than this? He was terrified of opening himself up for more disappointment; another failed relationship with a man who was no good for him, another heartbreak… Brendon sure enjoyed spending time with Ryan, but he couldn’t fall in love with him.

Ryan was too complex; their relationship, if ever it came to fruition would be filled with nothing put potholes and he would be risking everything just by going public. It was an unbeatable task, a fruitless possibility, a pipe dream. No good could ever come from them being together, except maybe, you know… happiness? Ryan made Brendon happy; there was no doubt about that – being in Ryan’s company made Brendon feel at ease, it made him feel appreciated and safe, like he was worth something. Ryan Ross was the only person who knew all there was to know about him and who accepted him irrevocably. Ryan Ross had just admitted to loving him – that’s all Brendon had been searching for his entire life, so why was he running away from it now?

He sniffed, burying his nose in the nape of Ryan’s neck and inhaling his scent – freshly shampooed hair and that musk that was so definitively Ryan. “Ryan… Listen to me,” he sighed, tightening his grip around the man’s waist. Ryan’s hipbones poked out from the waistband of his pants, half exposed where his shirt had risen up. “I really like hanging out with you-”

“Oh, god,” Ryan moaned. "Just stop there, please. I've already heard enough."

“Ryan, please... I’m terrified of opening myself up for this. You’ve got to admit, this isn’t your typical relationship.”

Ryan swallowed. “But it could be? It feels like one when I’m with you.”

Brendon closed his eyes – he could feel himself falling for the guy and Ryan would be so, so easy to take advantage of right now. Ryan was rich and he was dumb enough to think he was in love. With Ryan, Brendon would never want for anything ever again, he’d live a life of luxury - wonderful houses, designer clothes, first class travel... but that wasn’t the reason he had such an affinity for the man – and he didn’t want everyone to jump to that conclusion.

“Ryan, I think we both know that this is never going to be a typical relationship.”

“Oh, forgive me, I forgot what an expert you are at the typical relationship – whatever the fuck that is.” Ryan laughed, but the bitterness was clear on his voice. “You fucked your brother-in-law and then you hooked up with a druggie who couldn’t stand it when you touched him. Dating me should be relatively simple by comparison. You asked me to give you a reason to stay – what did you think
was going to happen? I thought you felt the same way…”

Brendon couldn’t find the words to reply, so he stayed silent. He was desperately grappling to protect himself and his own feelings and now Ryan had just solidified something in their relationship that he’d have rather ignored. He did like Ryan, fuck, perhaps he really did love him but he didn’t want to let down his walls right now. He was guarded, trying to protect his heart. Ryan surely had to realize that…

“I understand,” Ryan muttered, shrugging Brendon off from around his shoulders. “I get it. You should just forget I said anything.”

“Hey. Look at me.” Brendon tried to pull Ryan over onto his back to look at him, but the man was being deliberately stubborn. “Look at me, Ryan,” he said again, yanking at his shoulder. When Ryan refused to turn over, Brendon climbed over his body and slipped under the cover to face him. Ryan averted his eyes. Brendon didn’t want this – bad blood before he went back to Las Vegas. “Look at me. Please.” He cupped Ryan’s jaw in his hands and ran the pad of his thumb over the man’s lip. Ryan was indeed incredibly handsome – hazel eyes, soft brown hair, sharp jaw and slim limbs – maybe he should just swallow his pride and his reservations about any future they might have together and admit to almost feeling the same? Eventually, Ryan looked into his eyes.

“I really like you. I love spending time with you.” Ryan’s eyes cut to the side again and his lips turned into a subconscious pout. He was doing everything in his power to avoid Brendon’s gaze. “Look at me.” After a few seconds, Ryan’s eyes focused back on Brendon’s. “You make me feel things I’ve never felt before. You bring up things inside me I thought had died – you make me happy, Ryan… When I’m with you I’m not ashamed of who I am. You make me feel like it’s okay just to be me. I just need some time,” he said with a smile, his thumb still running idly across Ryan’s bottom lip.

“I’m scared.” The confession choked off in his throat. “You know damn well what people will say about me if ever this went public and I don’t think I’m cut out for that. I don’t think I can handle it. This is never going to be a typical relationship. You’re famous, Ryan and I’m not. You’ve got money and I don’t. I’m not like you. I’m scared – and I don’t think you can blame me for that. I think deep down even you know this is a terrible idea.”

Ryan shook his head, but Brendon could see how his words affected him – he pursed his lips and twitched his nose and his eyes fell away from Brendon’s. Ryan knew that he was right, but he was the one with his cards on the table, he was the one who’d opened himself up and was bleeding out his true feelings. “I think you over-complicate things. I’ve never been more certain of anything in my entire life, but if you don’t feel the same way…” he shrugged, moving to pull away from Brendon on the mattress.

“Jesus, Ryan,” Brendon bit, pulling him back to look into his eyes. “Don’t you ever listen to anything anyone says to you? I’m scared, okay? I’m terrified because I do feel something for you and I know it’ll never work out between us.”

"But why?"

"You've really got to ask me why? Because of my past, Ryan - because people write about you in the newspapers and stalk you for photos and because I'm a hustler who dated a drug-addict and fucked his brother-in-law - you said it yourself. You think your dad would be as keen for me to go back to New York for his birthday if he knew how we met?"

Ryan sighed, pressing his forehead against Brendon’s shoulder. “I just know I can make you happy,” he mumbled into Brendon’s t-shirt. “This past week between us has been sublime – I’ve told you
things I’ve never told anyone else before. I can’t remember the last time I was this happy. I’ve told you before; I accept you. I know you’ve made mistakes, but so have I. I think you’re the only person I’ll ever meet who just gets me.”

Brendon let Ryan’s words settle in his chest. It had been a long road that had brought them here; standing at the first crossroads in their relationship, Brendon couldn’t even remember the time when Ryan had been nothing more than a client to him. Now Ryan had become a friend and confidante. Ryan accepted him – for who he was, crappy past and inexcusable choices included. Ryan accepted him.

“I never expected this and now it’s happened and I don’t know how to react to it,” he sighed, rolling onto his back. “You understand that, don’t you? I like you, Ryan – ever such a lot, I just need some time to figure out what to do next. Please accept that.”

Ryan looked over at him with a furrowed brow and sighed, pushing himself up on his elbows. He hovered over him nervously, as if he didn’t quite have the right anymore. “I’ll wait,” he said. “I’ll wait for you for however long it takes.”

Brendon nodded, linking his hands around the back of Ryan’s head and pulling their lips together. The man kissed back, but his words hurt Brendon’s chest. Love complicated everything, it gave a name to what they had, it forced him to take responsibility of his ever-growing feelings for Ryan, but where did it leave them? Was Ryan really in love or was he just clinging to Brendon in the wake of leaving rehab and starting his life as a sober man?

Ryan wasn’t all that different to Jon – they were both drug-addicts, after all and drug-addicts were tricky, often selfish characters. People take drugs to fill up the holes in their hearts and perhaps Brendon was just a substitute for that? It was all too fast. It was all too serious. He started to silently panic as he felt Ryan’s lips move across his jaw and down his neck. He did want Ryan – and he did want to feel love. So why was he denying himself the most basic of human needs?

Ryan pressed against him, rolling over on top of him to press their hips together. He kissed his neck and sucked at his collarbone and Brendon let his eyes slip closed in appreciation of the moment. There was a warmth in the pit of his stomach that he’d never felt with anyone else and as Ryan’s lips grazed over his skin, he realized what it was – it was peace, it was self-acceptance and maybe, even though he didn’t feel strong enough to admit it yet, maybe the first flickerings of love.

“Before I met you, I would get high tirelessly,” Ryan said, pulling away to look into his eyes, “from the moment I woke up to the moment I passed out at night and I did it because I was so scared of being sober enough that I would have to remember for just one second how much I hated myself.”

The man paused, his hand coming up to cup Brendon’s jaw, his fingertips rubbing softly over his cheekbone. “I love you, Brendon. I want you to remember that when you go back to Las Vegas.”

“I will,” he nodded, trying desperately to hold back tears. “I promise.”

Ryan’s eyes creased at the corners; the smile had returned to his face once more. The man arranged himself over Brendon, settling between his legs. Their mouths connected in another kiss, wet lips moving together as Ryan’s hand slipped from Brendon’s jaw and around his shoulder, fingers grazing over his collarbone through the fabric of his t-shirt and down his ribs. His hand came to a gentle rest around his hip, holding tight at the bone.

Brendon sat up to pull his shirt off and Ryan let him, quickly unbuttoning his jeans and pulling them down around his knees to expose his cock. He was dealing with two denied orgasms over the past twelve hours or so – Ryan had led him to the brink of climax each time but hadn’t been able to tip him over the edge. It didn’t take long for him to get hard, the muscles in his stomach contracting as
Ryan pressed wet kisses along his hips, down his thighs and along the shaft of his cock. Brendon couldn’t help the moan that escaped his lips and he thrust his hips up in search of contact and friction – Ryan knew exactly what he was doing; he was being a little tease.

The man’s mouth slipped around the head of Brendon’s dick and he began to suck, bobbing his head slowly as he moved – the pace was slow and almost painful, but Ryan was becoming more confident, Brendon could sense that. He let his legs fall open and pulled Ryan’s face up in line with his. This was something akin to love, Brendon told himself. It had to be – the way his heart fluttered inside his chest when Ryan looked at him, the way he always wanted more of the man in any which way he could get him.

“Please,” Brendon murmured, hips pushing desperately up into Ryan’s. “Make love to me.” He wasn’t begging – at least, he hadn’t meant for it to sound that way.

“I’m not going to make love to you, Brendon” Ryan told him, pulling away from the mattress with a smug smile curling on his lips.

Brendon pouted, his erection straining painfully between his legs. Three times now Ryan had denied him the satisfaction of an orgasm; after over a week of nothing but incredible sex, the frustration was starting to become a little painful. “That’s not fair. Why not?”

“I’m not going to make love to you until you can tell me that all of this means something to you. Until then, you’re just going to have to wait.”

Brendon moaned in frustration, looking up at Ryan with pleading eyes. Ryan shook his head and loosened the collar of his shirt. “Is it just me or is it hot in here? I’m going to take a shower to cool off. Feel free to join me.” He walked across the bedroom floor and stopped at the door to the en-suite. “I can treat you well, Brendon. You don’t even know what it’s like to be loved, do you?”

From his position at the bathroom door, Ryan couldn’t clearly see Brendon’s face. It fell at his question, his expression crumbling under the weight of it. “What, and you do?” he asked, distraction against the emotions that threatened to spill out of his eyes.

“It’s what I want – more than anything else in the world. I want to share my life with you, Brendon and I don’t care what people say about that, I don’t care if they don’t agree with it or if they think it’s fake or that you’re with me for my money – fuck those people, they don’t matter to me… but you do and I know the truth about you and if we both know that what we have is real then what does it matter?” Ryan paused, lingering at the door. Brendon couldn’t answer him – his emotions were scattered, a mess of need and longing and fear and uncertainty. “I’ll call William; ask him to arrange travel for you back to Las Vegas for tomorrow morning.”

Brendon swallowed his emotions and gave a brief nod. He suddenly didn’t want to leave – he’d been putting his return to Vegas off for so long; why couldn’t they just continue their secret love affair right here in the mountains? Why did life and responsibilities have to fuck everything up?

“I understand that getting things squared away with your brother-in-law is important to you, but you’ll remember everything I’d said to you today, won’t you?”

“Yes. I promise.”

When he heard Ryan close the door and disappear into the bathroom, he ruefully accepted the fact that he needed to be an adult and face up to his mistakes. If he could have it his way he’d have buried them deep within himself and tried to ignore Dallon for the rest of his life – but he’d get no peace from that. When he heard the drum of water from the shower, he climbed from the bed and
pulled his pants back on.

His cellphone had been switched off since they arrived at the cabin over a week ago, stuffed in the inside pocket of his leather jacket. When he pulled it out and turned it on, he was surprised to find that no one had contacted him during the week he’d been out of service. He knew he’d told Dallon not to contact him, but he hadn’t expected the man to take his advice quite so literally.

He wondered what the man was doing, where he was staying, whether he'd already made amends with Lydia and would spend the rest of his life trying to make it up to her? He hoped the guy hadn’t killed himself; he didn't want that on his conscience. He pulled up his brother-in-law’s number and typed out a text. He felt terrible that it had taken so long to contact the man.

*Looks like I’ll be back in Vegas tomorrow if you’re free to meet up and talk?*

Dallon’s reply beeped through on Brendon’s cellphone almost immediately. *How long you home for?*

*Couple of days,* Brendon text back. It took Dallon a few minutes to answer. When his reply eventually came through, the obnoxious message tone made Brendon jump as he scrambled to open it.

*Caesar’s Palace for the lunch buffet. My treat – and then, a few seconds later; I’ve missed you so much, my angel. This week has almost killed me. Can’t wait to hold you in my arms again. I love you.*

Brendon read the text over three times before he dropped his cellphone back into the pocket of his jacket and looked back at the bathroom door, a heavy sigh escaping his chest. Those words sure sounded better on Ryan’s lips than they ever had on Dallon’s. What the hell was he going to do?
Chapter 48

Chapter Notes

Happy Thursday, readers! A few quick notes from me this week.

First off, Filthy Lucre will now be updated every TWO WEEKS until further notice. Secondly, almost a year into this story and I finally have a beta to catch all my typos and little Britishisms. The earlier chapters of the story are slowly being updated and there's a couple little improvements too but nothing that changes the story. Thanks Tumblr user insufferablehipsterscum, you're a star!

Also, I am currently looking into self-publishing this work. Unlike the version on here it'd be broken up into three parts: New York, Las Vegas and Lake Tahoe. I'm looking for any artists out there who'd be interested in creating cover art for the series. Don't be shy, you talented lot! I know you're out there. Come say hello and drop me a line on Tumblr or right here in the message box!

That is all. Enjoy the chapter.

Las Vegas Boulevard first thing in the morning was a strange place - eerie; like a theme park before the throngs of people showed up. The city that was known for being so pumped full of life at night looked like a ghost town at 8AM on a Wednesday morning. The lights of the Strip welcomed him home and from the back seat of a chauffeur-driven Mercedes town car, Brendon pulled down his cap to cover his eyes. He asked Ryan not to bother with this whole charade.

Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas.

“Where are you visiting from, sir?” the driver asked, looking at him in the rearview mirror. He met Brendon at the arrivals terminal of McCarran International, dressed in a smart black suit and shiny-peaked hat, holding up a piece of card with his surname printed across it. The man graciously introduced himself and welcomed Brendon to Las Vegas on behalf of the Bellagio hotel. Brendon guessed that’s where he was staying. Ryan refused to tell him which hotel he’d been booked into before he left Tahoe - probably because Brendon would’ve pitched a fit if he’d known Ryan set him up at the Bellagio - only one of the nicest hotels on the Strip.

Brendon removed his cap and blinked out at the passing lights of the casinos. “I’m actually coming home,” he sighed, avoiding the man’s gaze. Some of the neon temples still flashed, but there seemed to be a calmness to it in the early morning sun - the sky was dusty blue, flicked with yellow light and the roads were clear - Las Vegas before it had awoken from its stupor… A few lost stragglers still drunk from the night before and parents pushing their children in strollers ambled along the sidewalk.

“Visiting family, huh?”

“No,” Brendon shook his head. “Not this time.”

The driver gave a nod of quiet resignation and the two men sat at a red light in uncomfortable silence. Brendon folded his arms across his chest and let out a frustrated sigh - what the fuck was he
doing back here? Las Vegas almost killed him the first time and he wasn’t going to let it happen again.

He was booked into the Bellagio for two nights and due to fly out to New York on Friday afternoon, in time for George Ross’s birthday party - which was another thing he was starting to dread. He didn’t know which city he disliked more: Manhattan or Vegas - either was pretty miserable when he had to return to them alone.

Considering Brendon was born and raised in this city, he spent very little time down on the Strip. His conservative parents didn’t agree with what Vegas stood for – gambling, public drinking and regret. It was Sin City; what was there to do when you were underage and living under the watchful gaze of disapproving Mormon parents?

As a child, he’d always been fascinated by the glittering hotels and casinos. On special occasions, his mom would reroute their trip home to drive past them all and Brendon remembered sitting agog in the backseat, trying to take it all in - not too dissimilar to what he was doing now - it all seemed so forbidden and exciting when he was young.

His mother looked at him in the rearview mirror one time and told him, “Don’t grow up like these people, Brendon,” as he stared out of the window at all the happy, carefree faces, celebrating the city with family and friends. He guessed his mom got her wish.

“First time staying with us at the Bellagio, is it?” the man asked, for the sake of forced but polite small talk. Brendon just grunted in reply - he didn’t want to be a dick, but he kind of wanted this guy to just shut the fuck up. “The Lakeview Suite is one of our best - it’s got exceptional views of the fountains, sir. Twenty-four hour butler service, a full bar… You even get VIP seats for you and a guest at the Cirque du Soleil show - just make sure to tell reception if you’ll be taking advantage of it.”

Brendon scoffed. Maybe he could invite Dallon? Try and smooth things over with a night out at the circus before he left Las Vegas forever to go back to New York and play doting boyfriend to a billionaire who claimed he loved him. Not likely…

“I will,” he nodded, trying not to give away his discomfort. He was out of his depth here - he made Ryan promise he wouldn’t put him in this situation and just look at what happened - he was in the backseat of a brand new Mercedes Benz, a private chauffeur was driving him to one of the nicest suites in the Bellagio… VIP circus tickets, round the clock butler service? This was all a little much for him to take in…

“So, construction of the Bellagio started in May 1996 and we opened in October of 1998. The hotel was inspired by Lake Como in Italy and in 2011, it completed a seventy million dollar renovation. It’s home to three Michelin-starred restaurants and-” Brendon tuned him out. He had no interest in hearing this guy harp on about the history of a hotel he had no right to be staying in.

He begged Ryan not to go overboard when he was arranging this whole thing. A few weeks ago, he hadn’t even been able to pay for a night in one of the worst motels in Vegas - and Dallon was somehow meant to believe that he could afford the Lakeview Suite at the Bellagio? It definitely seemed like something he shouldn’t complain about, but Brendon didn’t want to lie to Dallon any more than he had to. He was certain that his brother-in-law would be keen to know where he’d been, who he’d been with and where he was staying. If he wanted to avoid ceaseless questions as to who was paying his way, he was going to have to flat out lie to the man.

He suggested to Ryan that he check into a Holiday Inn or a Best Western - something more realistically within his price range but Ryan was having none of it. Ryan had a hard time not
laughing in Brendon’s face at his idea.

“You think I’m going to let you stay at a *Holiday Inn*?” he sneered. “Come on now, I wouldn’t be caught dead in that place. I’d never force you to stay somewhere I wouldn’t. The Holiday Inn is for poor people, Brendon.”

“You’re such a snob; it’s unreal,” Brendon said with an irritated shake of his head. Most of the time, Brendon forgot what a privileged upbringing Ryan had. It was during the few instances he let his true elitism show that Brendon was reminded of the vast differences between the two of them.

“There’s nothing wrong with the Holiday Inn.”

Ryan wrinkled his nose. “Maybe to you there’s not,” he answered looking over at him. Brendon’s face must’ve given way to his disapproval, because Ryan apologized and knocked his fist gently into Brendon’s shoulder. “Hey, I’m kidding. Just let me take care of you - you deserve to be looked after for once.”

Brendon held up his hands in defeat. He had a habit of giving in quickly when Ryan offered to look after him. He could forgive Ryan’s complete lack of decorum but it didn’t mean he wasn’t going to call the guy out every time he acted a little too pretentious. “Dallon’s going to wonder where the hell I’m getting the money from if I check into a nice hotel. I’m just saying, it’ll be easier for me if I stay somewhere modest,” he advised the man - and he meant it.

As they drove down Las Vegas Boulevard, the driver still rambling on about the grand history of the hotel, Brendon wondered if the *Lakeview Suite* was Ryan’s idea of modesty or whether he deliberately ignored his request. He guessed the latter.

The car pulled into the entranceway of the Bellagio and Brendon stirred from his memories, taking in his surroundings. Lamborghinis and Ferraris littered the driveway, shiny BMWs and Cadillacs with blacked out windows all piled up behind them and Brendon felt so out of place. He felt like a spy, encroaching where he didn’t belong. His fellow guests would take one look at him and his clothes and just know he shouldn’t be there.

He cursed Ryan under his breath and leaned forward to slip the driver a crisp hundred dollar bill, thanking him for his time. The man gave a grateful wink and a slow nod. “I hope you have a wonderful stay in Las Vegas, sir. Anything you need, anywhere you want to go, please feel free to give me a call,” he enthused, passing an embossed business card with gold lettering over his shoulder.

Before he left Tahoe that morning, Ryan had been quick to remind him of the tipping etiquette of a rich man out in Las Vegas. Brendon didn’t think it was strictly necessary to tip quite as much as Ryan advised, but Ryan had been adamant. “Tip the driver a hundred bucks, tip the bellboy a hundred bucks, tip concierge a hundred bucks - basically, anyone who helps you out, make sure to slip ’em a good tip. Those guys who work at the hotel are on minimum wage. They probably only earn twenty-something dollars an hour; they deserve a good bonus. At least then they can’t bitch you out on *Reddit* for being a fucking cheap skate.”

Sometimes Ryan surprised him with how completely ignorant he was to how the real world worked. “I was a fool not to stay in Vegas and get a job at one of the casinos when I was younger,” Brendon told him. He couldn’t help but sound a little bitter. “The first time someone fucked me they paid me a hundred bucks - if only I’d known I could’ve earned the same amount just for taking your luggage up to your room or driving you up and down the Strip…”

Ryan flushed red at his faux pas. Brendon guessed he forgot about the social differences between the two of them on occasions as well. He pulled his phone out of his pocket and typed up a text to Ryan
as the car came to a slow crawl in front of the main doors.

*Thx for setting me up in the bellagio asshole. I told you not to put me up in the best suite.*

*I didn’t,* Ryan text back. *The lakeview suite is the 3rd or 4th best. U should be more specific next time.* A winking face and three kisses followed Ryan’s reply and a few seconds later another message beeped through on his cellphone - *Just enjoy it - and then another - U get to the room yet??* *Just pulling up now.*

*K. Call me when you get to the room xx*

He’d be able to enjoy all this a lot more if Ryan was there with him - at least that way he’d be able to follow his lead, keep his head down and go unnoticed - but Ryan was stuck in Tahoe alone, most likely fretting over his decision to return to New York. Brendon felt bad leaving him that morning, he was worried about how Ryan would cope without his company and when he sat in the car on the way to the airport, he couldn’t help feeling like he was leaving behind something important.

It was weird. Ryan had been the one to help Brendon through his troubles with Dallon; there had been no judgment and no expectations, just genuine support. It was as if they gelled together and became integral to each other’s recovery. People underestimated Ryan Ross. As Brendon thought about him, he noticed the smile that pulled on his lips. He wondered why Ryan hadn’t accompanied him back to Vegas. Probably because he’d never been invited.

A bellboy dressed in red tails appeared at the window and opened the back door. *Goddamn,* Brendon wasn’t used to this kind of treatment. The man grabbed Brendon’s duffel bag from the trunk and held it aloft. “Is this your only item of luggage, sir?” he asked. All these polite members of staff, calling him sir, sucking up to him because they thought he had money.

“Today it is, yes.” He gave the man a friendly slap on the back, pretending like he did this all the time - as if ostentatious hotels and private chauffeur-driven cars were something he was used to. The bellboy chatted with him amiably until Brendon slipped another hundred dollar bill from his pocket and into the man’s palm.

Much like the driver, the bellboy nodded his thanks and gave him a wink. “I hope you have a wonderful time in Vegas, sir. Anything you need, anything I can do for you to make your stay more enjoyable, please let me know.” The same schtick the chauffeur had given him - maybe there was a script. Brendon gave a slow nod of affirmation. It was all forced airs and graces - a few months ago they wouldn’t have looked twice in his direction.

Once alone inside the *Lakeview Suite,* Brendon took a long look at his surroundings, his heart contracting hard behind his ribs. The entire room was covered in flowers. Every available surface was filled with red roses and tulips, forget-me-nots and violets, some in elaborate arrangements, others in simple glass vases. The air was filled with sweet perfume. Ryan must’ve spent *thousands* on this.

It was like a scene from a movie. Brendon tried to take it all in. He silently questioned Ryan’s intentions - such an extravagant display of affection was not something that he was used to and he couldn’t help wonder what Ryan hoped to achieve from all this. What the hell was he meant to do with all these flowers?

On the dining table was a large wicker basket filled with fresh fruit and tied with an elaborate bow - *what was it with rich people and fruit baskets?* - next to that was a magnum of 2003 *Dom Pérignon;* quite the gift from a recovering alcoholic, Brendon thought to himself. To the side,
wrapped in silk paper, sat a small, rectangular box and an envelope about the size of a business card. His first initial was stamped on the front in gold ink. He opened it up and slipped out the card.

Don’t think about anything too much
You are a good person
You deserve good things
Love, R.

Brendon felt the tickle behind his nose - maybe Ryan had no ulterior motives, maybe he just wanted Brendon to feel good. No one ever treated him this well before and Brendon hated the fact that it made him suspicious but Jon was not at all romantic - they never even bothered with birthdays when they were together - and there was always so much secrecy surrounding his relationship with Dallon that there was never any time for romance between the two of them.

He wondered what would’ve become of his life had Ryan not showed up in Vegas after leaving rehab. He thought about Dallon and what a mess he made of the family and wondered where they’d have ended up if Ryan hadn’t been there to whisk him off to Tahoe. Perhaps they’d have eventually made it to California, just like they talked about when Brendon was a teenager… or perhaps they’d still be stuck in Vegas, trying to patch up the cracks in their relationship and escape his vengeful sister. Either way, Brendon knew he wouldn’t be happy. He’d outgrown Dallon, he just never had the guts to tell the guy.

Brendon unwrapped the box, careful not to rip the paper. Inside - of course - was a shiny new iPhone. Brendon couldn’t really get mad at Ryan for that - he wanted to upgrade from his crappy old Nokia for years now and never had the money. No wonder Ryan wanted him to call - he’d gone all out on decorating the room, way overboard in Brendon’s opinion but it was romantic. It was adorably romantic - he had to give Ryan that.

He fumbled the phone from its box and fiddled with the buttons for a few minutes. It didn’t take him long to work out how to enter Ryan’s number and make the call. Ryan answered after a few rings.

“Hello?”

“Hey, you. It’s me. I just got to the room,” Brendon smiled, walking over to look out of the window. The view, much like the driver promised, was indeed spectacular; he could see the famous Bellagio fountains and across the way, the Paris Hotel and Casino stood proud.

“Oh, yeah? What do you think?”

“Well, the room’s fucking ridiculous but the flowers were a nice touch and so was the fruit and the champagne - I’m surprised you’re encouraging me to drink,” he said, looking back at the room. “I thought you’d be totally against that.”

Ryan’s sigh came through the phone clearly. “Well, just because I can’t enjoy a drink or two doesn’t mean you can’t. I don’t know, I thought you might need it after talking to your brother-in-law.”

Brendon laughed and bit his lip. After a pause, he said. “I wish you were here.”

“Yeah? D’you miss me already?”

“I kinda do actually,” he admitted. He heard Ryan’s satisfied hum through the phone. “And thanks for the iPhone too. It’s awesome. I wanted one of these for years.”

“Oh, it’s nothing, really.”
“No, it’s definitely something, Ryan, but you really don’t have to spoil me like this, y’know? I’m very low maintenance.”

Brendon felt warm when he talked to Ryan - he never experienced a relationship like this before; easy friendship that turned into something so much more, something he wanted to hold onto, something he was suddenly terrified of losing.

“Perhaps I want to spoil you. Perhaps I think you deserve it. Besides, you can send me a photo now of how the room turned out. Maybe a cute selfie or two so I don’t forget what you look like.” He paused. Brendon missed his voice already. “The cabin’s so quiet without you…”

He pressed his head against the cold glass of the window and let his eyes blur the scenery out of focus. He was miserable, he realized. Being without Ryan was making him miserable. How had that man become such an indispensable part of him? Ryan started out as a trick and a few months later, Brendon was having a hard time trying to fight off his feelings for the guy.

Before he left Tahoe that morning, Ryan kissed him and suggested he try not to fuck his brother-in-law. He passed it off as a joke, but Brendon saw the anxiety behind his eyes when he said it. Brendon assured him that he had no intention of sleeping with Dallon again; they were just going to talk, that was it – nothing unseemly was going to happen between them.

“When are you going back to New York?” he asked, flopping down on the couch.

“Later this evening. I’m getting a helicopter ride to Sacramento and then my dad’s organized a private plane to pick me up and fly me back to JFK.”

“Tough life, huh?” Brendon smiled. During the small silences in their conversation, he almost wanted to admit how strongly he felt about him - he really, really liked Ryan. God, he hated being in a place like this without him…

They talked for another five minutes, briefly about the plans for George Ross’s birthday and Brendon’s objective in seeing Dallon again, before they hung up. “Don’t forget what I told you the other day,” Ryan reminded him - and of course, how could Brendon forget. Ryan was in love with him.

From his position on the couch, Brendon sighed. Since leaving Las Vegas, Brendon had come to the ugly realization that he used Dallon after he returned from New York. Ryan wasn’t around and Dallon was the only person stupid enough to stick with him. Brendon didn’t know how else to retain his interest without offering the guy sex and the sex had been nice, but only because it was marginally better than loneliness.

Dallon had fallen for him, but his dreams of eloping to California with the guy had died with the realization that his brother-in-law hadn’t changed at all in the eight years he’d been gone. They’d grown up to be two vastly different men and Dallon was much too self-loathing for Brendon to want to start a proper relationship with him. He wondered how it would feel to be involved with a man who secretly hated the fact he loved him.

He never thought Dallon would go and tell Lydia about their affair after barely a week of secret hook-ups. He felt guilty that his actions most likely ruined her marriage, but Lydia was a bitch - she was the one who’d convinced his entire family to stop talking to him, even before she found out about her husband’s indiscretion. Brendon did not feel guilty enough to issue an apology and nor did he feel guilty enough that he was going to let Dallon pressure him into admitting something he no longer felt. Dallon was going to have to grow up and learn how to stand on his own two feet eventually. Brendon couldn’t be the one to babysit him through the rest of his life, holding his hand
while he came to terms with his sexuality and what would no doubt be a very messy divorce.

No, their farewell was going to be no nonsense, a clean split. He wasn’t going to give the guy any false hope of the two of them ever getting back together and if he broke Dallon’s heart then oh well. He’d call it payback for marrying Lydia all those years ago. The only reason he was back in Vegas was to sit down and talk to him, tell Dallon that it was over, that they shouldn’t keep in contact… and maybe that he met somebody else.

The thought of the people from his past finding out about his relationship with Ryan filled him with dread - they were both too invested in each other to just go their separate ways and Brendon kept dreaming up terrible scenarios of being outed to the press; everyone knowing he was a whore with no money, everyone judging him and his poor life choices, jumping to conclusions about his reasons for sticking by Ryan, calling him a gold digger and unearthing his past…

Despite this, as he sat on the couch and watched the fountain show, Brendon couldn’t stop thinking about Ryan and the more tender moments they shared in Tahoe - the secrets Ryan told him, the fears they shared, the fact that Ryan told him he loved him… Ryan accepted Brendon’s reasons for not saying it back and told him he’d wait and that was pretty selfless for a man who spent most of his life barely caring about himself, let alone others.

Brendon pulled up Dallon’s contact on his old cellphone but managed to put off calling the guy for another hour. He showered and changed into some clean clothes, watching his reflection in the mirror as he tried to forge confidence. You can do this. This is just something you’ve got to deal with; you can’t run away any longer… It’ll be over in a couple of hours - stop delaying the inevitable.

When he eventually plucked up enough courage to call Dallon, the phone rang for almost a full minute before the man picked up. His voice was gruff on the other end of the line. Brendon guessed he’d just woken up; it was still pretty early.

“Brendon? You’re home? I wasn’t expecting it to be this early.” Home. Where the hell was home anymore? “Where are you?” Dallon continued.

Brendon flushed and tried to sidestep his brother-in-law’s question. “I arrived an hour or so ago - I can come meet you, it’s probably best that we talk in private.”

Dallon grunted on the other end of the line, as if he was still trying to wake up. “No. I wanted to take you out for brunch. The Caesar’s Palace buffet, remember?”

“I can’t deal with that right now, especially at Caesar’s. I’ll come meet you. Tell me where you are.”

Dallon stayed quiet for a few moments and then he sighed. “I’m at the motel - the Whole Year Inn - you don’t want to come here.” Damn right Brendon didn’t want to go back to the Whole Year Inn. He guessed that answered his question of what he’d be doing if Ryan hadn’t discharged himself from rehab six weeks early - still living at that disgusting motel, hating every single second of his existence.

“I can be at Caesar’s in half an hour, I- shit.” Brendon heard a crash through the phone - the sound of clinking bottles falling to the floor. Dallon’s voice was thick and slurred. If he didn’t know any better, he’d have said the guy was drunk. “I need half an hour to get ready, that’s all,” he groaned.

“I don’t want to go for breakfast. I want to talk in private.”

Dallon talked over him, as if he wasn’t even listening. “I’ve missed you so much. You can’t even
begin to imagine how terrible it’s been for me since you’ve been gone. Your family hates me; they know I’m staying here, someone defaced my car and let my tires out last week. How long are you staying in Vegas for? I got money - we can go somewhere together. California, Oregon - Portland’s meant to be nice. Or San Francisco. We always said San Francisco, remember?"

“Dallon. Stop. I’m going to come by the motel in thirty minutes, okay?”

“No. Please don’t. Where are you, angel? I can come pick you up.” Dallon sounded pretty desperate. He didn’t sound like he’d been coping very well at all with Brendon’s absence. “Please,” he begged a few moments later. “Where are you?” It was almost a wail. Dallon sounded drunk as shit.

“Dallon, have you been drinking?”

There was a pause. “No… Maybe. Baby, where are you?”

“I’m staying at a hotel on the Strip,” Brendon told him.

“Which one?”

Brendon rolled his eyes - this was the reason he wanted to stay at a Holiday Inn. “Look, I don’t want to go into that right now. Just get yourself ready, shower, do whatever you have to do. I’m going to come by the motel in half an hour.”

“Which hotel are you staying at, Brendon?” Dallon’s question was a little more abrupt this time, spat from his mouth as if he had enough of all these secrets.

“I don’t want to go into that,” he repeated, firmer this time, dropping his voice low.

“Shit, Brendon, just tell me where you’re staying. Is it really that fucking hard?” Dallon barked - Brendon wasn’t used to such colorful language coming from his brother-in-law. It was a little disconcerting. “A hotel on the Strip? There’s hundreds of them - where are you?”

“I’m staying at the Bellagio. Okay? Happy now?”

“The Bellagio? How on earth did you manage to afford that?”

Once again, Brendon cursed Ryan silently. “Well, that’s actually nothing to do with you, Dallon. The only reason I’m back here is because I feel we need to talk things through. I’m not here to move back into that scummy motel room with you or take you to Portland or San Francisco or wherever the fuck. I’m going to come by the motel and if you’re not there then I’m not hanging around. I’ll be half an hour tops. Okay?”

“Fine,” Dallon sulked. Silence flooded the phone after that. Brendon was about to hang up when he heard his brother-in-law’s voice crack through the receiver. “This past week and a half has been a total nightmare. I missed you so much, my angel. It’s so good to hear your voice again. I didn’t think you were going to call.”

Brendon inhaled deeply. “I’ll see you,” he said, at a loss for anything else to say and then he hung up.

Grabbing his jacket and checking his reflection once more, he pulled the driver’s business card from the inside pocket and frowned at it, suddenly second guessing himself. He couldn’t ask that dude to drive him to the Whole Year Inn - it was in the roughest area of town; Brendon knew that and most likely so did the driver. The only reason someone rich enough to afford the Lakeview Suite at the Bellagio would venture to that part of the city was for a drug pick up - or maybe to fuck a hooker,
which was ironic. The man had probably already judged Brendon enough, without knowing his business in that part of the city. Anonymity here was the key.

Brendon left the hotel room and booked it down to the lobby - once outside it wasn't difficult for him to hail a cab.

“To the Stratosphere, please,” he told the driver when he climbed in the backseat. The motel was just across the way and it was a touristy enough spot that the cabbie wouldn’t question it. Once again, Brendon sat in the back of the car and watched the Vegas Strip pass by the window. This driver tried to make strained conversation with him too, but after a few blocks of nothing but one word answers, he gave up and the two men finished the rest of the drive in silence, hitting every stoplight along the way. Brendon, for one, was thankful for the delay.
When Brendon arrived at the Whole Year Inn, Dallon’s car was parked up front with four flat tires and the words, ‘repent faggot’ emblazoned across the side in red spray paint. The sight settled uneasily inside his chest as he loitered in the parking lot and cast his eyes over the motel’s peeling exterior.

This is what would have become of him had he stayed in Las Vegas with Dallon - they’d still be in the same, shitty motel, both of them victims of hateful slurs and vandalism. Neither the Whole Year Inn or the man who currently occupied his old room were a part of his life he regretted leaving behind, but he suddenly felt a swell of anguish for the man. Dallon didn’t deserve this, he thought, wondering who the scribe behind the graffiti was and how they could sleep at night after being so actively cruel.

He wanted to run away, call Ryan and ask to go back to New York early. Inside his stomach, he felt sick with nerves, his heart was pumping out of time and his muscles were jittering. Brendon felt truly out of his depth, incapable of dealing with such raw emotions. As he approached the motel room, his eyes gazed back over the spray painted words. Repent faggot. It was a distinctly foreboding threat and one Dallon had no doubt taken rather personally. Why hadn’t he got the thing towed already? He was setting himself up as a target with his car sat outside the room like that.

He stepped up to the door of Dallon’s motel room and he knocked just twice, before he had a chance to chicken out. The curtains were drawn across the dusty windows and Brendon waited on the doorstep, chewing the inside of his cheek. He’d come from one of the nicest hotels on the Strip to the worst motel in Vegas. He didn’t feel like he particularly belonged at either of them.

When the door opened, Brendon was shocked at the sight that greeted him. Dallon had always been so handsome and well-groomed, but now he didn’t look like he’d slept in days - his eyes were circled with dark bags and he had a few days regrowth of stubble on his face. He blinked against the harsh morning light and turned back into the room without saying anything. Brendon entered cautiously, glancing up at his brother-in-law’s unkempt appearance. When the door closed behind him, the two men stood in Dallon’s dark motel room in silence.

Brendon cleared his throat first. “So… what happened to your car?” he asked. Standing in front of Dallon, he felt like he was looking at a stranger. That fire he felt even when he first returned to Las Vegas was dead. Their history together seemed to have been totally erased. Brendon didn’t feel anything for him anymore - not lust or love. Maybe pity.

Dallon shrugged. “I’m pretty sure it was your brother, but I can’t be certain. The day after you left, they smashed out my back windows. I went and had them fixed and a day or two later, I woke up to that.” He nodded at the window and sighed. “I figured there wasn’t much point in doing anything about it.”

That was a pretty typical response from the man who’d never been proactive in seeking his own happiness. Brendon had no sympathy for him anymore.

“You don’t want to get it towed away?” It would’ve been the first thing Brendon would've done - or at least, tried to cover up the graffiti. It was surely not attracting the right sort of attention in this area of town.

Again, Dallon shrugged his shoulders and sniffed, turning away from the window to clear the bedside table of empty beer cans. To the best of Brendon’s knowledge, Dallon had never been a
drinker, but when he looked around the room, he noticed the trash was not just filled, but surrounded by empty wine and beer bottles. The side table was cluttered with bottle caps and stained with puddles of stale beer. Brendon told Dallon to shower and get ready, but the man looked like he only just rolled out of bed. The sheets were bundled at the foot of it, the thin pillow still indented with the shape of Dallon’s head.

“So, the Bellagio huh?” Dallon sniffed. “How’d you manage to afford that?”

“Does it really matter?”

“Well, yeah actually, I’d say it does, considering you couldn’t even afford this place a few weeks ago,” Dallon told him looking despondently around the motel room. “You had to beg me for money just to keep a roof over your head.”

*So, that was the game Dallon wanted to play, was it?* Two could play at that game. Brendon was prepared to be as polite and forgiving as possible, but if Dallon wanted to bring up the past… “I don’t remember begging you for money, Dallon. I do remember the day you fucked me and then disappeared as soon as I was asleep, after leaving three hundred and twenty bucks on the nightstand though.”

“Whatever,” his brother-in-law bit petulantly. “I’m just wondering how you’re paying for it, that’s all.”

Brendon heard Ryan’s voice at the back of his mind - *just tell him about us.* Oh, he just wished it was that easy. He guessed any lie right now was more believable than the truth. They could get into a petty squabble about who and how and why but Brendon was not prepared to divulge Dallon any information about his affair with Ryan Ross. *Fuck no.* He decided to ignore him and instead, signaled to the trash can full of empty bottles and cans. “What the fuck’s this, huh? You started drinking now?”

Dallon turned towards him in irritation, flicking a bottle cap at the trash and missing. “Why? Are you going to stand there and judge me? Surely, you understand the need to numb all this bullshit better than anyone. I used to turn up here and you were always hungover and I was kind enough not to mention it. I mean, what the hell else is there for me to do now?” He looked at Brendon as if he expected an answer. Brendon fell silent and chewed his lip. *Exactly,* he thought, *what else was there for Dallon to do but drink and wallow in his own misery?*

“Your sister won’t even talk to me. All our old friends from church think I’m sick. No one’s stopped to even consider that I’ve been living with this for as long as I can remember, hating myself because I was always taught being a homosexual is a *sin.* I had *death* threats, Brendon. I get phone calls in the middle of the night from people I don’t even know, calling me really hateful, *hateful* names, telling me I ought to watch my back and just leave town.” Dallon slumped down on the bed and rubbed at his face. “Oh, and your father, by the way, he told me to tell you not to contact the family ever again. He said you’re dead to him. They want nothing more to do with you - and they want even less to do with me.”

Dallon’s words stung like a slap to the face. He didn’t expect any forgiveness from his parents, he already accepted they disowned him but imagine saying that to someone - *you’re dead to me.* Brendon couldn’t fathom it himself. When he was tucked up in bed with Ryan again in New York, he’d tell him what his father said and he knew Ryan would offer him comfort and sympathy. He was probably better off without his family anyway. He hadn’t needed them for the eight years he’d been in Manhattan, so why did it feel like his heart had just been ripped from his chest?

Dallon was looking at him with a narrow gaze. “You were *meant* to support me. We were meant to
Brendon took a deep inhale through his nose and avoided his brother-in-law’s glare. “I told you, I needed to get out of town for a bit. I had a lot on my plate these last few months, I just needed to clear my head a little.”

Dallon rolled his eyes and scoffed, as if Brendon’s reason for leaving Vegas wasn’t quite good enough for him.

“Everything was too much for me, Dallon - me and you, Lydia, my parents - I was so unhappy. When you weren’t around, I drank too much, I was taking drugs because I hated myself and it was the only thing that made me forget about my shitty life. I was sleeping with you behind my sister’s back, my parents threw me out because I’m gay…” He took a breath, “My ex-boyfriend back in Manhattan cheated on me because I couldn’t give him what he needed and I had to teach myself not to love him anymore. I was fucking miserable, Dallon - from the moment I got up, to the moment I fell asleep. I needed an escape. Don’t hold that against me because you have no idea the shit I went through before coming back here.”

Dallon gaped at him. “You were taking drugs? Where? With who? What kind of drugs?” Brendon should’ve guessed that would be the snippet of information Dallon would choose to run with. Brendon ran his hand through his hair. What was even the point in trying to protect Dallon from the truth anymore?

“I was doing a lot of coke for a little while but-”

“Cocaine?” his brother-in-law spluttered. “Brendon, that’s disgusting. You were seriously taking cocaine when we were sleeping together?”

Brendon’s face reddened. It wasn’t something he was particularly proud of, all those nights spent with Spencer in the back room of his bar, doing coke, getting high and flirting. “It was a really fucked up time in my life. I took the initiative to get out of Vegas and go sort my head out. Maybe you should do the same,” he suggested. “I mean, it’s not like there’s anything left for you here anymore.”

“And whose fault is that?” Dallon’s voice raised to a shout. He paced towards Brendon and pushed both his shoulders back. Brendon stepped back against the desk that was pushed up against the wall.

“Well, it’s not mine! I didn’t ask you to go tell Lydia you’re gay and had a hard-on for me since I was a kid.”

“No, not in those exact words you didn’t, but you were constantly telling me I was a pussy for not standing up and being honest about who I really am and truth be told, Brendon, I was sick and tired of people constantly telling me I was useless or a coward. You left me when I needed you most. You left - and I had to deal with this crap all by myself.” Dallon raised his arm and gestured to the window. Brendon assumed he was talking about the graffiti across the driver’s side of his car, the flat tires and the apparent death threats.

“I never asked for this - you ruined my chances of ever patching things up with my family - and maybe now, you know how it feels. You left me first, Dallon - at a time when I’d have done anything for you.”

Brendon remembered back to how utterly besotted he’d been with Dallon when he was seventeen. He’d been prepared to leave his entire family to start a life with that man. Now he realized what he felt for Dallon all those years ago had merely been a pathetic puppy love. Sure, they could’ve moved
to California together, but the cracks would’ve eventually started to show. Dallon claimed time and time again that he was so in love, that Brendon meant the entire world to him but he used him. The man wasn’t strong enough to admit to anyone who he really was and Brendon had been naïve enough to believe all his promises. Dallon was all talk, no action. He’d always been that way.

Dallon turned away from him and sighed. “I can’t forgive you for doing drugs, Brendon. That’s virtually inexcusable.”

“Well, I’m not asking for forgiveness, Dallon. That’s the thing you’re most upset about?” he asked. “I’m not proud of it, but I think you’re neglecting to see the bigger picture.”

“Where the hell were you, huh?” His brother-in-law spun around to look at him. “Where did you run off to that was so important - after all I did for you when your family disowned you?”

“What does it matter where I went? I just needed to get out of the city for a week or so, I told you that. I went north for a bit.”

“North? Where the fuck is north?” Dallon’s face was red, his blue eyes were wide, penetrating, cold and full of mistrust. It was unnerving hearing his brother-in-law cuss. “What kind of bullshit are you going to try and throw at me next, huh?”

Brendon shook his head irritably. “I went to Lake Tahoe. I needed to get away from the city and sort my head out.”

Dallon paced towards him. Brendon backed up against the desk until he felt the edge of it cut into the back of his thighs. Dallon didn’t look quite so angry anymore, but he looked like he was trying his hardest to remain calm. “We both need to get out of Vegas, huh? We can leave together, the two of us. We can go wherever you want - I have some money, we could travel; LA, San Fran, anything,” he finished desperately.

“Dallon, no.” Brendon shook his head. “This is over between us. The only reason I’m here is so I could tell you that face to face. I felt I owed you that much, but I’m not leaving Las Vegas with you.”

Dallon knotted his brows as if he hadn’t even considered for a second that this would be the outcome of Brendon’s visit. “Why not? I’m prepared to forgive the drugs. We could be really happy together. I know we could.”

“You’re fooling yourself, Dallon. It’s over.”

His brother-in-law stared at him, grappling desperately for a suitable comeback. “But I thought you loved me?” he said eventually.

The man was so lost, he knew nothing of the real world or real love, he spent his life being told by the people he loved most that what he felt for other men was a sin. It wasn’t that he hated Dallon, because he didn’t - but he had no love for the guy anymore, not after spending all that time in Tahoe with Ryan. Ryan could offer him way more than Dallon ever could and not just financially but sexually and emotionally. Ryan knew all there was to know about him and he accepted him without exception - Ryan loved him.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered. “I just don’t feel that way anymore.”

He watched his brother-in-law’s face crumble, his eyebrows drawing together in confusion. Surely this finality should’ve crossed Dallon’s mind already? He surely couldn’t be this naïve about the whole situation. “But why?”
“Because we got nothing in common with each other anymore. I moved to New York, I lived my life, I did shitty things so I could pay my rent - pay my father’s medical bills,” Brendon stressed, his anger peaking as he remembered how much money he sent back to his parents when he’d been living in New York, all the arguments it caused between him and Jon… “You made your choice, Dallon. You made your choice when you married Lydia. Don’t try and make me feel guilty for making this decision, because it’s not going to work.”

“But I waited for you. I waited here because I thought you just needed some time on your own. What about all those times we made love, Brendon? Are you telling me that meant nothing to you?”

Brendon rolled his eyes and looked at the ground. “Sex doesn’t always have to mean something,” he mumbled.

Maybe, at the time, it had meant something. Brendon wasn’t sure what: comfort and solace, escape from the storm that raged inside his head. There was no doubt Brendon had felt something for the guy after he returned to Vegas, some sexual tension or fondness because Dallon had been there for him when nobody else wanted to stand by him and he had been desperate enough to cling to that.

He should’ve walked away when he realized Dallon was too emotionally invested in him still. Now, he was going to have to break the man’s heart and it wasn’t something he wanted to do. Despite how pitiful his brother-in-law was acting, Brendon didn’t relish in watching him desperately cling onto the last few scraps of their relationship.

“I don’t think this could ever work out between us, Dallon.”

“But why?” he cried. “Angel, I love you. We’re good together. We understand each other - you can’t just throw that away.”

“You threw it away eight years ago, Dallon, not me - and we’re not good together, we never were. Maybe you think I’m the only person out there who truly understands you but it’s not true. I’m not the only guy who can make you happy.”

Dallon’s face contorted in fury. Brendon had been in his position before - with both Dallon and Jon - having to sit there and be told it was over. He didn’t envy his brother-in-law right now. “I ruined my marriage for you,” he seethed. “Your entire family knows we had an affair, they know I’m gay - look at what they did to my car. Everybody knows! You let me fall for you again. You let me love you. How could you do that?”

“There’s someone else,” Brendon confessed.

The admission hung in the air for a few seconds and the room fell silent for a moment before Dallon managed to react. “What do you mean there’s someone else? Who?”

“A guy. I met him back in New York a few months back. He came out to Vegas and the day you told Lydia about us, I spent the night with him. His parents own a house in Tahoe. That’s where I’ve been this last week. With him.”

Dallon shook his head in confusion. “So you already slept with him?” he asked, voice monotone, face void of emotion.

“Yes.”

Dallon groaned and pushed his hands through his hair as he blinked up at the ceiling. He puffed up his cheeks with a sigh. “Why is sex so dispensable to you? How can you give yourself like that to someone you hardly know? That’s something I’ll never understand about guys like you, Brendon,
just giving it away like that, sleeping with strangers like it’s no big deal.”

Brendon was a little affronted, but he wasn’t surprised by Dallon’s reaction or his conservative views
about sex. “You don’t know anything about my relationship with him - and don’t stand there like
you’re better than me because you’ve only ever slept with two people. For some reason, your parents
raised you to think that sex is something evil and sinful and the ironic thing is you’re constantly
reminded you’re meant to save it for someone you love.”

“Well, do you love him?”

Brendon shrugged and let his mind linger on the question for too long. After a moment, he sighed,
“Maybe I do. I don’t know.”

“So you’re prepared to throw away what we have for someone you don’t even love?”

“We don’t have anything, Dallon. Stop trying to act like there’s still something here worth saving.
There’s not.”

Dallon turned away with a bitter laugh. “I get it. His parents own a house in Tahoe, huh? That’s
nice. Is he paying for you to stay at the Bellagio too? Let me guess, he’s probably quite a bit older
than you, a replacement father figure of some kind seeing as you don’t have one of them anymore.”

He knew Dallon was just saying things to hurt him and more than anything, he wanted to ignore
them and pretend they didn’t affect him, but Dallon’s words stung. They made his chest hurt. “Shut
up,” he muttered. “You don’t know the half of it.”

“Am I right? No wonder you think you love him. I mean, if he’s got enough money to put you up in
the Bellagio, I hardly blame you for thinking that means something. Is that the reason you’re leaving
me? Because he’s evidently got more money than I have.”

“Dude, you’re fucking delusional,” Brendon said with a sigh. “I should never have come back here.
I knew this would happen. I knew you wouldn’t understand. I knew this would cause a fight. I
fucking knew it.”

“You act like you’re doing me some massive favor by even being here, like I should be honored to
be graced with your presence. Do you know how humiliated I feel right now? Who is this guy,
Brendon?”

Brendon couldn’t spill the beans about Ryan Ross - not right now, not to Dallon. Dallon was upset
and angry and humiliated; what if he went to the press to get revenge? What if he sold his
story? *Fuck,* this was all so risky. He wanted to fly back up to Tahoe and curl up in front of the fire
with Ryan’s arms around his shoulders and simply disappear. *God,* he should have told Ryan how
he felt about him before he left for Vegas…

Brendon took a deep breath and tried to steady his nerves. “I can pay you back the money you lent
me, more if you need it-”

“*His* money? *Fuck* that,” the man spat. “It’s filthy lucre, why would I want any part of it?” Dallon
paced towards him, fury etched all over his face. “Is that what you are to this guy? His boy toy?
His *whore*? You like to stand there and claim you know what love is, but I don’t think you have a
clue. *I* love you - *me.* *I* love you more than anyone else ever will.”

Brendon wanted to hit him, but he remembered saying a similar thing to Jon on numerous occasions.
He could see the error in his ways now, he could see why his relationship with Jon failed so
spectacularly - something like that didn’t make him want to stay, it made him want to run far, far
away into the arms of a man who understood him. Just like Jon. Brendon bit his lip. “You know nothing about our relationship and you know nothing about me anymore. You’re still in love with the kid I was when I was eighteen and now you have the audacity to stand there and call me a whore because I told you I met someone else?”

“Well, I call ’em as I see ’em, Brendon,” his brother-in-law remarked spitefully. “You can’t expect me to change my whole opinion and say sleeping with a stranger you hardly know is okay - or attractive, or mature for that matter. It disgusts me to think of another man fucking you, Brendon. I was your first - why doesn’t that mean anything to you?” Dallon took a step closer to him and wet his lips, his eyes still cold and accusing.

Brendon realized that the only man he ever connected with sexually was Ryan. Jon had never been interested in him in that way - he understood why now - and Dallon’s views on sex were a million miles from his own. He was pretty puritanical for a man who fucked his wife’s brother behind her back. “Just listen to what you’re saying. Why the hell do you think I don’t want to be with you? You’re manipulative, Dallon - and you bore me half to tears.”

“I’m manipulative? I bore you?” he questioned, taking two more steps towards Brendon, stabbing at his own chest with his finger. They were stood only a foot apart but the backs of Brendon’s legs were pressed hard against the edge of the desk. He felt his fists clench at his sides, ready to fight. “At least I’m not sleeping with some rich asshole for his money. Two weeks ago, you were crying because you couldn’t afford a room in this dump, now you’re letting some random dude you don’t even love fuck you because he’s got more money than me? That makes you a whore in my eyes, Brendon.”

Dallon let his insult hang in the air and then he turned away, picking up an already opened can of beer from the bedside table. He shook it and took a sip, then he threw it overhand in Brendon’s direction. It hit the wall to the left of his head, spewing out stale beer over his leather jacket. “You’re the one who needs to repent, not me.”

“So what if I am, huh?” Brendon shouted, picking up the beer can and throwing it back at him. “What if I am his whore, would you still love me then? Would you still want to run off to Portland together knowing that I sucked his dick and let him fuck me and that he paid me thousands of dollars to do so?”

Dallon furrowed his brow and shook his head. “What are you even talking about, Brendon?”

“How the hell do you think I could afford to send all that money to pay for my dad’s medical bills, huh? Not off some job waiting tables in New York City, you fucking idiot.” Dallon’s face fell, his skin drained of color. “Are you so blindly in love with me you just believed every lie I ever fed you? You want to be with me but you don’t know the first thing about me anymore.”

“Brendon, I don’t… what are you saying?” Dallon squared his jaw, looking down at Brendon with such disdain.

“You need me to spell it out for you? I’m a whore - I’m a hustler, a hooker, a rent boy or whatever the fuck you want to call me. That’s how I made my money in New York - men paid me for sex, some of them paid me thousands of dollars just to fuck me, Dallon, can you believe that?”

Brendon watched as the older man tried to blink back tears. “Please, tell me you’re lying.”

He shook his head. “You know nothing of my life in New York. Why do you think I was so miserable when I came home? And then my parents kicked me out and I had to live here. The reason I left Las Vegas in the first place was because of you,” he shouted, “because you married my fucking
sister! I had no other option, so I started prostituting myself and I got involved with drugs and bad people and I would stand out on a street corner and wait for someone who was pathetic enough to pay me twenty bucks for a blowjob. So, am I still your angel now?"

He watched Dallon blink in disbelief, his words settling in, all the pieces of Brendon’s murky past finally slotting together. “But… I thought… Brendon, you said you had a partner in New York. You said he helped out with your dad’s bills. Is that a lie too?”

“I dated a heroin addict for six and a half goddamn years, Dallon. Any money he had, was spent on getting high or paying off thugs he owed money to. He earned money the same way I did, we were both in the game and holy shit, I loved him so much but he was so sad and I couldn’t make him happy. He fell in love with someone else right in front of me - I know what it’s like to have someone tell you they’re not in love with you anymore and I’m sorry, Dallon, but that’s the shitty life I led back in Manhattan. You still want to book that flight to LA and start a life with me knowing what I did for a living?”

Dallon stayed silent - he looked like a wild animal who was staring down the barrel of a hunter’s gun.

“I’ve been with thousands of men, Dallon - and all of them paid me and I hated almost every single one of them, so sex really can mean nothing. Trust me.”

“So it really is all about money for you, isn’t it? No wonder you don’t want to be with me - I can’t pay you. You’re a prostitute?” he hissed. “It all makes sense now, all that money you sent back to your mom and dad - Lydia thought you were selling drugs and I was stupid enough to defend you in front of her? I told her, over and over, no, he’d never get involved with that stuff, he’s a good, sensible boy but I did think to myself a few times, ‘I wonder how he really is making this money?’ I prayed that it wasn’t drugs - but it’s worse. You’re a goddamn prostitute, Brendon?” He closed the distance between them and wrapped his hand across Brendon’s throat. The pressure was hardly there, but the threat was. “Why didn’t you tell me?” he yelled.

Brendon clawed at Dallon’s fingers and pushed him away easily. Dallon’s hands fell to his side. “You really need to ask why I didn’t tell you?”

“We had unprotected sex, Brendon - and only now, do you tell me that you’re a goddamn whore?”

“I’m clean, I was always careful,” Brendon spat, rubbing at his neck, more to prove a point than because Dallon hurt him. “Maybe now, you can understand why I don’t need some guy like you - some needy coward who’s so ashamed of who he is, he spent his entire life trying to hide from the truth.”

“I’m a needy coward? You’re going to call me a needy coward when you’re the one who sleeps with men for money? You think you have the right to insult me when you disgrace yourself by whoring yourself out to men who’ll never love you? I can’t even fathom it,” he breathed. “How can you sleep at night?”

“I met someone who loves me, someone who accepts me for who I am. Someone who’d never make me feel bad about my past.”

Dallon laughed, the abrupt sound burst from his lips. “You actually think this guy loves you? Wow. Now that’s pathetic.”

But Dallon was wrong. Ryan did love him - he told him he’d wait, he said he accepted him and all that meant something. Brendon recalled all the flowers and his gifts back in his room at the Bellagio,
the little card telling him he was a good person who deserved good things... Brendon didn’t need
Ryan to prove his love for him by flaunting his cash, but it sure felt good to know the guy cared
about him enough to want to take care of him. Dallon was so wrong.

“So, what’s your going rate, huh?” Dallon stood in front of him and pulled his wallet out the back
pocket of his pants. “Fifty? Hundred? You said you do oral for twenty bucks, didn’t you?” The man
picked through bills in the folds of his wallet and threw them at Brendon’s chest. They fluttered to
the floor in front of his feet. “If you want money, I can fucking pay you for it.”

“Don’t embarrass yourself,” Brendon snapped, kicking the notes back at him.

Dallon bent over to pick them up in his fist and pushed them roughly into Brendon’s chest. “What’s
up, huh? My money not goddamn good enough for you?” He could see the anger behind Dallon’s
eyes, spit spraying from his mouth and falling on Brendon’s face as the older man paced towards him
again and grabbed his face.

He crushed their lips together as Brendon struggled against him, but Dallon was taller and Brendon
was stuck between his body and the edge of the desk as the man pushed against him, his mouth
working wetly over Brendon’s closed lips.

“Get the fuck off me,” he spat, struggling against the force of Dallon’s kiss, pushing and kicking
against him as he tried to wriggle free. Dallon pulled him away from the desk and threw him down
on the unmade bed. Brendon wondered if the sheets had been cleaned since his departure.

“What the fuck do you think you’re doing?” he choked, clambering as quickly as he could to the
other side of the mattress.

“How come you’re a whore for everyone apart from me?” Dallon yelled, making a grab for
Brendon’s ankle as he tried to escape him. The man was surprisingly strong and Brendon fell onto
his back on the mattress with a huff as Dallon pulled him towards him and pressed down on top of
him. “I love you, Brendon. Now, take my money and stop pretending like you’re too good for me.”

Dallon’s hand fisted in Brendon’s hair and he pushed their lips together again, forcing his whole
weight down on top of him. Brendon felt like he was floating above the whole situation - he couldn’t
believe his brother-in-law was forcing himself on him like this. He kept expecting Dallon to stop and
pull away and apologize and return to the self-loathing coward he was.

Brendon fought against the man on top of him and eventually, got enough leverage that he could
force Dallon’s head back enough so he could look into his eyes. “What the hell are you trying to do,
huh, rape me?”

The man blinked at him, clearing his eyes - and then he clambered away, standing in the middle of
the motel room, tears streaking his face. “I’m sorry,” he whispered, choking on the word. “Please.
Don’t tell anyone about this.”

Brendon pushed himself up from the mattress and straightened his jacket. His heart was thumping
hard inside his chest, his muscles strained from the effort of trying to force his brother-in-law off him.
Now the two men stood separated by the bed - the same bed Dallon once made love to him in and
cried he was his angel, the same bed on which he just tried to force himself on top of him with
nothing but hate in his eyes.

“I should never have come back here. I knew you wouldn’t understand,” Brendon told him, his
voice wavering, dangerously close to cracking. His heart wouldn’t stop thumping. He took a breath
to calm himself and looked over at Dallon stood on the other side of the room. “I don’t think you
need to ask me why I’m leaving you, Dallon.”

“You’re going back to him? You’re prepared to be nothing more than a whore for the rest of your life?”

“If I stay with you, I’d be nothing more than a whore - I already know you’d never forgive my past - and I’d rather be his whore than your angel, Dallon,” Brendon told him. He saw the man’s lip tremble. He hadn’t known what to expect when he arrived at the Whole Year Inn that morning, but it wasn’t this - having to physically fight Dallon off him, watching his heart break as he realized he had no one else to blame for the end of their relationship but himself.

“This is over between us, okay? Please don’t contact me again.” Brendon held Dallon’s gaze until the man looked down at his feet and sighed.

“I just pray he’s worth it. You should probably just leave. I can’t even look at you anymore.”

Brendon left the room without another word. The late morning sun was blazing in the sky. The peace and serenity he witnessed on the Strip earlier that day was long gone as cars and tourists made their way towards the casinos and fancy hotels. The very last place he wanted to be right now was alone in that vast suite at the Bellagio.

Fuck, he needed a drink, something to numb the feeling in his chest… a stiff drink, a joint, a line of coke, anything. He needed comfort and reassurance and Ryan was hundreds of miles away in Lake Tahoe, he didn’t know what other option he had but to creep off to a bar and drown his sorrows.
Chapter 50

*Spencer’s* sat at the end of a largely disused strip mall, about a mile back from South Las Vegas Boulevard and a fifteen minute walk from the Whole Year Inn. By the time Brendon approached the parking lot, it was midday and the unforgiving Vegas sun was beating down on him, making the sweat gather at the back of his neck and the small of his back. The area was deserted - a far cry from the hustle and bustle of the Strip - and the expansive parking lot offered little shade from the desert sun. *Spencer’s* was like a little oasis, refuge from his problems.

At the far end of the strip mall was a sex shop - the sleazy type that played porno in the back and let men jerk off in booths - next to that, a rundown laundromat offered ‘the cheapest wash in Vegas! Slot machines! Keno!’

The other units were empty, boarded up and abandoned, piles of junk mail littering their doorways - only a few cars were parked up front, the place was void of people and for a short moment, Brendon faltered on his way towards the bar. He wondered if he was making the right choice visiting Spencer again after almost two weeks without contact.

The last time he’d seen the man, Marc Willis called him out in front of a bar full of people and Brendon marched out there after him and almost killed that motherfucker. *He still needed to call Jon and warn him about that,* he reminded himself. Brendon hated to think Marc Willis would seek revenge on Jon for his actions that night.

Spencer would probably question him about his disappearance, about why a stranger in a suit had so confidently accused him of being a whore. He tried not to think about it too much - an ice cold beer and a friendly face was exactly what he needed right now. Plus, as soon as his name got leaked and the world found out he was screwing Ryan Ross, he wouldn’t be able to frequent sleazy strip mall dive bars anymore - and he kind of liked *Spencer’s*. He felt he fit in better here than he did in the *Lakeview Suite* at the Bellagio.

The door creaked as he entered the bar and scanned his eyes quickly around the small space. It was completely empty apart from Ian the Bartender, who was playing with his phone behind the bar.

Ian looked up at Brendon and nodded. “What’s up?” he said as if he didn’t recognize him. “What can I get you?”

“Coors, please.” He thought about it - he needed more than a beer after dealing with Dallon earlier - his spiteful tongue and cold eyes. “And a shot of whiskey. Whatever’s cheapest.” Ryan would probably scold him for being so cheap, but he didn’t care for fancy liquor right now. He wanted to get drunk and ignore his problems.

“Is Spencer around?” he asked as Ian silently made his drinks.

The man rolled his eyes and called back over his shoulder. “*Spence! Visitor!*” He looked back at Brendon with a weary look on his face, placing a shot of Canadian Club and the glass of beer down in front of him, spilling several mouthfuls in the process. “Anything else?” he grunted. *So much for customer service.*

“That’ll be all.” He was just about to take the first sip of his beer when Spencer entered the bar from the back room, swinging the door open with his hip. He was lugging a case of white wine bottles, precariously balanced with a tub of plastic cups, napkins and straws. His expression morphed into one of surprise when he saw Brendon sat at the end of the bar.
“Well, well, well, the wanderer returns,” he smiled, placing the box down on the bar top and dusting off his hands. Spencer flashed him a look - a look that said, where the fuck have you been and who do you think you are disappearing into the night like that two weeks ago? Brendon ignored it, but he did wonder if perhaps he should’ve gone back to his hotel. All his visit to Spencer’s was doing was digging up his past indiscretions.

Spencer was dressed down today. He was wearing a frankly too-tight slogan t-shirt that read ‘I’m not just a bitch, I’m the bitch’ and a dark pair of jeans, teamed with an old pair of Chucks. It surprised Brendon to see him dressed so casually. It almost seemed like he was looking at a stranger - if it wasn’t for the t-shirt, no one would’ve looked twice at Spencer on the street. His hair was scraped back off his face with sweat and his cheeks were flushed pink from the effort of hard work Brendon had never seen him do until now.

“Where’ve you been, huh?”

“I needed to get out the city for a bit,” he explained. “Vegas gets kinda suffocating after too long.”

“Oh, honey, tell me about it. Last time we saw you, you followed that old creep outside to the parking lot and we haven’t heard from you since. What gives?”

Brendon shrugged. Of course Spencer was going to question him about his disappearance. He was lucky he was so well-versed in lying at this point. “Oh yeah,” he mused. “I’d forgotten about that… Nah, I just needed a break, man. I’ve been up in Tahoe for a week or so.”

Spencer’s eyebrows rose in pleasant surprise. “Very nice,” Spencer nodded. “What a lucky boy - I wish I could run off to Tahoe for a week or so and not have to worry about this place falling to shit in my absence.” He glared at Ian the Bartender as he started filling the refrigerator with wine bottles.

Ian ignored his boss and cleared his throat. “That’s going to be six bucks, man,” he piped up quietly, waving his finger at Brendon’s drinks. Brendon slowly moved to pull his wallet from this pants pocket - he had nothing smaller than a hundred…

“Ian!” Spencer barked, snapping his fingers at the weary bartender. “You don’t charge my friends for drinks, how many times do I have to tell you? Take a twenty from the cash register and go on break. I can manage this place on my own for an hour.”

Ian removed his apron and threw it over his shoulder with a sigh and a few moments later, Brendon and Spencer were alone in the bar.

“I was worried about you for a hot minute. I thought maybe you and that guy had a history, some ex-boyfriend or something. You look the type who’d have a rich sugar daddy.”

Brendon frowned. He looked the type? He fucking hoped not. Oh, that wasn’t good… Spencer was looking at him expectantly, but his expression was soft and not at all cruel. He pushed sweat-damp hair back from his eyes and poured himself a drink - a shot of top shelf vodka in a plastic cup. He knocked the rim against Brendon’s glass and sighed, “I thought we’d seen the last of you around here. When d’you get back to Vegas, darlin’?”

“Early this morning. Thought I’d stop by and say hi. I head back to New York in a few days.”

“Oh yeah?” Spencer looked pretty tired - a more washed-out version of the fabulous man he sat and drank with night after night before he managed to meet up with Ryan.

“Yeah… It’s been a crazy few weeks actually,” he admitted, rubbing the back of his neck. He kept thinking about how disgusted Dallon had looked with him after he found out the truth about his past,
the way he’d thrown money at him and pushed him down on the bed… The shock of it was just beginning to settle. Brendon pounded his shot of whiskey.

Spencer thought he looked the type to have a sugar daddy and Dallon was convinced the only reason their affair had come to an end was because he couldn’t provide financially. Maybe there was just something about him that screamed ‘I use men for their money! I use sex as a tool!’ That didn’t bode very well for when his relationship with Ryan went public…

Spencer’s hand rubbed at Brendon’s knuckles, giving him a quick pat. “Well, it’s good to see you again, sweetheart - and looking handsome as ever, I must admit.” He put his chin in his hand and smiled up at him. Spencer had the remnants of last night’s make-up still smudged under his eyes. Brendon was taken aback at how different the guy looked in men’s clothing. He always assumed Spencer’s cross-dressing was a full-time thing.

He let his eyes gaze over him, at the muscles in his arms and the way that ridiculous t-shirt hugged his figure. The man obviously caught him staring, because he straightened up and cocked his hip, pouting his lips like a model. “What d’you think of my work clothes, huh? Still fabulous, right?”

Brendon laughed - it was the first time he cracked a smile since leaving Ryan. “Of course,” he nodded, taking another long sip of his beer. “More understated than the kimono.”

“No, that kimono cost several hundreds of dollars, it’s couture, darling - and I buy my dresses from places like Ted Baker and Betsey Johnson, do you have any idea how much more women’s clothes cost than men’s? One simply does not do grunt work like this in a designer dress.”

“You look good,” Brendon told him. He did.

Spencer grinned at the compliment and poured himself another drink. He nodded at Brendon’s empty glass. “What are you drinking today?”

“Canadian Club, I believe. It’s not so bad.” It really wasn’t - not after the second or third shot, at least.

Spencer pulled a face and reached to the top shelf for a dusty bottle of 18-year old Jameson. “Only the best for my boy, Brendon. No one ever drinks this in here; it’s too expensive for our regular clientele, so if you don’t drink it no one else will.” He poured Brendon a generous shot and sat the bottle down on the bar. The man kept his eyes down as he asked his next question. “So tell me, handsome - how d’you know that guy, hmm? That guy from New York who came in here last time we hung out?”

“I, uh…” Brendon faltered - how did he know Marc Willis? As a client, a rapist, an attempted murderer? “I don’t,” he finished with a shrug.

“Well, he came in here the next night looking for you - kept asking for someone called Jon though - he was convinced that was your name. He sat right in that seat and refused to leave.” Spencer nodded at the barstool Brendon currently occupied. He felt his heart contract, beating out of time inside his chest.

Spencer huffed a sigh and inspected his nails. “I didn’t want to call the cops because obviously I got a shitload of coke on the premises and Josh, one of my boys - you know him - he’s well known to the LVPD and has some kind of warrant for his arrest. That old dude ended up causing quite the ruckus actually.”

Brendon swallowed and wet his lips. “He was asking for someone called Jon?” It came out choked.
“Why?”

Spencer laughed incredulously. “I have no idea, but he described you pretty accurately. At first I thought, maybe this dude’s a little loopy - you know, losing his marbles in his old age. Then I began to wonder if the guy was right and he really did know you as someone called Jon back in New York - that’s where you used to live, right?”

“Yeah, but… I have no idea who that guy is.”

*Oh fuck, he really needed to call Jon - he fucked this one up bad. He’d never forgive himself if anything happened to Jon…* Maybe he should just tip off the cops right now, place some anonymous call in hopes the old fuck would be arrested?

“He caused a big old scene - nothing I couldn’t handle, of course, but he came in here, throwing his weight around, demanding I tell him where you were. He said he was going to sit and wait for you but he was drunk as shit - then he tried to pick up Josh, said he had a room at Caesar’s Palace and needed some company. He’s so creepy. You ever meet a guy you can just tell is a piece of shit by looking at him? Breaking news: old, rich white dude thinks the sun shines out his ass. He’s totally in the closet too, probably married.”

“Wait,” Brendon interjected, “so did Josh end up going with him?”

“No.” Spencer shook head. Brendon breathed a silent sigh of relief.

“He was just an obnoxious prick, loud and fucking rude, didn’t leave when I asked - you know the drill, I’m sure. We get his type in here all the time. It was just weird how he seemed so convinced he knew you… Jon.” Spencer took a sip from his glass and narrowed his gaze.

Brendon attempted a laugh. “Yeah, I have no idea what all that’s about. Never seen the guy before in my life - and I’m Brendon - that dude must be losing his marbles. Maybe I remind him of someone else?”

“Hmm…” The man pouted. “If you say so. It’s really none of my business, but I did think the whole thing was a little fishy.” He topped up his plastic cup with vodka and took another sip. “I kept my lips sealed about you and eventually he gave up. Once he realized we weren’t going to serve him he called me a tranny and left.”

“What an asshole.” Brendon shook his head and tried to hide his discomfort - he really, really needed to call Jon. Marc Willis was a loose cannon and evidently, he wasn’t the sharpest tool in the box. When was the guy going to learn to back the fuck off? Did he want to get caught? Had he not fully understood Brendon’s threat out in the parking lot that night, did he think he was joking?

Spencer, much to Brendon’s relief, changed the subject. “So, how long are you hanging around in Vegas for?”

“Not long - a couple days. Headed back to New York on Friday.”

Marc Willis had come looking for him. Brendon couldn’t ignore the fear that began to bubble inside his stomach. *Marc Willis had come back for him…* Even after almost being strangled to death in a dive bar parking lot, he still hadn’t learned his lesson. He was relentless and he knew Jon’s name. The only comfort Brendon could take from that was there was probably tens of thousands of Jon Walkers in New York City.

He really hoped Jon and Joe made it back to Chicago - maybe they had their own little apartment by
now. Brendon hoped he hadn’t gone back to working the streets, he really hoped he wasn’t alone and vulnerable and strung out on smack in Manhattan. *Fuck,* Brendon needed something to distract himself…

“Can I get another one?” he asked, waving his empty whiskey glass at Spencer.

Spencer obliged, of course, and Brendon gulped it down in one. Silence followed, but his head was abuzz with his current problems – Dallon and Marc and the fact Jon could be in danger. Perhaps he should call Ryan, explain the whole situation to him and ask what he’d do? He needed to keep his mind occupied - he’d deal with this whole mess when he got back to New York.

After a moment, Brendon remembered something the driver told him earlier that morning. “Hey, I got tickets to go see that *Cirque du Soleil* show at the Bellagio this evening if you’re interested? If you’re not busy, you should come with me. They’ll just go to waste otherwise.” It was Brendon’s idea of payback, a thank you for all the free booze and coke Spencer shared with him before Tahoe.

Spencer slammed his hands down on the bar top and looked at him with excited eyes. “You got tickets to see the *Cirque* show at the motherfucking *Bellagio*?” he repeated slowly. “Do you know how much those things cost? Shit, I would love to go, are you kidding? Oh my god, I have the perfect outfit too - any excuse to get dressed up, right? How on earth did you score tickets?”

“A friend of a friend,” he shrugged cryptically.

Spencer grinned at him. “You are still a complete mystery to me, Brendon but you are officially my favorite customer. Oh man, there’ll be dudes in spandex.” He rubbed his hands together and shuffled excitedly on the spot. “You don’t mean as a date though, right? Just as pals?”

“Just as pals,” he repeated, the smile spreading across his face. Spencer was a good distraction, a diversion from his spurned brother-in-law, Marc Willis and the several thousand dollar hotel suite Ryan booked him into.

“Well, I would be truly honored. Hey, you know what goes well with a trip to the circus?” Spencer said, grabbing excitedly at Brendon’s hand, his eyes bright and smile wide.

“What?”

“Drugs!”

From the back pocket of his pants, Spencer pulled out a little baggie of coke and dumped it out on the counter, cutting it into two thick lines with a beer coaster.

“You’re gonna do that right here?” he asked, looking back at the door. Spencer didn’t seem too bothered by the prospect of being caught taking drugs in his own bar.

“You first,” he said, nodding at the line he just cut. Brendon held back long enough for Spencer to click his fingers impatiently in his direction. “Come on, you should take some. Then, as soon as Ian gets back, we can ditch out of here and grab some Margaritas somewhere a little cooler than this fucking place.”

At the back of his mind, Brendon remembered Ryan and how let down he’d be if ever he found out he’d taken cocaine again mere hours after touching down in Las Vegas. He suddenly felt like he had some kind of loyalty to the guy, an allegiance, like he really didn't want to disappoint him…

“Come on, just a little bump - it’ll be fun!”
Brendon bit his lip. He was certain the cocaine would drown out the noise in his head - he was sure he could forget about Marc and Dallon and Jon if he just accepted Spencer’s offer, but what about Ryan? Before he left Lake Tahoe, Ryan had told him he loved him. I want you to remember that when you go back to Vegas, he said. Brendon made a promise.

“Not today. I’m trying to live a little more responsibly.”

Spencer frowned at him, knotting his eyebrows like a mother who was trying to figure out if her son was really sick or faking it. “I got some weed out back,” he said eventually, nodding his head in the direction of the back room. “You wanna blaze one with me?”

That actually sounded pretty tempting, especially after his hellish morning. “Go on then. You twisted my arm.” Granted, he hadn’t taken much convincing.

* * *

Ryan felt like an asshole for telling Brendon he loved him - what had he been thinking? The time seemed so right and Ryan was positive Brendon was going to say it back. He’d never opened himself up like that before in his life and his admission had been met with silence.

He got it, he really did – Brendon was trying to protect himself - but Ryan wanted to hear those three words from his lips more than anything else in the world. He’d been thinking about them non-stop since Brendon told him he needed more time. Now his happiness was in Brendon’s hands and Ryan was sat in his Manhattan apartment alone, with the sickening realization that Brendon may choose to forego their plans together and stay in Las Vegas with his brother-in-law.

If Brendon chose not to come back, it’d break his heart. He’d fallen so hard for that boy and he just wanted to feel something real for once in his life. He wanted his words reciprocated but Brendon was two and a half thousand miles away with his ex-lover in Las Vegas. All of Ryan’s anxieties returned as soon as he was alone - it was difficult not to numb them with coke or pills or a bottle of expensive scotch. There were still drugs in Ryan’s apartment, he was certain of it.

He arrived in JFK airport earlier that afternoon to an onslaught of press and photographers, all of them flashing cameras in his face and asking how rehab was, what being clean felt like, if he was excited about being back in New York… Ryan walked past them with a scarf covering his face, pulled through the crowd with William and Shane on either side of him until they reached the car and managed to drive through the swarm of boisterous journalists and flashlights. Ryan knew why Brendon didn’t want to commit to him - because of this, his crazy life as an internationally famous celebrity.

William talked amiably to him about the weather and his father’s birthday on the weekend and other mundane crap, but his interactions with Shane were awkward to say the least. Ryan didn’t understand why Shane seemed to think his private life was any of his business - Shane always cheered him on when it came to his exploits with women but he had a different attitude towards Brendon.

“So, where’s your boyfriend, Ryan?” his driver asked, looking at him in the rearview mirror.

“His name’s Brendon, alright? And he had to go back to Vegas for a few days - he’s coming out to Manhattan on Friday, so if you’re a dick to him, I’m going to be real fucking pissed off,” he snapped. He had no time for Shane’s snarky little comments and homophobia dressed up as concern for his wellbeing. After a long morning of traveling, all Ryan really wanted to do was lock himself away in his apartment and take a nap.
“You know, there’s a sexual health clinic not far from your apartment. Did you want me to drop you off there so you can get checked out?” Once again, Shane proved himself to be less than accepting of Ryan’s affair with Brendon and he knew it was because the guy was a homophobe. Ryan held his driver’s gaze in the mirror. Shane laughed like it was all some big, hilarious joke. “I’m kidding, man, I’m kidding. Come on, lighten up, I’m just joking around!”

“Shut the fuck up, Shane,” William snapped on Ryan’s behalf.

Shane grumbled under his breath. “He just needs to learn when to take a joke.”

“No, you need to learn when to shut the fuck up. Leave him alone.” His PA reached over and gave Ryan’s shoulder a gentle pat. Ryan appreciated it. William always had his back.

He draped his scarf over his face again and didn’t talk to either William or Shane for the rest of the drive. Instead, he thought about Brendon and wondered how he was getting on in Las Vegas - he should’ve gone back there with him, but he hadn’t wanted to intrude and Brendon had never invited him.

He told the kid he loved him and Brendon hadn’t been able to say it back… He spent all his time analyzing everything Brendon said to him before leaving for Vegas - he could just take him at his word, he knew that’s what he should do if he wanted to make it through the next couple of Brendon-less days but he couldn’t help it, it was intrinsic.

He was cutting himself up worrying about the outcome of Brendon’s trip back home and he couldn’t forget about the drugs that were hidden away in various places throughout his apartment: the cigar box on the bookshelf where he kept his weed, the Ming vase in the kitchen where he knew he stored an eight ball of coke before he left for L.A… He couldn’t stop thinking about it, the allure to get fucked up kept scratching at the back of his mind.

As he sat on his couch, he tried to call Brendon. There was no answer, of course. Ryan tried not to get too frustrated at that - Brendon was probably talking to Dallon, he had other priorities, he’d call back when he had the chance, Ryan told himself, pushing his phone under a cushion in hopes of forgetting about it.

He spent the afternoon dozing on and off, thinking about getting high. He should gather up all the drugs he was aware of and flush them down the toilet but if Brendon decided to stay in Vegas, he’d need them. What reason would he have to stay clean if, for the last two weeks, Brendon had just been pitying him?

Quite to Ryan’s surprise, Gabe called him early that evening, informing him that he was in New York with no plans for the night. “It’s been months since I last saw you. I’ve been busy as fuck, bro - sorry I haven’t called sooner. You still clean?”

“Still clean,” Ryan sighed, eyeing the vase he’d hidden his drugs. I don’t know for how much longer, he thought. He didn’t have Brendon to distract him anymore, he couldn’t bury his woes in the boy and he kept thinking about the worst possible outcome of his trip back to Las Vegas - that Brendon would choose Dallon over him and had simply been pitying him the entire time they’d spent together in Lake Tahoe. The drugs always killed that part of his mind, now he was clean, he had no other choice but to just deal with it.

“You want me to come round and keep you company?”

Not really, Ryan thought to himself. “Yeah, okay,” he said aloud.
“Try and sound a little more enthusiastic, my friend. I turned down a party at Katy Perry’s house to hang out with you this evening. I thought I’d drop in on my boy, catch up on all the gossip. Oh god,” Gabe shuddered after a moment, “you’ve not turned all whack job religious, have you?”

“No. Not quite.” He was, after all, crazy in love with an ex-hooker. “Just come over whenever. I’ll be here.”

Despite how distant his best friend had been since he left rehab, Ryan was actually glad of the company that evening. He didn’t know how long he’d be able to hack it in his apartment alone. Gabe would surely offer a little distraction from Brendon. He couldn’t pin on his hopes on that boy - it wasn’t fair on him.

Gabe arrived an hour later toting a six pack of O’Doul’s. Ryan had been warned about the dangers of non-alcoholic beer in rehab. It still contained booze, if only a minimal amount - he’d have to drink twelve bottles of non-alcoholic beer to equate one regular beer, but that wasn’t the point, he was in recovery.

His doctors in LA told him time and time again: non-alcoholic beer is for non-alcoholics - and he was an alcoholic who didn’t want to risk it. Gabe, however, looked exceedingly impressed with his thoughtful choice of beverage.

“I’d better not,” Ryan told him, ignoring the proffered beers. “It might, you know… trigger me.” Dr. Stump said it himself, first, it’s a swig of beer, then a puff on a joint until you’re injecting heroin between your toes in a subway station bathroom. Ryan certainly didn’t want to risk that fate.

Gabe’s dark eyes rolled. “At zero point four percent? I highly doubt it. So you’re telling me I have to drink these piece of shit beers all by myself? Are you not even smoking weed anymore, bro?”

“Nope.”

“Jesus. I can’t even begin to imagine how much that must suck. So, you spent two weeks in Tahoe without smoking?”

“Yes.”

Gabe grabbed at Ryan’s shoulders and shook him. “Who are you and what have you done with my best friend?” he laughed, eventually pulling Ryan against his chest in a tight hug. “I’m kidding. I’m proud of you, man. How long since you last got high?”

Ryan calculated it quickly in his head. “It’s been about nine weeks now.”

Nine weeks! That was a huge achievement for someone who spent every single day of his life from the age of fifteen getting messed up on one drug or another.

“Tahoe must’ve been boring as fuck though, right? Did your dad make you go up there?” Gabe released Ryan from his embrace and swaggered towards the kitchen.

“No,” Ryan answered a little defensively. “I actually like it up there a lot. It’s quiet. Manhattan wore me out after so long. It was nice to escape the city for a little while. If I wasn’t being forced to attend my father’s birthday this weekend, I’d still be up there.” He’d be wrapped up in bed with Brendon, falling deeper and deeper in love…

“Do you have any real booze here?” his friend asked, opening cupboards in Ryan’s kitchen in search of glasses. “I was trying to be thoughtful to my friend who can’t drink alcohol anymore, but I might as well not have bothered, the thanks I got for it.”
Ryan remained on his spot on the couch and ignored him - people with money were obnoxious as hell. Brendon would never have been so condescending. He took a breath and sighed. “So, what have you been doing with yourself?”

“This and that,” Gabe shrugged. “Erin and I went to Barbados not too long ago, did sweet fuck all and lounged around on a beach for a few weeks. Then we had to go to Paris for some fashion show she had, so we hung around there for a couple days…” he called from the kitchen. “Hey, Ryan? This bottle of 1995 Chateau Margaux? Can I have a glass?”

“Yes.” Whatever, drink in front of me, asshole. I can handle it, sure. Ryan could feel himself becoming more restless by the second. He picked up his phone as a distraction, but there was still no word from Brendon.

_Missing you already_, he typed up on his cellphone - then he deleted it. Brendon hadn’t even been gone twelve hours.


“You’re talking about your long-term girlfriend here, man… TMI,” Ryan sighed - he wasn’t bragging about all the incredible blowjobs Brendon had given him because he had a certain amount of respect for the guy.

Gabe, however, still as unflappable as ever, just laughed as he returned to the lounge with his glass of red wine and took a seat on the couch opposite Ryan. He held up his glass and folded one long leg over his knee. “You don’t mind, do you?”

Ryan didn’t have much of a choice. He shook his head. Dr. Stump had told him before how difficult it could be to stay away from old habits without cutting ties with his old life. He wondered what he and Gabe had in common now he was trying to stay away from drugs.

“I went to a few good parties while you were in rehab but you were all anyone wanted to talk to me about. _Ryan this, Ryan that_ - after a while I was like, _fuck, gimme a break_. I bumped into Keltie at one of them actually - off her nut on coke. You two would make a cute couple. I mean, you both have very similar interests.”

_That_ didn’t fill Ryan with much confidence at all. Keltie had gone to the press about him and called him a crappy lay and all his friends, family members and millions of strangers across America knew he hadn’t be able to perform for her. It was a first world problem really, Ryan deduced. _Who really cared_? He was a better man now than he had been two months ago. Brendon made him realize that.

From the opposite couch Gabe said, “Considering she claims to be totally over you, she talks about you a lot.”

“That’s because she’s only famous because of me.”

His friend nodded sagely and hummed. “Do you want to tell me what happened between the two of you in rehab?”

“What’s there to tell? We tried to fuck and I couldn’t get it up because I had a million other things on my mind. She sold her story, big surprise there.”

Gabe took a sip of his wine and narrowed his gaze but he didn’t pry. “So, what’s been happening
with you? How was your time in Tahoe?”

“Good,” he nodded, avoiding eye-contact with his friend - everything was going to come out about Brendon, he just knew it. He couldn’t keep it bottled up anymore.

“What the fuck, dude? Were you up there alone or what?”

“No. I uh… I actually met someone, someone who I really like.”

Gabe’s eyes twinkled at the prospect of new gossip. “Is it safe to say it’s not Keltie Colleen?” He threw his head back in amusement. Ryan didn’t reward him with a laugh. Had Gabe always been this audacious?

“No. It’s not Keltie. I met a guy.”

Gabe Saporta quickly stopped laughing at his own joke and did a double take. “A dude? Amigo, you’re not gay.”

“Well, I spent a lot of time in Tahoe in bed with another man doing pretty gay stuff. I don’t think I’m gay,” he shrugged. “I still like women, it’s just… I like this guy a whole hell of a lot more. He’s incredible, Gabe. I really like him.”

Gabe’s face was a picture of pure shock. It wasn’t very often that man was rendered speechless. Ryan couldn’t understand why his friend looked so taken aback - they had multiple threesomes together, Ryan openly identified as bisexual. Why was Gabe acting like he never considered this a possibility?

“Wow. Fuck me, bro. I wasn’t expecting that.” He rubbed at his chin, eyebrows knotted as if he didn’t quite know what to say. Just wait until you find out what he does for a living, Ryan thought to himself.

“So, the whole bi thing? Us fucking girls together? Was that some kind of stepping stone for you? I didn’t think it was anything serious, I thought it was just some fun - experimentation, sex, something that happened when you were high, y’know?” Gabe was looking distinctly like he was beginning to worry that he entered into threesomes with Ryan under false pretenses.

Ryan shrugged. “Does it matter? I met this guy and I really like him - that’s all there is to it; why is it a big deal?”

Except, it was a big deal - because Brendon used to be an escort and Ryan’s father was a billionaire and there was so, so many reasons they shouldn’t be together…

“It’s not a big deal; it’s just a surprise, that’s all. I always thought it stopped at sex, y’know? I didn’t think Ryan Ross would ever settle down, let alone with a fucking dude.” He puffed up his cheeks. Gabe was definitely going to make this into a big deal. “Does your old man know?”

“Yeah, they met - George showed up out of the blue at the cabin in Tahoe the other morning and walked in when I was rimming him on the couch. That was fun.”

Gabe snorted and covered his face at Ryan’s misfortune “Oh man, that’s both hilarious and gross and one of the most embarrassing things I can ever imagine happening.” He peeked at Ryan through his fingers. “You’re going full gay with this dude then? Rimming, giving blowies and shit?”

Ryan nodded.

“Can I ask you something personal? D’you let him fuck you? Erin’s super into that idea - you know, buying a strap-on and pegging me and I have my doubts.” Ryan imagined the scene for a brief
moment - Gabe’s beautiful girlfriend fitted with a plastic cock between her legs and Gabe on all fours, face down in the pillow. No wonder Erin wanted to peg him, it would probably be the only thing that would shut Gabe up for five minutes.

Ryan hadn’t given much consideration to letting Brendon top him. He always thought it’d remind him too much about his time with Marc, but he’d be lying if he said he wasn’t curious after spending so much time with the guy. Brendon always looked like he enjoyed sex and Ryan watched enough gay porn in his time to know that it didn’t have to be painful or degrading - it was something beautiful and pleasurable and just as natural as straight sex.

“We’ve not done that yet, no,” he admitted.

“Would you?”

Perhaps. Perhaps letting Brendon fuck him one evening would show the guy how much he trusted him because he never, ever desired that before and Brendon was probably well-versed enough in bottoming that he’d know how to make it feel good.

He let the scene play over in his mind: him and Brendon in bed together, Brendon fucking him slowly, coming inside him and finally, admitting he was in love… It stirred something inside him it hadn’t before. Maybe Ryan would be down for letting Brendon top one of these days - only if Brendon wanted to, of course and only if he let Ryan remain reasonably in control. Brendon knew why too, he wouldn’t even have to explain himself to Brendon. Ryan still wasn’t over the fact there were no secrets between them anymore; Brendon was a man who knew everything there was to know about him and still wanted to spend time with him. That was the best thing about what they had together - Ryan trusted the guy more than anyone. Yeah. He’d definitely let Brendon fuck him.

“Maybe.”

“Wow. So, is this guy famous? Do I know him?”

Ryan shook his head, rehashing the same, tired lie he told everyone else so far - they met in NA, hooked up a few times in New York and kept in touch during his time in rehab. They spent the last two weeks together in Lake Tahoe, watching each other bleed and falling helplessly in love… He didn’t add the last bit.

Gabe snapped his fingers. “You told me about this guy before, haven’t you? Wasn’t he your sponsor or something like that?”

“Yeah. Something like that.”

“What does he do?”

“This and that. He’s done some modeling in the past but…” He shrugged. How much longer could he keep up this façade? “He’s everything I ever wanted. He’s everything I didn’t know I was looking for. He’s the reason I want to stay clean - he makes me want to be so much better than I ever was without him. He saved my life, Gabe. I think I’d be dead if I hadn’t met him.”

Gabe gave Ryan an apprehensive smile. “Wow. So, like… are you in love with this guy or something?”

Hopelessly. “I am. I really do love him, Gabe.”

“Does he know? Have you told him how you feel?”
Ryan nodded, wordlessly. *What if Brendon didn’t feel the same way about him? What if their affair was nothing more than a job to him?* He felt the fear creep up his spine. It turned his stomach.

“And did he say it back?”

“No,” he choked.


Suddenly, the prospect that Brendon might not return from Vegas became too much for him - desperate tears began to leak slowly from his eyes. “Shit,” he sniffed, wiping at his face. “I love him so much, I don’t know what to do. I always thought I was fine on my own. I thought I had everything I needed - and then I met Brendon and he turned my life upside down.” Ryan shook his head in resignation. Gabe, now looked a little more stoic sat across from him on the couch, his glass of wine forgotten about on the coffee table.

“Is he worried about the press attention?” Gabe asked, serious now, pushing himself up from the couch and flopping down next to Ryan.

“Yeah,” Ryan snuffled. “Poor guy, he’s gone through some shit - all I want to do is look after him and make him happy and share my life with him. I trust him; he’s meant to be coming out here to meet me on Friday and at the back of my mind, I’m terrified he’ll change his mind. I guess I’m just seconding guessing myself.”

Gabe placed a heavy hand on Ryan’s shoulder and gave it a squeeze. “You’ll be alright,” he sighed. “If it’s meant to be, it’s meant to be.”

Ryan knew Gabe was right - there was nothing he could do to force Brendon to fall for him and he understood why the guy was so cautious about commitment. Ryan grew up in the glare of the spotlight, to him, it was normal - but not to Brendon. It’d take a lot of adjustment on his part to settle into Ryan’s lifestyle.

“I’d give it all up if it meant I could be with him - all of this,” he said, looking around his apartment, “the fame, my dad’s money - and I think I’d be richer for it.”

Gabe gave a slow nod and a heavy sigh. He left an hour later, after two more glasses of wine and exhaustive talks about the pros and cons of dating someone who wasn’t in the public eye, being clean after spending half his life as an active drug abuser and various parties Ryan had missed out on during his time in California. Ryan noticed Gabe was most animated when he talked about himself, but Ryan was guilty of that in the past too and he didn’t hold it against him.

After Gabe left, Ryan tried not to be swallowed by his empty apartment. He really wanted to get high - just to distract himself from thinking too much about Brendon. After a half hour alone and making several unanswered calls to the boy’s cellphone, Ryan pulled the old cigar box from his bookshelf and walked with it back to the lounge.

There were a few little Ziploc’s of weed, all of it dried out by now, and enough hash to get him high for a week. He could maybe roll a joint, it surely couldn’t hurt that much? But Ryan already knew that weed alone wasn’t going to cut it - he had an eight ball of cocaine in the vase in his kitchen that was just calling his name.

Ryan tried to call Brendon one more time, desperate for the boy to pick up - he didn't though and Ryan threw his cellphone down on the couch and sat on his hands, repeating the mantra he said so many times in rehab.
God, give me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference. God, give me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change… God, help me.

He repeated the words until they became just meaningless sounds and his hands turned numb. Whoever he was praying to didn’t seem to be listening.
A mixture of weed and day-drinking had, by five o’clock that evening, left Brendon absolutely exhausted. He was tipsy and stoned and after boozing it up all afternoon on the Strip with Spencer, he finally felt the desire to return to that beautiful hotel suite, climb under the sheets of the bed and fall asleep.

Spencer was great company and Brendon was eternally grateful he was offering some much needed distraction, but after several hours of hanging out with the guy, he was becoming rather a lot to handle.

Wherever Spencer went, all eyes were on him - even in his dressed-down state - he loved being the center of attention and he was forever striking up conversation with tourists and strangers alike. Everyone loved him, he was so charming and friendly and funny. Spencer talked non-stop about anything and everything and there was rarely a lull in conversation, but as evening approached, Brendon had a headache - he’d been on the go for almost twelve hours and Spencer showed no sign of slowing down.

“We should get another round of shots before we leave,” the man told him as they sat at the bar of an over-priced tourist trap on the far end of the Strip. “Tequila or vodka?”

Brendon put his head in his hands - he literally couldn’t drink anything else, he needed to go back to the hotel for a nap, but he knew he’d not want to get out of bed again as soon as he did. “I don’t know if I can handle any more shots - not if I want to make it through this show tonight.”

“Oh my god, I keep forgetting about the show.” Spencer grabbed excitedly at Brendon’s knee. “You can come back to my place while I get ready, we can order pizza, Chinese or something to sober us both up a little, what d’you think?”

Brendon paused. He should really go back to the hotel - check his cellphone, call Ryan, maybe even squeeze in that nap before showtime. He tried to make an excuse, but Spencer was a persistent little fucker.

“One more round of tequila and then we can get a cab back to my apartment, I promise.” Brendon was still a little unconvinced - he wasn’t accustomed to drinking so much since he’d been to Tahoe. “Come on! What are you gonna do otherwise? Sit in a motel room on your own? Sleep?” he scoffed. “Sleep is for the dead. I’ll order pizza and then you can finally see my apartment.” He jabbed at Brendon’s ribs with his elbow - Spencer was always jostling him around, infringing on Brendon’s personal space and grabbing at his shoulders, arms or knees. If he showed up in New York covered in bruises, Ryan was going to be suspicious. He’d have some explaining to do…

Brendon sighed in resignation. Okay, sure. He could check up on Ryan later. It wasn’t a big deal, he was sure Ryan had his own thing going on back in New York anyway, and being away from each other for a few days wasn’t so bad… Was it? They both needed some time to figure out what they wanted - perhaps Ryan was thinking a little more clearly since arriving in Manhattan? Perhaps he realized embarking on a relationship with a guy with a past like Brendon wasn’t such a good idea after all.

For Brendon, things had never been clearer. He couldn’t stop thinking about that man; he wanted to share the details of his day with him, feel his embrace and his heartbeat against his chest. He missed Ryan and he was concerned his fears would come true. What if Ryan really did want nothing more to do with him once he returned to New York? Where would that leave him?
Completely and utterly heartbroken that’s where.

The hardships of his day were finally catching up with him and although Spencer proved to be great company, Brendon couldn’t help thinking about what a mess his life was currently in. Dallon hated his guts, Ryan Ross, one of the most famous men in the country, claimed to be in love with him and Marc Willis, a man Brendon wished he really hadn’t become involved with, returned to Spencer’s bar looking for him. He knew Jon’s name and the motherfucker was intent on revenge.

During the quieter moments of his afternoon, that knowledge made Brendon sick to his stomach. He pounded shots and guzzled cocktails in an attempt to forget, but it was useless. When Spencer wasn’t engaging him in conversation, Brendon repeated his actions from the past two weeks over and over in his head; all the things he wished he’d done differently - threatening Marc in the parking lot, neglecting to call Jon weeks ago, all those moments he shared with Ryan and the fact he left him without truly saying how he felt.

In Tahoe, he felt like all his troubles melted away. In Ryan’s presence, the past didn’t matter, only the future, which was equally as murky but not quite as miserable when he imagined spending it by Ryan’s side. He missed the man almost to the point of distraction.

Spencer’s place was a few blocks back from Las Vegas Boulevard in an apartment building that offered what Spencer called a pretty sweet view of the Strip. In fact, what his apartment really had was a rather restricted view of the Ross Hotel, Casino and Spa. Of course. What else?

Brendon stared out the window at it, thinking about Ryan and remembering their night there together, how different Ryan felt than Dallon and how much more he enjoyed hanging out with a sober Ryan Ross than he did a wasted one. The hotel was world-famous and Brendon spent the night in its most opulent suite with the owner’s son - even he couldn’t quite fathom that.

It was so infuriating not being able to talk to anyone about it, not being able to ask for anyone’s advice or guidance. The urge to spill his secret to someone was almost too much for him, but as much as he enjoyed hanging out with Spencer, as much as the man made him almost forget his problems, Brendon couldn’t help feeling he was perhaps a bit of a gossip and therefore, probably couldn’t be trusted with his biggest secret - but then again, maybe he could… He didn’t have to get into specifics, did he? He didn’t have to name names - he just wanted to get this off his chest.

Brendon felt like there was this whole other side to him he had to keep under wraps, that he was a different man in front of each person he knew - Spencer, Dallon, his parents, Jon… the only person he felt he could truly be himself in front of, who he didn’t have to hide anything from, was Ryan. It felt almost like an epiphany stood in the window of Spencer’s apartment - he was having a secret fling with one of America’s most famous socialites and no one knew about it apart from them. Brendon just wished it could stay like that. He loved how their romance blossomed up in Tahoe.

Spencer’s apartment was a typical party pad. Brendon doubted the man spent much time doing housework; his place wasn’t dirty but it was messy. Designer shopping bags and shoes cluttered the floor, clothes and scarves were strewn over the back of the couch - the man had a lot of clothes - and when they entered the living area, Spencer threw everything carelessly to the floor to make room for Brendon to sit down.

“Excuse the mess, I wasn’t expecting a visitor,” Spencer said absently as he did a quick tidy up. Brendon’s stomach was turning from all the alcohol, he was feeling heavy and lazy from the weed and the view of George Ross’s five-star hotel was making him nervous. There was nowhere he could turn without being reminded of Ryan - he wasn’t complaining, but he knew he’d have to watch his tongue.
“This is a nice place you have,” he said tentatively. It was nicer than anywhere he could afford that was for sure but there was evidence of drug use and boozy parties all over the coffee table and kitchen counters - empty beer cans and pizza boxes, cocaine residue, Ziplocs of weed and discarded bottles of poppers. What did he expect from a twenty-something gay guy who owned a bar in Vegas? Spencer was a party animal, he made no secret of that.

Spencer stood in the middle of his lounge, put his hands on his hips and looked around proudly. “Yeah, it’s perfect for little old me. Chill out, relax and make yourself at home. Roll a joint, if you want. You sure I can’t tempt you with a little bump of something?” He held his finger against his nostril and sniffed.

“I’m good,” Brendon nodded. He made it this far, he didn’t see the point in getting high now - he needed to sober up, not take a bump of coke just for the hell of it. Cocaine only ever made him feel breathless anyway.

Spencer continued their conversation as he changed, shouting at Brendon from his bedroom. “This was my dad’s place, he left it to me. My mom passed away when I was young and he never remarried, so it was just the two of us growing up. When I moved out at eighteen, he sold our house and bought this place. My dad loved to party, he was a big womanizer - he actually used to get some pretty hot chicks, but they were all strippers, a few of them were probably hookers too.”

“Oh yeah?” Brendon answered with a lump in his throat. He didn’t really want to discuss how many prostitutes Spencer’s dad fucked when he was alive.

“Yeah. He was a real man’s man, y’know? He was a boxer back in his heyday. Then he got my mom pregnant and had to get a real job so he bought a car dealership on the edge of town. I always thought he blamed me for ruining his career - he was your typical sad sack ex-boxing champ, unable to really deal with the fact he had a kid and a dead wife by the age of thirty. He desperately wanted me to follow in his footsteps too - and he loved to gamble. He pretty much lived at the casino and the dog track; he chain-smoked American Spirits and drank Bud Lite from the moment he got off work to the moment he fell asleep and it wasn’t like he was a bad father, but when I came out it was a big issue for him.”

“How old were you when you came out?” Brendon called back. Everyone had their own stories, their dark pasts and difficult childhoods. Spencer seemed so well adjusted considering.

“I was fourteen, so I guess pretty young, but my dad still acted like it was a huge fucking surprise - I don’t know why, everyone knew I was gay even when I was a little kid. Of course, he said I was just going through a phase, that I’d grow out of it - that I just hadn’t met the right girl yet… I think he was just disappointed he didn’t have a son more like him. He accepted it eventually, he even took me and my first boyfriend to the horse races one time, taught us how to bet,” Spencer chuckled.

Brendon thought about his own parents and how he’d always known they’d never be able to accept him - at least Spencer’s dad had been able to put aside his pride long enough to disregard his son’s sexuality.

“He hated the fact I chose to wear women’s clothes though. Oh my god, it used to drive him insane. He hated the fact I wasn’t ashamed of it, y’know? He just couldn’t fathom why I was so comfortable being such a freak. He was always so embarrassed of me when I dressed up.”

The man returned to the living room, wearing full eye-make up and a hot pink maxi dress that cut low across his chest and swished around his feet. “This one time though, after he bought the bar - I was about nineteen and was working there for extra money, collecting glasses and that bullshit - one of the customers made some smart-ass comment about what I was wearing, called me some name or
whatever I can hardly remember. My dad knocked that fucker out with one punch and no one ever talked shit about me in front of him ever again.” Spencer smiled fondly at the memory.

“Being the son of a boxer does have its benefits - he taught me how to fight and believe it or not, I can pack a pretty mean punch.” Spencer swiped his fist across the air a couple of times for practice. “What d’you think?” he asked, pointing at his outfit. “Fab or what?” he muttered mostly to himself.

It wasn’t really Brendon’s bag, the whole cross-dressing thing, but Spencer pulled it off with so much confidence he actually felt a little jealous. He truly did look fabulous and there was no way he’d fade into the shadows at the show this evening. Brendon envied how much Spencer seemed to be at ease with himself.

“You look great,” Brendon told him.

“Good enough for the Cirque du Soleil show?”

“Fuck yeah,” he smiled. “You’ll probably be the best dressed there.”

“Oh sweetie, I’m the best dressed wherever I go.” Spencer turned to check himself out in the mirror and fiddled with the material for a second before carrying on their conversation as if the interruption never happened. “When he died, he left me everything - this place, his crappy bar, all his gambling debts… He accepted I was gay but he wouldn’t even talk to me if I was in a dress. My dad got sick and he knew he was going to die but he decided not to tell me. Our relationship was strained at the best of times and he tried to reach out to me, bless him, but I was too busy being an irresponsible twenty-one year old - young, dumb and full of come. I didn’t have time for any of it.”

Brendon noticed the change in Spencer’s voice, the way he blinked his eyes a little quicker and tightened his jaw but he was quick to regain his composure. “A week after he passed away, I got a letter in the mail from him telling me he loved me, that he was proud of me and accepted me. He said all a parent really wants for his kid is for him to be happy and sometimes, it’s hard to accept your kid’s idea of happiness might be different from your own.” Spencer kept his eyes on his reflection and adjusted a wayward bit of hair.

Brendon imagined his own parents doing something similar - granting him forgiveness for his sins, redemption… His eyes began to water when he remembered what Dallon told him his dad said: you’re dead to me. He guessed that was his own fault though, his punishment for fucking Lydia’s husband and blowing apart the family. Brendon swallowed the lump in his throat. “That’s really sweet he did that. Do you miss him?”

Spencer shrugged. “Sometimes. I just wish I made amends with him when he was still here. Life’s too short for holding grudges, y’know? Life’s too short for pretending people don’t matter. There’s no pride in love; no matter what type of love it is.”

“Yeah,” Brendon agreed quietly. “I guess you’re right.”

For a brief moment, Brendon wondered what it was that caused people to react so differently to misery. Why some people - people like Spencer - had that coping mechanism and others - people like Ryan and Dallon and Jon - didn’t. Brendon could probably learn something from Spencer Smith - there really was no pride in love, so why was he denying himself what he’d been desiring for years?

Spencer plucked at the material of his dress for a few moments more, Brendon was lost in his own thoughts about Ryan. He couldn’t wait to see the guy again, to wrap his arms around him and hold him close and tight and whisper in his ear how happy he felt when they were together…
“So, if you were a *Cirque du Soleil* dude, would you offer to like, buy me a drink or something?” Spencer cocked his hip as Brendon gave him the once over.

The neckline of the dress gaped open where Spencer didn’t have the chest to fill it and the hot pink was a little garish against his complexion, but he was too polite to say anything. He was certainly no expert on fashion. “You look great, but I can’t imagine a *Cirque du Soleil* dude being too impressed with your party lifestyle - aren’t they super fit? I think the circus is a little incestuous too, don’t you? They probably got their own thing going on,” he teased.

“You’re right. I’ve no time for guys who fuck their family.” He eyed Brendon in the reflection of the full-length mirror and Brendon felt his face flush crimson. He’d forgotten he told Spencer about his affair with Dallon and when Spencer put it so bluntly, he couldn’t help feeling like a piece of shit. “How’s that going, by the way?”

Brendon puffed up his cheeks and looked up at the ceiling. “Terribly. I feel like a really shitty person every time I think about what happened between us.”

“Hey! You are *not* a shitty person - you’re fucking awesome, okay? You just moved home from New York, right? You’d just broken up with a long-term partner - he *cheated* on you and that *sucks*. Your parents threw you out and you needed some support. You had history with this guy, didn’t you?”

Brendon nodded silently. He was surprised at how much of the story Spencer actually retained since the last time they saw each other, especially under the influence of all that booze and cocaine. It had been a long time since anyone other than Ryan had taken note of his problems.

“I was just so *stupid* to think any of it was a good idea.”

The man sat down next to him on the couch. “You went through a really shitty time and you made some bad decisions - heartbroken people often do, but don’t punish yourself for it because it ain’t gonna do you no good, sweetheart, trust me.” Spencer rubbed at Brendon’s knee and offered a sympathetic smile. “So, what’s the lowdown on you and your brother-in-law? Did he go with you to Tahoe? I swear to god, your life is like a fucking soap opera.”

Brendon laughed and let his smile slowly fade. He didn’t want to get bogged down talking about *Dallon* - he wasted enough of his time on that man and he was trying really hard not to let the guy ruin his evening. “No. Things are over between us - he’s probably relieved. You’d have to be a saint to want to take me on.”

Spencer grinned. “So, you’re back on the market? Single and ready to mingle?”

“I wouldn’t quite say that. I actually met someone else and… I really like him; he’s awesome and good-looking and we have mind-blowing sex. He’s really sweet and thoughtful and romantic, but… it’s complicated.”

“More complicated than screwing your sister’s husband behind your family’s back?”

*Yeah. I’m fucking Ryan Ross. The Ryan Ross. I guess you could say that’s a little more complicated than sleeping with my brother-in-law…*

Brendon reddened. “I guess I don’t have a very good track record with relationships. I’ve had three significant ones in my life and none of them have been particularly ideal.” He rubbed at the back of his neck and sighed, distracted by thoughts of Ryan and Dallon and Jon and when his mind lingered on Jon for too long, he wondered what the hell he was going to do about Marc Willis when he got
He suddenly felt restless - he didn’t want to be in Las Vegas anymore; the city held absolutely nothing for him anymore but bad memories and people who hated him. He wanted to be locked inside the master bedroom of Ryan’s Manhattan penthouse, curl up with the guy and listen to him fall asleep.

“So, this new love interest of yours? It’s complicated? How so?”

Spencer was the closest thing to a friend Brendon had right now and he was desperate to get this one thing off his chest - he didn’t have to disclose Ryan’s name, but he could certainly try and get a little guidance from the guy. Spencer seemed to be full of wisdom and good advice. He wondered how he could word his worries.

“Well, this guy I met, he’s uh… He’s got quite a bit of money and I’m just worried his family and uh, you know, his friends and stuff will assume I’m no good and I’m with him for the payout.”

“Well then, who cares what people think? Listen, honey, if you like this guy, don’t let him go because you’re concerned about what other people think. So long as the two of you are on the same page, so long as you both trust each other, who gives a shit? What did I say earlier? There’s no pride in love - just go for it, let down your walls for those that deserve it.”

Brendon appreciated Spencer’s kind words and his *fuck the haters* attitude, but it was more complicated than that. It wasn’t just a case of rich boy meets poor boy and falls in love; his entire life would be turned completely upside down if he chose to start a relationship with Ryan.

“How rich is he?” Spencer asked after a beat. “Like, *millionaire*-rich?”

Brendon gave an uncomfortable nod - *millionaire, billionaire, what was the difference?*

“Wow. That thing I said about you looking like the type to have some rich sugar daddy? I didn’t mean that. You’re not insulted are you?”

“He’s famous too,” Brendon blurted out.

A plethora of emotions crossed Spencer’s face - surprise and intrigue, excitement and curiosity. He raised one eyebrow. “How famous?” he asked slowly.

“*Really* famous.”

The Ross Hotel, Casino and Spa loomed outside Spencer’s window like an apparition. Spencer’s interest suddenly spiked, he gripped excitedly at Brendon’s shoulder and shook him. “Jesus, don’t tease me. How famous is *really* famous? Would I know him? Is he a movie star, a musician?”

“Neither,” Brendon groaned, rubbing at his face. He took a breath. His voice came out of his mouth like a whisper. “It’s Ryan Ross.”

Spencer’s jaw dropped. At the back of his mind, Brendon already regretted giving him Ryan’s name but an infinite amount of weight felt like it had been lifted from his shoulders - he felt like he could finally *breathe* again. The man he’d been keeping a secret from everybody, for *months*, was now known to a guy who could very well rat them both out to the press.
“Are you fucking _shitting_ me?”

“I met him a couple months ago, back in New York. I didn’t expect to fall for him but I think I have - hook, line and sinker.”

_“Ryan Ross?”_ Spencer gaped. It took a second for the news to sink in. The man looked absolutely flabbergasted. “Well, I’ll be damned… That’s his father’s hotel out there!” he cried, pointing out of his window, mouth falling open once more in shock. “You’re screwing the heir to the Ross dynasty? He’s a goddamn _billionaire_, Brendon.”

“I know. I don’t know what I should do. I _like_ him, Spencer. I really, really like him but I don’t know if I can deal with all that attention.”

Spencer quirked his eyebrow. “Honey, are you yanking my chain? Is this some kind of joke?”

Brendon shook his head. “I’m staying at the Bellagio - that’s how I got the tickets for the show tonight. You should see the suite he booked me into, it’s fucking ridiculous. He says he _loves_ me, Spencer and I am _so_ scared of getting hurt again that sometimes I think I should just call it a day, move on, carry on without him but he’s the only person who makes me happy; he’s the only guy I feel I can be one hundred percent myself. I’m terrified of what people will think of me when it goes public.”

_“Sweetheart, other people’s opinions of you don’t define you,”_ Spencer told him. “You think I dress like this just for the hell of it? _No_. I do it because it feels right and it makes me happy and sure, I could go out in jeans and t-shirt every day, try and fit in with everyone else and people wouldn’t even look twice at me. I wouldn’t get harassed, people wouldn’t shout out their car windows at me and threaten me, call me a fag and a tranny, but I wouldn’t be _happy_ - and more importantly, I wouldn’t be myself. You can’t live your life being the person everyone wants you to be because you’ll die miserable and alone. Or maybe not alone but surrounded by fake-ass people - and what’s the point in that, huh?”

Brendon let go of a breath he wasn’t aware he’d been holding. “I guess you’re right.”

_“Honey, I’m always_ right. Now, you should roll us both a joint while I go and change - pink just ain’t my color - then you can regale me with stories about your relationship with Ryan motherfucking _Ross_. Wow, you lead some life, don’t you?”

Spencer pushed up from the couch, using Brendon’s knee as leverage. He shook his head and tried to hide his grin as he sauntered back to his bedroom. “Just remember me when you’re invited to some fancy celebrity party with him - I’d love a hot, rich boyfriend,” he called back to the lounge with a chuckle.

_“You have to _promise_ not to tell anyone. This can’t get leaked to the press just yet. _Please_ don’t tell anyone,”_ he begged.

Spencer poked his head around the doorframe. “Sweetie, we’re friends now, whether you like it or not, and I don’t fuck my friends over. Get it?”

Brendon felt a smile pull at his lips. “I get it,” he nodded, feeling the warmth of Spencer’s promise finally drain the tension from his body.

* * *

Instead of doing drugs that night, Ryan retired to bed early, locked his bedroom door and laid face
down in his pillow, repeating the same mantra over and over and over again. *God, give me serenity, give me courage, give me wisdom.*… His bed hadn’t been slept in in months and it sure felt lonely without Brendon. He hadn’t been able to get a hold of the boy and he was starting to worry.

He knew he was being ridiculous, he knew he was probably worrying about nothing, but he wanted to make sure the guy was okay. He kept imagining horrible scenarios in his head - of Brendon going AWOL in Las Vegas, deciding he didn’t want to return to New York and of Brendon getting fucked by his brother-in-law in the master bed of the *Lakeview Suite* of the Bellagio, both of them laughing at how gullible Ryan had been to think they stood a chance, quaffing champagne, eating strawberries and watching the fountain show together, hand in hand.

Ryan couldn’t decide which was the more terrible of his two imaginings but not being able to contact the guy was slowly beginning to drive him crazy.

*Brendon is an adult and he doesn’t have to answer to anyone,* he told himself as he lay there. *Dependence on another person is just as bad as dependence on illegal drugs, it’s not healthy and nor is it normal,* he attempted to convince himself, trying to push visuals of Brendon sleeping in the same bed as another man, wrapped around another man, kissing and saying *I love you* to another man, to the back of his head.

He was certain there was a perfectly reasonable excuse why Brendon hadn’t called him back and he tried to think rationally, but after a couple more hopeless phone calls and unanswered texts, Ryan decided to call it a night. Tomorrow’s another day, he didn’t need to stay up until 4AM worrying about the only person he’d ever fallen in love with running off with someone else. His thoughts were self-destructive and they were making him feel nauseous. Brendon probably just misplaced his cellphone. Maybe he was trying to patch things up with his parents? Maybe talking to his brother-in-law proved a more difficult task than first expected? Either way, Ryan *didn’t* want to get high - not really. He *had* to stay clean because Brendon or no Brendon, he couldn’t resort back to how he once was.

He showered for an hour, disappearing into his own thoughts as the water cleansed his skin, and after he dried off and climbed back into bed, it was almost midnight.

He didn’t want to be alone in his Manhattan penthouse. Gabe offered some brief company for a couple of hours, but midnight was a lonely hour and he missed the mountains - there was no temptation up in Lake Tahoe and it was where he’d fallen in love. New York held very few memories he was proud of and he was that much closer to Marc Willis and his father’s upcoming birthday party this Saturday where he’d have to interact with his family again. The only thing that made that task somewhat bearable was the fact Brendon promised to accompany him - nothing seemed quite as bad with Brendon Urie by his side. Life seemed infinitely more promising.

It hadn’t even been a full twenty-four hours since Brendon left the cabin in Tahoe - he shouldn’t miss someone quite this much after less than a day away from them. Brendon was due to return to Manhattan on Friday - it was a little over a day away, but too long to go without knowing the man’s stance on their relationship with each other.

He browsed the internet for a little while, in an attempt to distract himself. He searched what had been said about him since he left rehab - the general consensus was most people online didn’t believe he was actually going to stay clean, they still thought he was some spoiled rich kid - too much money and not enough sense.

He searched Brendon’s name and got no results - the man evidently had no social media footprint, for which, Ryan was reasonably thankful. After another fifteen minutes of pointless browsing, he
pulled up a high-quality gay porn site on his MacBook and settled on jerking off. He couldn’t claim to be bored when he had a dick, a hand and the awesome power of masturbation on his side.

The bottom reminded him of Brendon when they first met - beautiful dark eyes and a toned body, desperate and slutty with that speck of innocence to him, he could deep throat a dick too and Ryan grew hard watching the boy’s fellatio skills. With a little bit of imagination, he could almost transport himself into the scene.

The top was everything he wished he could be – strong and powerful and passionate about how he fucked. He always loved the foreplay in porn more than the actual fucking, but this time, the scene got him off before the sex had really begun. It was the fingering shots, paired with the close-up of the bottom’s face as he was penetrated.

Up until that point, he sided very much with the guy who was topping. He imagined Brendon acting like the boy on screen for him - hungrily sucking his dick, licking his balls and just letting himself get throat-fucked. Of course, in his fantasy, Brendon was totally down with it, but when it progressed to a close-up of the top’s long fingers disappearing into the boy’s ass, stretching him open, preparing him for a hard fuck, Ryan felt his balls tighten and he imagined himself in the same position.

When the camera zoomed in on the young boy’s face on the first in-stroke, Ryan lost it and came unexpectedly at the thought of Brendon penetrating him in the same way.

His curiosity had been awoken and he let the scene finish, only half-watching it as it played on the screen of his laptop. He pulled lazily at his semi-hard dick, wet his fingers and let them stray between his legs and press against his hole. He didn’t push a finger inside, but the pressure was enough to make him squirm. He closed his eyes, listening to the groans coming from his computer and tried to picture Brendon lying beside him, encouraging him, getting turned on by watching him…

He was too tense to fully slip his finger inside himself but he watched Brendon have powerful orgasms from getting fucked and he watched enough gay porn to know that pleasure from penetration was indeed possible - but he was still cautious.

His ass was off-limits, or at least, it always had been. Until now. He trusted Brendon fully and he wanted to explore his sexuality with him. He came once more, in time with the come-shot on screen, with his fist around his cock and his middle finger rubbing at his hole. As his arousal subsided, Ryan closed his laptop with a sigh and pushed it to the far side of the bed.

He wished Brendon was lying beside him, the bed would be so much warmer with him there - he loved the guy, he truly loved everything about him - but now they were thousands of miles apart, in two different cities and Ryan couldn’t contact him. He hugged the pillow and felt himself relax against the mattress - his two orgasms completely drained him and he was fast asleep within five minutes.

When his phone started to ring, Ryan was in the middle of a dream and it took him a little while to realize the sound was coming from his bedside and not his imagination. He took a few moments to reach for his cellphone, groggily trying to wake up from a deep slumber. He squinted against the light, blinking the sleep from his eyes.

It was just past 3AM and it was Brendon’s name on his screen - if it was anyone else, he’d have been pissed and would’ve directed a curt fuck off into the receiver before settling back down to sleep, but relief swept over him, excitement rushed into his heart as he brought his phone to his ear, eager to hear Brendon’s voice on the other end.

“Hey, handsome,” he answered, trying really hard not to sound like he’d been asleep no less than
thirty seconds ago. “What’s up?”

“Hey… I just got back to the hotel, I left my phone here, I’m sorry…” Brendon’s voice sounded sweet and low in his ear and Ryan felt a satisfied smile creep over his face. He knew there was going to be a perfectly reasonable explanation as to why he hadn’t been able to get ahold of Brendon - he spent the entire evening worrying about nothing. That was typical of him. “Did I wake you?”

“Not at all, I was just falling asleep, actually – still on Pacific time, I think.” He settled down further under the covers - his bed was warm and comfortable and he was talking to his favorite person in the world. Ryan couldn’t ask for anything more. “How’s everything going in Vegas?”

There was a slight pause on the other end of the line. “Alright, I guess - I mean, Vegas sucks but I suppose things could be worse. I’m in bed now and I saw you called like, nineteen times… Did you ever hear of this little thing called self-control?”

Ryan smiled and closed his eyes. “I have very little self-control where you’re involved. I was worried about you, that’s all. It’s so good to hear your voice.”

Brendon hummed. “It’s nice to hear yours too. It’s been such a long day,” he sighed.

“How did things go with your brother-in-law?”

“Not so good, he didn’t take it very well but I didn’t expect anything less. I don’t really want to talk about it right now but I’ll tell you all about it when I get back to New York. It feels really weird in this big hotel room without you…”

He really had been worried about nothing. Brendon was an honorable guy and he had to learn to take him at his word. “I wish I was there with you,” he smiled. “Or that you were here with me. I had a really crappy evening, I don’t think I’d’ve felt so lousy if you were here.”

“Why was your evening so crappy?” Brendon asked quietly.

He loved this boy, everything about him made Ryan’s heart flutter. He sighed and rolled onto his back, scratching at his belly. “I hung out with a friend for a little bit - we talked about you some.”

“Oh yeah? Only good things, I hope,” the man chuckled.

“Baby, only ever good things… It was nice to see him, he offered some distraction from how goddamn lonely I’m feeling. It was really hard to behave myself, actually - I really wanted a joint and a drink, or to get high off something. There are still drugs in my apartment, Brendon. I thought I was going to slip up,” he confessed, his voice wavering - he felt weak admitting it now he had Brendon’s voice in his ear but the temptation had been so real.

“Why didn’t you?” Brendon asked, the question worded so simply, but so difficult to answer.

“I don’t know…”

“Because you’re stronger than you realize, that’s why. I’m sorry I wasn’t around to answer your calls but don’t slip up, okay? Stay clean, because I really love hanging out with you when you’re sober. I’d be so upset if you took drugs again because you worked so hard these last few months. I got used to having you in my life now, Ryan - you can’t take yourself away just yet.”

Ryan felt the warmth settle in the base of his stomach and spread through his bones. He understood why Brendon couldn’t admit to being in love just yet, especially not over the phone, but his sweet words were the next best thing.
“I don’t plan on it,” he reassured the boy. There was a pause and Ryan tried to battle the grin from his face. “Would you really be upset if I slipped up again?” He needed the reassurance he had the man’s support and Brendon cared about him and was invested in him as much as he was in Brendon.

“Of course I would,” he exclaimed. “Ryan, you worked so hard at this and I really care about what happens to you. When I get back there, I’m going to give you the biggest hug and the biggest, wettest kiss of your entire life.”

He laughed, a genuine laugh from deep within his belly. “I’m just counting down the seconds, baby. I can’t wait to see you again. Roll on Friday, huh?”

“Roll on Friday - another day and a bit, it’ll be here before we know it.”

“So, what did you do this evening, did you go out on the Strip?”

“I went to that Cirque du Soleil show at the hotel - the tickets were free with the room. I took an old friend and he loved it. I thought it was nice and all, but it would’ve been even better if you were around. Now I’m lying in this big lonely bed all by myself… Thinking about all the things we’ll be getting up to as soon as I get back to Manhattan,” he sighed - there was something suggestive in the tone of his voice but Ryan wasn’t sure if he was reading it correctly - and he didn’t want to jump straight to the assumption that Brendon was suggesting phone sex.

The man groaned through the phone - and this time there was no mistaking the desire in his tone. “I’ve been thinking about you all day - during the show I couldn't stop fantasizing about you. I wish you were here to fuck me, Ryan. I wish you were here to watch what I’m doing right now…” Ryan heard the unmistakable sound of the bed sheets rustling and Brendon’s moan getting caught in his throat.

He decided not to ask details about this ‘old friend’ Brendon just mentioned, not when it seemed like the guy was leading the conversation in a sexual direction. He hadn’t engaged in phone sex in years, but Brendon’s dirty talk always got him off. He rearranged himself on the mattress and slipped his hand under the covers and inside the waistband of his pajama pants.

“What are you doing right now?” he asked, closing his hand loosely around his cock.

“Jerking off,” Brendon whispered through the phone. He guessed that answered his initial uncertainties. “What are you doing, Ryan?”

“Lying here in bed with my hand down my pants, wishing you were right beside me…”

“Oh yeah? And what do you wish I was doing to you?”

He guessed now was as good a time as any to mention the fact he was up for getting fucked. It seemed a little easier through the phone. He paused, licked his lips and tightened his hand around his dick.

“I want you to fuck me,” he breathed, his voice getting caught in his throat - words he never said to anyone apart from Brendon. “I want to try it… but only with you.”


“Well, I guess you’re the expert when it comes to knowing what a good fuck feels like.” He didn’t mean for it to come out quite the way it had, he was just implying Brendon was experienced, he hadn’t intended it to be a dig at his old career.
“I’ve had way more lousy fucks than I have good ones, Ryan, but I’m sure we could work something out. Are you touching yourself yet?”

“Yeah. Are you?”

“Mmm-hmm. I got a finger in my ass too.”

“Already?” Ryan cried. *Christ*, they hardly even got started.

“Where’s your hand?”

“Around my dick. Shit, Brendon, I’m so hard already.” His voice was almost a whine - despite his two orgasms earlier that night, Ryan’s cock was *aching*.

“Put me on loudspeaker and if you want, I can talk you through fingering yourself. It feels good when it’s done right. I promise.”

Ryan didn’t need to be asked twice. He fumbled with his cellphone and placed it on the pillow next to his ear. “Okay,” he said, trying to muster some courage. “Tell me what to do.”

Brendon talked him through the initial steps - lube helps and feels much better, but wasn’t strictly necessary for just one finger, he said. Ryan grabbed the lube and used it liberally on his middle and pointer fingers. Brendon told him to find a position he was comfortable in. Ryan asked how Brendon was lying.

“I’m on my side, with my hand reached around the back and my knees pulled up to my chest - always works for me.” Ryan slipped into a similar position.

Brendon said to take it as slow as he wanted and gently press around his asshole to loosen himself up a little more. Ryan did as he was told, his wet fingers massaging around his taint and hole. Brendon claimed he was already fucking himself with three fingers by the time Ryan even pushed his first fingertip inside. When he slipped it in, he found it wasn’t so bad - the ample lube made the intrusion reasonably easy and Ryan let Brendon’s voice spur him on, crackling through the loudspeaker as Ryan slowly fucked himself.

“I’ll fuck you and I’ll take it so slow, you’ll be begging me for release. I’ll start with one finger and then two and it’ll be so good you’ll be desperate for more - I’ll milk your prostate, Ryan. You’ll be astounded at how good it can feel when you’re with someone you really trust.”

Ryan felt his ass tighten around his digit at the thought - he was fine with one for now. He stroked his dick and flexed his finger, pushing a little deeper until he pushed against his prostate. He gave it another cautious press and cried out in surprise - so *this* was why Brendon always had such intense orgasms…

Jerking off was one thing but stimulating his prostate was something else entirely. The sensation flowed not only through his dick, but deep inside his ass and through his belly. *God, he was so turned on* - it wasn’t fair they were so far away from each other. Ryan wanted Brendon right there with him, he wanted to be able to touch him and taste him and feel his sweat against his skin.

The dirty talk continued but Ryan didn’t last long - within a few minutes, he’d forgotten all about paying attention to his cock and had his face buried in the pillow as he listened to Brendon gasp and moan on the other end of the line.

With just one finger inside him and Brendon’s hot voice in his ear, Ryan felt himself peak - his hard dick bobbed between his legs and he pushed his finger deeper, curling it against that spot he
neglected to pay attention to for so long. He wasn’t aware of the words he groaned as the pressure became too much for him, but he heard Brendon come and a few seconds later, he climaxed so hard he thought he was going to pass out.

There were orgasms and then there was the supercharged, violently powerful prostate orgasm he just experienced - he barely even touched his dick. Ryan had never felt anything like it.

“Was that good?” Brendon asked after a couple of moments - Ryan still felt a little dumbstruck, his entire body was shaking in the aftermath of his climax.

“Damn, I wish you were here for that, that was incredible,” he managed to mumble, already feeling his muscles giving into the deep desire for sleep. He yawned and wiped his finger off on the bed sheet, mopping up his come with the corner of the comforter.

“Just imagine how good it’s going to be in person.”

Ryan couldn’t wait. Brendon opened his eyes to a whole other side of his sexuality and right now, he couldn’t imagine living his life without him by his side. He was perfect boyfriend material and Ryan was so in love with him. They just shared such an intimate experience; Brendon patiently talked him through it, there was a warmth to his words and a softness in his voice and Ryan felt so alive when he was talking to the guy - he wanted nothing more from life than to know he could make Brendon happy and if that didn’t prove his love for the guy, he didn’t know what would.

“I can’t wait to see you again, can’t wait to hold you in my arms and kiss you ’til you fall sleep,” he yawned. “You’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me, Brendon Urie.” The words flowed from his mouth with ease as he pulled the covers around his shoulders and listened to Brendon laugh through the phone.

“I think it goes without saying you’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me too. I’ll be back in New York on Friday - just keep your nose clean for me, okay? No drugs.”

“No drugs…” he repeated sleepily. He was truly spent and totally satisfied - he had no intentions of taking drugs now he knew that Brendon was going to return to Manhattan in just over twenty-four hours. As Brendon said goodbye, Ryan drifted into a peaceful sleep.

The first thing he did when he got up the next morning was scour every inch of his apartment for forgotten drugs and flush them all down the toilet. He spent so much of his life feeling like a bird trapped in too small a cage, flapping his wings against the bars - but as he watched his old friend Cocaine swirl down the toilet basin that morning, he felt free.

For the first time in his life, Ryan Ross was free.
Chapter 52

Brendon was on his way back to him.

It was early Friday evening and he was no more than thirty minutes away. He touched down at JFK airport an hour ago and sent Ryan a text that exclaimed, *I’m back! Can’t wait to see you!* The words filled Ryan with an indescribable excitement. He *missed* the boy - it had only been a couple of days, but he was itching to hold Brendon in his arms again.

He - or more so, William - organized a private jet to bring Brendon from McCarran International back to New York and Ryan received a series of messages from the boy saying Ryan really shouldn’t have gone to so much effort, that he didn’t expect private jets or expensive hotel suites and his needs really were very simple.

William told Ryan that Brendon probably felt intimidated by such grand gestures - especially if he wasn’t used to living the billionaire lifestyle. Ryan considered William’s words carefully. He didn’t mean to intimidate the guy - in fact, that was the very last thing he wanted to do. He simply wanted to treat Brendon as his equal and after living a life of opulence, there was no way in hell he’d ever fly economy or choose to stay in a cramped Vegas hotel room. Why would he treat Brendon any differently?

Either way, his PA made him feel a little guilty for constantly railroading Brendon’s desires for a simple life. He thought the private jet would be something Brendon could appreciate, something that would show him: *hey, you’re worth all this and so much more.* He had no hidden motives, he just wanted to treat the guy well - that and the fact that he was a *billionaire,* why the hell would he fly his lover economy class?

At Ryan’s request, William had gone with Shane to meet Brendon at the airport because Ryan didn’t trust his driver to keep his goddamn mouth closed around a boy he already made his dislike for more than obvious. If things got out of hand between the two of them, he knew his PA would be able to diffuse the situation.

Ryan didn’t think it a good idea to go with him, even though he wanted to - the sooner he could see Brendon, the better in his opinion - but he had to think rationally about the whole thing. If he travelled to the airport, a gaggle of press and photographers would follow him and it would be mere minutes before both his name and Brendon’s face were plastered all over the Internet. Brendon wanted to remain reasonably anonymous and *that* was something Ryan really could respect. He’d gotten used to the media attention over the years, but Brendon was new to the whole thing.

He wished there was some way he could wrap Brendon up and protect him from all the cruel things people would undoubtedly say about him as soon as their relationship went public. A few months ago, Brendon had been nothing more than a convenient whore to him, now he’d punch someone out if they so much as *looked* at Brendon wrong, much more if they called him such a derogatory name.

He stood at the floor-to-ceiling window of his penthouse lounge and looked out over Central Park. It was raining in Manhattan and the sky was gray. The surrounding skyscrapers disappeared up into the low-hanging black clouds and Ryan thought there was something beautiful about the scene below him - maybe the fact he knew Brendon was now back in New York and on his way over to his apartment?

When Ryan reflected on the bare bones of their relationship, he couldn’t help feeling terrible about how he treated Brendon during their first few meetings. If he could take back his behavior, he would
in a heartbeat. He’d been so selfish; he acted like such an asshole with so little regard for the guy’s feelings. Brendon had been nothing more than a commodity to him, a sexual object, a man who was there simply to serve his desires. There was nothing he could do to change the past, but at least now, he recognized his bad behavior was totally unacceptable. On reflection, it made him feel guilty and ashamed and now Ryan was desperate to make it up to him.

Ryan spent the majority of his adult life getting a free pass for bad behavior. His surname alone gained him access to everything he could ever dream of: beautiful men and women, the most expensive real estate in the country, the purest of drugs and the most hedonistic of parties. He was surrounded by enablers; everyone was always too scared to say no to him and he could afford to live such a dangerous lifestyle with reasonably minor repercussions. It wasn’t like he was going to get so high he’d lose his job or spend so much money on coke he couldn’t pay his bills and got his house repossessed.

He guessed that was the difference between him and Brendon’s ex, Jon - to Jon, drugs were the problem, to Ryan, they’d always been the solution. High-quality coke was commonplace within the circles he moved, it was easy to get ahold of, it was usually free and it was always so hard to say no - not that he ever tried.

He paced around his lounge restlessly. His apartment had been meticulously scrubbed from top to bottom; there were brand-new sheets on the bed and food in the refrigerator - even though, with Brendon’s track record for cooking, Ryan guessed they’d probably be ordering take-out. His cleaner lit numerous expensive candles all along the mantelpiece and coffee table, the whole place smelled divine. His stark apartment looked and felt reasonably cozy – homey, even - and that was his aim. He wanted Brendon to feel comfortable and at home, not like at his parents’ houses where he always felt too on edge to relax. Plus, he didn’t want Brendon to think he lived like a slob.

Currently though, Ryan wasn’t feeling at all relaxed. His stomach was a mishmash of nerves and excitement, it was hard to differentiate between the two. He sat on the couch and absently scrolled through his messages to distract himself. When he was in Vegas, Brendon sent him a series of cute selfies and Ryan sat there and swiped through them for minutes on end - the same three photographs now etched into his memory forever. He felt like a teenager with a crush - Brendon was so handsome and had such a beautiful heart Ryan wondered how he got so lucky because he sure as hell didn’t deserve someone like him. Goddamn son of a bitch captivated him. He threw his phone down on the couch with a frustrated groan - Christ, he was so fucking in love.

Brendon was coming back to him, he was going to meet his family and sleep beside him and live in his apartment… This wasn’t something they discussed, but Ryan assumed Brendon would want to stay with him - at least, he hoped so. The thought made Ryan restless, he couldn’t sit still and his mind was racing. The drugs in his apartment were now gone and he wasn’t tempted to get high anymore but he sure was finding it difficult to deal with his thoughts. What happened in Vegas between Brendon and his brother-in-law? What did he want from their relationship? Did he want to fall in love or was Brendon still trying to protect his heart? Would Brendon want to move in with him? The possibility boggled his mind. They still had a lot to discuss, but he guessed all that serious talk could come later - after his father’s birthday, no doubt. He didn’t want to ruin their reunion by getting too heavy.

Ryan was trying very hard to remain in control of his feelings. Take a deep breath, count to ten, breathe - that’s what Dr. Stump would tell him. Ryan practiced his breathing techniques on his couch. No one said it was going to be easy, but living was endlessly more difficult without the help of illegal drugs, anti-depressants and alcohol. For the life of him, he couldn’t concentrate on anything other than Brendon.
He wondered what his family would make of him and whether Brendon would get on with them. He really wanted things to run smoothly between them, but he knew the social divide might cause a few problems - and that was before they even found out about what Brendon used to do for a living. The Ross family very rarely interacted with people who weren’t, at the very least, millionaires and Brendon Urie was far from a rich man - not in the same way as his dad anyway…

Perhaps his parents would just be glad Ryan finally wanted to settle down and start a committed relationship with someone he loved and respected. He sure hoped the fuck so, because it would make his life infinitely more manageable if Brendon and George actually got on. He didn’t want their relationship to be any more complicated than it already was.

Twenty minutes later, Ryan’s phone rang. He rifled in the pillows of his couch trying to find it, hoping it was Brendon informing him they were almost at his apartment but of course, it was his father, probably calling to check if they were still on for his sixtieth birthday celebrations tomorrow. Ryan considered ignoring it for a second, but he hadn’t talked to his dad since he’d been back in Manhattan and he was really trying to work hard on patching up their relationship. Ruefully, Ryan swiped his finger across the screen and answered - he was still a little upset it wasn’t Brendon and he couldn’t help his disappointment from showing in his voice.

“Dad,” he answered flatly. “Hey, what’s up?”

“Ryan!” George exclaimed. He always sounded so surprised when Ryan answered his phone these days - probably years of being ignored in favor of getting high. “How are you, son? You happy to finally be back?”

No, Ryan wasn’t happy to be back. New York had been his home since he was a young boy and he lived full-time in Manhattan since he was eighteen but it didn’t feel like home - not anymore. The beautiful cabin in Lake Tahoe felt more like home these days. He was over the Upper East Side. He wanted peace, quiet and beautiful blue water, not some busy, bustling, unforgiving city.

“Well, it’s cool being back and all but I think I miss Tahoe. I was really happy up there.” The only reason I’m back here is to attend your birthday party - just to keep the peace - as soon as it’s over, I’m taking Brendon back to the mountains.

George remained quiet for a second. “That’s good to hear, Ryan - that’s really good to hear. I have many fond memories of that place myself so it’s nice to know you’re making some of your own there as well. Have you, uh… have you been kicking it with anyone in particular since you got home?”

Ryan groaned inwardly - he knew that was his father’s awkward, roundabout way of inquiring about his relationship with Brendon. Kicking it… as if George was suddenly down with the kids or something. How embarrassing. “William dropped by earlier this afternoon. I hung out with Gabe the other night…”

“And how is Gabriel?” his father asked.

Gabe was Gabe - he hadn’t changed. “Pretty good. He seems really happy in his relationship, so that’s something.”

His father hummed distractedly and offered no input on Gabe’s love life - but he hadn’t been asking about Gabe in the first place. “And your friend from Tahoe? Did he come back to New York with you? Brandon, wasn’t it?”

“No, Brendon had to go back to Vegas and sort out some family stuff but he’s on his way over here now, actually. William and Shane went to the airport to pick him
up.” He looked at the clock on his wall and felt the anticipation flutter in his stomach - this truly was love, the one thing he’d never been able to buy with his father’s fortune.

George made a noise of quiet surprise. “So, umm… you two, huh? I mean - the two of you, you’re ah… you’re dating?” The last word came out almost as a squeak. Ryan winced at the idea of talking to his dad about his love life, not because he was ashamed, but because he’d have to answer some awkward truths.

They weren’t dating, not officially at least, but Ryan guessed he needed to talk to his father face-to-face about how highly he thought of the boy - until then though, he was going to shrug off the man’s questions. Brendon deserved to be a part of this discussion. “I don’t know if it’s anything as official as that just yet.”

“What do you kids call it these days, huh? Seeing each other? Hooking up? Friends with benefits… fuck buddies?”

“Dad!” Ryan cried in embarrassment - there were some things that were just sacrilege between father and son, talking about his affair with Brendon in these early stages was one of them. “God. Seriously?”

George chuckled on the other end of the phone. “I’m yanking your chain, son. Can’t I have a joke?” His father wasn’t the only person to claim Ryan took things too seriously, but if that’s what his father thought about their relationship, he wanted to set the record straight - they were more than just friends with benefits. Brendon was more than just his fuck buddy.

“It’s more than that. I really like him, dad. I… I love him, I really do.” Even admitting it aloud made him feel emotional. “He’s been a huge support since I left rehab.”

His father stayed quiet, surprised by Ryan’s admission. After a moment, he sighed. “Well, I just want to say this: I support you, son - in whatever path you choose. I was always aware of your… bisexuality and I don’t have a problem with it - not in the slightest,” he added quickly. George started to laugh. “I must admit though, I am surprised!”

“Are you surprised that I’ve fallen in love or that I’ve fallen in love with a man?” he bit.

“A bit of both,” his father sighed. “But just because I’m surprised, doesn’t mean I’m not happy for you. I think it’s great you met someone who can help you through sobriety. How long has Brandon been clean for?”

“Dad, his name’s Brendon. Shit, it’s not that hard to remember, is it?”

George apologized. “I’m sorry, I’m old now. You’ll be like me one day. So, how long has Brendon been clean?”

And yeah… Ryan kept forgetting he told everyone he met Brendon in a Narcotics Anonymous meeting so they all thought he was an ex-junkie. He still thought that was better than them knowing the real story behind their meeting. “Years,” he answered quickly, “but you know, that’s the whole anonymous part of NA. You don’t ask about that stuff.”

“And course not, Ryan but you can’t expect me not to ask questions. He’s someone new in your life who I know nothing about. What does he do for a living?”

Ryan huffed in frustration - this was not the conversation he wanted to have right before Brendon showed up. “Dad, can you not right now? Maybe we can talk about this at some other time?”
Brendon’s due to arrive any minute now…” He still felt he needed to defend himself though and he was looking for some reassurance from his father. “I really want things to work out between us,” he started, “but he’s not famous and I’m worried he’ll have problems adjusting to the press or they’ll write really horrible things about him in the papers. He’s just a regular guy, after all.”

“Well, it’s not going to be easy, that’s for certain and I’m sure there will be some unsavory articles written as soon as the press gets wind of you dating a feller but you need to be there for him and support him, take things slow between the two of you… and make sure he knows he knows what he’s getting himself into being with you - but if that’s what the two of you want, Pamela and I, we both support you to the ends of the world; we love you and we’re proud of you for staying clean. So proud,” George added. “And what’s more, we respect your decision to be with this guy - he obviously makes you happy and that’s all I ever wanted for you, buddy. Living the life we live isn’t always easy and the media can be complete assholes sometimes. Right?”

Ryan breathed a quiet laugh on the other end of the phone. Yeah, he got that right - Ryan had been their punching bag since he was sixteen years old.

“If this boy makes you happy and if you love each other, then that’s the most important thing - the rest is arbitrary. A relationship is between the two of you, nobody else's opinion matters. I, for one, am really looking forward to getting to know him better. Is he coming with you tomorrow?”

Ryan took a deep breath through his nose and exhaled slowly. “I think so.” I fucking hope so, he added silently. The thought of attending his father’s birthday alone filled Ryan with anxiety - even if it was just going to be him, Pamela, his dad and his siblings. “I guess that’s throwing him in the deep end and it’s ultimately his decision, but I think that was the plan. So long as it’s just going to be family in attendance,” he added - and not that rapist you call your best friend.

“Yes, yes, don’t panic. I reorganized the whole thing.” The way his father said it implied it had been a big old strain on the poor bastard and he still thought his son was being purposefully difficult. “It’s just family - a small get together, nothing too fancy. So… can we expect one extra guest?” George finished wistfully.

“So long as you don’t ask him too many invasive questions.”

“Of course not. I’m looking forward to meeting him - properly this time.”

Ryan suddenly had a horrible flashback to the first time George met Brendon - when Brendon’s was butt-naked on the couch and Ryan was tongue-deep inside the boy’s sweet ass. He shuddered at the memory - it was probably one of the single most embarrassing moments of his entire life.

“William tells me you seem quite taken with him,” his father said at the exact same moment there was a knock on the door. Ryan startled and almost dropped his phone - all his nerves rushed immediately to his stomach and he cursed under his breath. It couldn’t be anyone other than William and Brendon - he hoped they left Shane in the car…

“Dad, I gotta go. I think Brendon’s at the door.” He felt like a little kid on Christmas morning, filled with anticipation of all the good things the rest of the day would bring.

“Oh, Well… Okay. We’ll see you tomorrow?” He still sounded like he was half expecting Ryan to back out at the last minute. Ryan was already distracted. He stood in front of the mirror in the hallway and adjusted his shirt, picking at his jacket and fiddling with his hair while his father rambled on about tomorrow’s schedule - he didn’t feel too bad about himself, actually and he thought he looked pretty good.
“Yeah, yeah, sure. I’ll be there,” he mumbled.

His father sounded in pretty high spirits after that. “Can’t wait to catch up.”

“Me neither. Listen, I gotta go, someone’s at the door…” he hinted, trying to get rid of the man on the other end of the phone. There was a small pause and Ryan wiped his sweaty palms off on the pants of his suit and took a breath to steady his nerves.

“I love you, son.”

The declaration caught Ryan off-guard and after a brief moment of consideration, Ryan decided to say it back. “I love you too, dad. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

The two of them hung up after that and Ryan was left with a warm feeling of hopefulness inside his heart - perhaps George really was going to like Brendon and maybe his father would make an effort to get to know the guy for Ryan’s sake, despite how different the two men were. Things seemed just fine with his father and with that in mind, Ryan pushed his cellphone into the pocket of his pants and moved towards the door. He closed his eyes, took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. He felt like he wanted to prolong the moment for as long as possible - keep that constant, fervent excitement bubbling.

When he opened the door, Brendon was stood behind William, toting that damn duffel bag and looking self-conscious. Ryan could feel his heart beating hard inside his chest, he could feel the butterflies in his stomach - Brendon looked fantastic.

“Hey,” he breathed, looking straight past his PA and into Brendon’s dark eyes. He felt the smile spread over his face and a similar one appeared on Brendon’s. Ryan felt the weight of the days he spent alone in Manhattan, when he’d been so tempted to take drugs again, lift from his shoulders.

“Hey yourself,” Brendon grinned back.

Fuck, it felt so good to finally see him again - to have him stood mere feet in front of him at his front door. Ryan was overcome with the desire to take the boy into his arms, to welcome him back into his apartment with hot kisses and declarations of how much he missed him, but William was already pushing in through his front door uninvited, rambling on about how terrible the weather was. Ryan loved William, he really did, but he didn’t want the guy to outstay his welcome right now and he was going to hint really hard that the two of them needed some alone time.

Brendon followed William slowly into the hallway of Ryan’s apartment and hung timidly by Ryan’s side - he didn’t know who was more nervous, him or Brendon…

“Traffic was an absolute nightmare,” William complained. “Gridlocked the whole way since we got into Manhattan. Park Avenue’s totally jammed this evening - road works, can you believe it? Yeah, great time to do road works, assholes - during a rainy rush hour in New York City.”

Ryan let his PA carry on moaning about the traffic, ignoring him in favor of watching Brendon. The boy melted his heart. Manhattan suddenly didn’t feel so lonely. “You look really nice,” he told him quietly, reaching out to brush the tips of his fingers along Brendon’s knuckles.

Brendon looked him up and down. “You don’t look too bad yourself.” They shared a smile and Ryan let his little finger hook around Brendon’s - William was still blathering on, oblivious to the fact Ryan desperately wanted him gone.

“Your father’s party starts at three tomorrow, so Shane is scheduled to pick you up at two thirty. I’ll come by at two to make sure you’re ready, okay?” The man turned to look at them both, eyes falling
on their linked fingers before Ryan had a chance to pull away.

“I’ve been clean for over nine weeks, Bill. You don’t have to drag me out of bed anymore.”

William gave Brendon a quick glance – Ryan could see the disapproval in his eyes. “We’ll see about that,” he bit under his breath, turning away. Ryan was about to bite back at his PA with a similar snarky comment, but when he looked at Brendon, the boy was biting his lip, trying to hide his grin. He quickly realized that if he could have it his way, his Saturday afternoon would be spent in bed with Brendon, as opposed to exchanging pleasantries with his family.

William stood in the middle of his apartment with his hands on his hips and gave the place a quick scan. He hummed in surprise. “It’s tidy in here, Ryan - and it smells good. It actually looks clean for once.”

Ryan simply rolled his eyes in response. He heard Brendon trying to hold back a laugh.

“Well, I’m not going to hang around, I’ll leave you alone - but I’ll be here at two, okay? Please make sure you’re ready - your dad’s been on me about this for ages and if you change your mind at last minute, he’s going to be super pissed.”

Yeah, way to go making me look like a useless asshole who can’t do anything for myself, Bill. “I get it. I just got off the phone with him, we talked, it’s all good,” Ryan said, trying to usher his PA out the door.

William hung onto the doorframe and looked seriously at Ryan over the frames of his glasses. “Two, okay? You want me to call when I’m on my way?”

“No! I’m sure I can manage on my own.” He knew William was used to dealing with him when he was on drugs and he knew that he’d never been the easiest person to deal with when he was high, but he just wanted the guy out of his apartment so he could properly welcome back the man he loved. With a few more assurances that Ryan had no intentions of backing out of attending his father’s birthday, William made his exit and the two men were left alone in the silence of Ryan’s apartment.

“C’mere, you.” Ryan opened his arms and Brendon walked into them, quickly closing the space between the two of them. Brendon’s head nestled into the crook of Ryan’s neck, his arms wound tight around his body, their chests pressed flush. Ryan closed his eyes and they stood like that for a long moment, just breathing together and holding each other close - he had the boy back in his arms again and Ryan’s heart wouldn’t stop pounding.

“I missed you,” he whispered, pulling away slightly to press a kiss against Brendon’s temple. He could feel the boy’s breath against his skin, his chest rise and fall as he held him.

“Same,” Brendon sighed eventually. The man raised his lips to meet Ryan’s and pressed their mouths together. The kiss was soft and slow and Ryan cupped his jaw, walking him backwards into the lounge. When they fell to the couch together, he pulled away and looked into the boy’s eyes.

“I’m so glad to have you back,” he smiled.

Brendon laughed and hit him gently on the shoulder. “I was only gone a few days!”

“I know.” He let his face press into the space between Brendon’s neck and shoulder and sighed against his skin. “Still missed you like hell though.”

 Fuck, it felt so good to finally hold him again...
They lay together and kissed when the mood struck them. Ryan welcomed him back with slow, gentle pecks along his jaw and Brendon arched up into him with a groan. Their lips joined again and Ryan felt the desperation behind Brendon’s kiss, felt his body bend and bow against him and the dig of his fingernails against his shoulder. Brendon’s dick was hard inside his jeans.

He trailed his tongue along the shell of Brendon’s ear and whispered to him with a grin. “Maybe we should take this to the bedroom?” They both knew what happened last time they tried to fuck on the couch.

“Oh man,” Brendon groaned. “I thought you’d never ask.”

Ryan pulled Brendon up from the couch and dragged him towards the bedroom. By the time they even got to the bed, they were both shirtless and Ryan’s pants were pulled open, their clothing discarded in a trail from the door to the bed. They fell onto the mattress together and Ryan pulled Brendon on top of him, inhaling his scent, pulling it into his lungs.

They continued their make-out, Brendon was straddling him and it didn’t take long for him to start rolling his hips, rutting up against Ryan’s thigh in search of friction. Ryan let his hands stroke around the boy’s shoulders and inside the back of his jeans as they kissed.

“I sure missed this,” Ryan breathed, pushing Brendon back to gaze at him.

“Feels like it’s been way too long, huh?” the boy smiled back.

Brendon sat up, popped the top button of his jeans and slowly unzipped himself. He pulled his cock out and displayed himself in front of Ryan, his semi-hard cock resting in the palm of his hand, the fly of his pants pulled wide open. Ryan’s own dick grew stiff at the sight, Brendon was sat astride him, jerking his erection, his ass grinding down against him every few seconds.

“It sure does,” he mumbled, almost to himself.

Brendon climbed from on top of him, pulling his jeans down over his ass and all the way off. He threw them across the room with a proud flourish that made Ryan grin. When Brendon was naked, he tugged Ryan’s pants down slowly, kissing each inch of his skin as it was revealed to him. Ryan couldn’t ignore the shiver that tingled up his spine. Brendon’s lips felt like lightning on his skin.

When Brendon rid him of his suit pants, he mouthed at his dick through the material of his briefs until his underwear was wet with spit. He’d seen that in porno’s, but he’d never experienced it firsthand. The contrast between Brendon’s warm tongue against spit-wet briefs was enough to drive Ryan insane. His cock strained for release, but Brendon worked him for what seemed like countless minutes before he eventually pulled them down and licked along the shaft. He sucked around the head and mouthed at his balls, pulling them into his mouth at the same time. His tongue was warm and wet and he’d almost forgotten how well that boy could suck cock - the blowjob felt simply divine and when Brendon eventually slid Ryan’s cock down his throat, he took him to the hilt without any hesitation. Ryan blinked up at the ceiling and closed his eyes as Brendon's head began to bob up and down between his legs. His fingers rubbed tenderly over the boy’s jaw.

The blowjob continued until Ryan was writhing on the mattress - this head was unlike anything Brendon performed on him before, it was slow and deliberate, each and every small movement was done to bring Ryan closer to the edge. He was torn between bucking his hips up into the man’s throat until he reached orgasm and pushing him back so they’d actually be able to fuck.

Ryan decided on the latter option, pushing Brendon back gently by his shoulder. His dick was slick with spit and Brendon’s lips were red and wet. He wiped at his mouth and Ryan coaxed him onto his
hands and knees on the mattress so he could rim him. Brendon buried his head in the pillow and arched his back and for a short moment, Ryan sat back on his heels and drank in the beautiful sight in front of him - Brendon was gorgeous, he was perfect in every way and he didn’t even know it. He was the love of his life. Ryan would do absolutely anything for him.

He kissed down Brendon’s spine, rubbing his palms over the soft globes of Brendon’s ass before spreading his cheeks and licking cautiously around his hole - he still wasn’t very practiced at this act and he was nervous performing it but Brendon shuddered under his touch and groaned into the pillow. His toes curled and his hands fisted in the bed sheets and that was all the encouragement Ryan needed. He pushed his tongue inside the boy and reached his arm between Brendon’s legs to jerk his cock - he was already leaking precome and Ryan took that as a sign to continue. He rimmed Brendon until the boy was begging for something more - your finger, your dick, anything, he groaned. Please...

“I could do this all night,” Ryan smiled, “listen to you beg like that, wind you up until you can’t take it anymore…” He pulled back and spat on at Brendon’s hole, slipping a finger inside him with ease. Ryan knew the boy’s body by now, he quickly located his prostate and pushed the pad of his fingertip against it.

Brendon cried out in pleasure and Ryan pressed a second finger against his entrance. He lay down on top of him, his chest against Brendon’s back, his second digit slipping in beside his first - this one was more of a stretch and Brendon’s body put up a little more resistance but when he had two fingers inside him, the man muffled his groan into the pillow.

“Godfuckingdamn. That feels so, so fucking good.”

“I feel guilty about every single time I treated you as anything less than perfect,” he admitted into Brendon’s ear. He flexed his fingers and Brendon whined. “I can be a good man for you. I can make you happy.” Another testing stretch of his fingers and Brendon was pushing back into him.

“I know you can, Ryan,” Brendon answered, his voice wavering. “If you keep doing what you’re doing though, you’re going to make me come before we even get started.” He wriggled underneath him and Ryan pulled away, watching as Brendon turned over onto his back. “I’m here because you make me happier than anyone has in a long, long time,” he said quietly, dropping eye contact and licking his lips. “If you want - and only if you want - you can fuck me bareback tonight.”

Ryan always used condoms - every single time, with every single sexual partner he’d had. It was something his father drummed into him since he hit puberty - have sex with whoever the hell you want, but always use protection. Some girls will go to great lengths to get pregnant by someone like you, Ryan.

When he was a teenager, he quite inexplicably thought it was because he was so damned irresistible to women - it hadn’t taken him long to realize that had nothing to do with it and if he wound up getting some random chick pregnant, she’d be set for life with the child support he’d have to pay. He didn’t want kids - what if they turned out like him? He guessed being in a gay relationship solved that problem.

“Ryan?” Brendon’s voice snapped him out of his thought. “What do you think? We don’t have…”

“Baby, I’d love to,” he answered quickly. He really did want to, he’d wanted to go bareback with Brendon since they first met - it had always been something that excited him, one of his biggest kinks if you will. He fell down on the mattress against Brendon’s side and wrapped his arm around him with a sigh. He didn’t know quite how to word his next question.
“How about you? I mean, are you-”

“I’m clean,” Brendon nodded, turning towards him with a smile. “I went to a clinic in Vegas and I got tested. I was always really careful when I was working, but I guess you can’t always be one hundred percent sure. So I went and got tested and everything came back clear.” He tucked a loose strand of Ryan’s hair behind his ear. “I really want this - so long as you feel the same way…”

Ryan felt the excitement at the idea surge through his body - he hadn’t even had to suggest it. “Well, I’ve never not used protection. Not even once. My dad was always worried I’d end up getting some socialite pregnant.”

“Well, there’s no chance of that with me,” Brendon laughed, leaning over to kiss him. “When I was in Vegas, I got so hard thinking about taking your load up my ass, it was literally all I could think about when I was in bed.”

Ryan’s cock hardened at the boy’s filthy words and he looked into his eyes. He ran his thumb over Brendon’s bottom lip. “I would love to do that with you, baby. That’s my ultimate fantasy.”

The two men engaged in foreplay that evening for over half an hour, sucking, kissing and licking until Brendon was open and wet and eager enough to take him - foreplay had always been a very underrated part of Ryan’s sex life, but he enjoyed seeing Brendon squirm under his touch, watching him buck and twist on the mattress.

When they were both ready, Ryan slicked up his dick, held Brendon’s ankle over his shoulder and slowly, slowly pushed inside. Brendon, of course, was tight as hell - back in Tahoe, they would have sex two, sometimes, even three times a day. Now it had been a few days and they were both wound up and sensitive. When Ryan slid all the way in, the moan that fell from Brendon’s lips sounded like pure sin.

During the first few strokes, Ryan didn’t think he was going to last long - Brendon was so tight and he looked so hot and they were fucking bareback for the first time - he thought it was going to be over before it even began, but they moved slowly, took their time and when they fell into a comfortable rhythm, Ryan leaned forward against Brendon’s chest and rocked against him, kissing the boy’s chin, his jaw, his neck as they moved.

This wasn’t just sex, Ryan realized. This wasn’t fucking - they were making love. He always scoffed at the phrase, but now he understood it. Fucking was physical, making love was mental - and they had that connection with each other now. Brendon meant the entire world to him, his happiness was the most important thing and Ryan couldn’t explain it - how this boy had made such a huge difference in his life.

A little while later, when Brendon rode Ryan’s dick, it was slow and fluid. Ryan couldn’t help but stare in awe at the way the muscles in his stomach tensed and flexed as he moved his hips. He pulled him down against his lips and kissed him, bucking his hips up gently as Brendon pressed his mouth against his ear.

“I missed you so much, Ryan,” Brendon whined with his eyes closed. “You have no idea how much I missed you.”

_Oh, Ryan had an inkling_. He missed Brendon just as much - he thought of no one else for the entire time they’d been apart.

The dynamic between them had changed. Ryan felt like his heart was going to break through his chest. He never felt so close to someone before, he never felt this in tune with someone. They were
taking their time and concentrating on each other’s pleasure. Ryan pressed his lips against Brendon’s and they breathed each other in and they didn’t break their kiss until they switched positions - missionary style to finish off.

Brendon cried out in satisfaction as Ryan fucked him, he looked completely undone beneath him and Ryan could feel the threat of orgasm bubbling inside his belly. He wanted to hold back, he wanted to delay his climax as long as possible but it was hopeless; Brendon’s moans were just too hot and his love for the guy was impossible to ignore. Brendon seemed to be in the final stretch himself. His hand slipped between their bodies and he began to pull quickly at his dick.

“I’m close,” the boy groaned. His brow was furrowed, his mouth wet and open as Ryan watched and waited for the exact moment Brendon came so he could follow suit.

“Where… where d’you want me to..?”

Brendon knew what he was asking, he didn’t have to spell it out. “Inside me - please, Ryan…” A couple of strong strokes later, Brendon’s body shuddered to climax, the muscles in his stomach tightening as he came, his hips bucking up to meet Ryan’s as he milked the rest of his orgasm. Ryan could watch that moment over and over and never get bored of it. He wrapped his arms around the boy’s shoulders, pressed his forehead against Brendon’s and thrust his hips forward once, twice, three times before he came himself, releasing inside Brendon as they both blinked at each other in a daze.

When he pulled out, he did so slowly, only briefly glancing down between Brendon’s legs to watch his come trickle out of him. He felt like he could’ve made more of a show of that, but caught up in the moment, Ryan wanted to extend their intimacy as long as possible. He flopped down on the mattress beside Brendon and let the boy roll against his side with a sigh. His breath was shuddering.

“You’re shaking,” Ryan smiled, pulling him close to his chest.

Brendon took a second to answer and when he did, his voice was weak. “That was amazing. Every time with you, I think sex can’t get any better and every time you prove me wrong.” Ryan could still feel the boy’s muscles jittering - he was going to have to get Brendon to show him how it felt to get fucked and experience such a powerful orgasm.

He didn’t say anything in response, but he returned Brendon’s lazy smile and held him against his chest - they were both sticky and loose, their muscles weak and still pulsating after sex. Ryan let his fingers trail absently though Brendon’s hair.

Brendon took a while to come down from his orgasm but when he did, he pressed a string of soft kisses along Ryan’s shoulder. The boy eventually rolled on top of him, his mouth sucking gently at his chest and neck until their lips joined together once more. Brendon took a shaky breath as they kissed and Ryan could feel tears on his lashes.

“I love you, Ryan,” he said.

The feeling that settled in Ryan’s chest was warm and unassuming - it was the comfort of coming home after a long journey, the tranquility of feeling like he finally found his place in the world.

“I’m sorry it took so long. My worst nightmare is everyone thinking I’m taking advantage of you, because I’m not. I don’t want people to think I’m a bad person. I am so scared, but I don’t want to live without you anymore, Ryan.”

Ryan held tight to the man’s shoulders, his head swimming, his cheeks flushed at Brendon’s words.
“You don’t have to, baby,” he whispered, pulling his chin up so they could look at each other. “You’re not a bad person, you’re beautiful to me - inside and out and I’ll help you through this, we’ll take everything at your pace.”

“I feel like I don’t deserve someone like you,” Brendon choked with a furrowed brow and tears in his eyes.

Ryan hushed him and laughed. “Don’t talk such nonsense. I’m going to make you happy and I’m going to look after you and stand by you, because you deserve every ounce of happiness that’s going to come your way from here on out, okay?”

Brendon flashed him a teary smile and nodded. “Okay.”

“Now, tell me again - I didn’t quite catch it.”

Brendon fell forward into his chest. “I love you,” he laughed, linking their fingers. “I love you, Ryan Ross. I love you.”

Ryan couldn’t pinpoint a time in his life that filled him with as much happiness as this moment. He brushed Brendon’s hair back from his eyes and felt his heart swell with emotion. “I love you too, Brendon Urie - more than anything else in this entire world.”

Ryan fell asleep that night listening to the soft thud of Brendon’s heartbeat, his own heart resting easy in the knowledge that he wasn’t lonely anymore; he finally had someone to take care of, someone who loved him for the broken man he was.
In the few short days Ryan had been alone in Manhattan, he missed waking up next to Brendon. It felt good to feel the heat of someone else beside him, to be awoken slowly to the touch of Brendon’s hands on his body, pulling him closer and pressing gentle kisses along his shoulder. Ryan sighed, content and warm under the covers as he stirred. He didn’t want to wake up quite yet, it was still dark outside which meant it was too early to start another day, but Brendon was hard behind him and his erection was mightily distracting.

Ryan’s sleep-clouded mind reminded him of the words Brendon uttered before they fell asleep last night – those sweet I Love You’s punctuated by soft kisses… He pulled the covers up and buried his face in them; it was the first morning in a long time he actually felt excited to start the day.

Brendon was going to meet his family for the first time and although he knew that thought should’ve filled him with dread, he was kind of looking forward to it. He’d get to introduce Brendon to them and say: this is the wonderful man I’ve fallen in love with, isn’t he amazing? This is the guy who saved your son’s life, so be kind to him. There was something incredibly comforting about the idea of doing something so normal, something so many other people took for granted. He played the fantasy over in his mind.

Brendon was trying his damnedest to get Ryan’s attention and he couldn’t deny the boy that. They were in love with each other now – Brendon deserved every single second of his time. Ryan rolled over onto his back and greeted the boy with a sleepy smile.

“Mornin’, sunshine,” he chimed.

“Good morning, love.” Brendon straddled Ryan’s hips and moved against him slowly. This was what he wanted from the guy for so long - comfortable familiarity... pet names and morning smiles. It had taken Ryan several long, tiresome months to realize it but he’d fallen for Brendon the moment they met.

Ryan’s dick began to harden between his legs and he reached his hands around Brendon’s hips to pull him against his by his ass. When Brendon lay against his chest, Ryan let his fingers stray to rub at his hole, sweet and wet from last night. Ryan’s stomach flipped somersaults as Brendon sucked at his neck.

“You fancy a quickie?” the boy smiled against his ear.

Of course he did. Why was Brendon even asking?
They shared some really intense sex the previous evening and Ryan still felt stiff and sticky because of it. Last night, Brendon finally divulged him his biggest fantasy – bareback sex – but it hadn’t felt like some dirty kink. It was intimate and beautiful and this morning, he felt truly connected to the man. Within a few minutes, Ryan’s cock was lubed up and Brendon was slowly lowering himself down on top of him, his dick sliding into the boy’s tight ass inch by inch until Brendon was riding him, his hard cock bouncing between his legs as he moved.

It wasn’t a quickie. They made slow, lazy love until the sun came up and right before they came, Ryan wrapped his arms tight around Brendon’s shoulders and told the boy he loved him. Brendon breathlessly repeated his sentiments and Ryan knew he’d never tire of hearing those three little words fall from his lips. They recovered in silence, sharing soft kisses and tender, featherlight touches.

That morning, Ryan attempted to explore every inch of Brendon’s skin with his fingertips, the map of the boy’s body underneath his hands. It wasn’t like it was uncharted territory - Ryan understood that, he’d been around the block a few times - he’d been claimed by numerous men before Ryan came along, but it didn’t matter. That was Brendon’s past and they had an entire future ahead of them. Ryan traced patterns along the boy’s hip and pressed his lips against the crook of his neck.

“I could do this forever,” he sighed, listening to the rhythm of Brendon’s heart.

“Me too, but… I should really go shower. Perhaps you’d like to come help clean me up?”

“Can’t,” Ryan mumbled. “The bed’s too warm – besides, it’s still early. We don’t have to be up for hours. Fall back asleep with me,” he whispered, snuggling down under the thick covers and feigning sleep.

Brendon laughed. “Sleep’s kind of impossible when I got two loads of your come up my ass and a butt full of lube.”

Ryan cringed at Brendon’s choice of words and felt a guilty smile spread over his face. “Gross. You really need to work on your pillow talk, my darling.”

“Oh, you’re going on soft on me now after last night?” Brendon leaned forward and pecked Ryan’s nose. Ryan scoffed in defense – if he was being honest, he still loved that boy’s filthy mouth, the way he never tried to sugarcoat anything. “I kind of like it – this New You, all sweet and romantic. I never had a boyfriend like that before.”

Ryan opened his eyes in surprise to see Brendon looking more than a little shocked himself at the b-word that had just come out of his mouth. Brendon flushed red and attempted to correct himself. “Sorry. I don’t know why I said that, it just slipped out. Shit, I mean – that’s a big word and if that’s too much or whatever, I totally understand, I-”

Ryan covered Brendon’s mouth with his own. “I’ll be your boyfriend if you want me to be,” he smiled. Brendon looked like he must have morbidly embarrassed himself at the b-word that had just come out of his mouth. Brendon flushed red and attempted to correct himself. “Sorry. I don’t know why I said that, it just slipped out. Shit, I mean – that’s a big word and if that’s too much or whatever, I totally understand, I-”

Ryan covered Brendon’s mouth with his own. “I’ll be your boyfriend if you want me to be,” he smiled. Brendon looked like he must have morbidly embarrassed himself; he cringed as Ryan pulled the boy into his chest and laughed. “Jeez - all these weird dating protocols us modern folk have to abide by, huh? What, we’re meant to wait a certain amount of time before giving what we got an official title? Fuck that,” he said. “Boyfriend is good with me, if it’s good with you. At least I know how to introduce you to my family now.”

“Oh Christ, don’t remind me,” Brendon groaned against Ryan chest. “I never had to meet the parents before. What if they don’t like me?”

“They’ll like you because I like you. I think my dad’s just relieved I settled down some since leaving rehab. Don’t think about it too much – the Ross family ain’t nothing to be scared of and I’ll be there
to hold your hand. I won’t leave your side.”

Brendon hummed, as if Ryan’s answer was satisfactory enough for him. “Well, that makes me feel a little better. So long as you’re there, it shouldn’t be so bad.” The boy lay next to him for a little while longer but after fifteen minutes, he started to toss and turn and sigh loudly. Ryan was just about drifting off to sleep again, but Brendon was evidently an early riser – either that or their morning fuck had the opposite effect on him than it had on Ryan.

“I should get up. I have a couple things I need to do this morning.”

Ryan opened his eyes and blinked them clear. “What do you mean?” he asked, his curiosity peaking. He tried to keep his voice light and level. “What kind of things?”

Brendon sighed up at the ceiling. He didn’t answer for a couple of seconds, but when he did, he looked back at Ryan and brushed his hair gently away from his eyes. “I feel like I should probably catch up with Jon.”

“Jon, your ex, Jon?”

“Oh my god. Panic flooded Ryan’s chest – Brendon had barely been back in New York twelve hours and he was already running off to check on his ex-boyfriend? Why? The news didn’t sit well with him. In fact, it terrified him, but he wet his lips and cleared his throat. “Can’t you just call him instead?”

“I tried when I was in Vegas – a bunch of times actually but I got no answer - but then again Jon was always losing his phone in one way or another. He was never the most responsible of people,” Brendon laughed.

Ryan stared at him, trying to rationalize it all in his head – Brendon lived a life before they met, he’d fallen in love and cared for someone. He’d been in a long-term relationship and Ryan didn’t know what that felt like yet, maybe Brendon’s need to see Jon was normal.

The boy turned onto his side to face him. “Look, just because I want to go see him doesn’t mean I want him back. Jon and I are through and I meant what I said last night. I love you. I did a lot of soul-searching in Las Vegas and there were a few things I became aware of out there that I feel I need to tell him about.”

Ryan didn’t really understand it – Brendon’s innate desire to leave the comfort of his penthouse apartment and the warmth of his bed to go run back to Jon, who no doubt was still living in the scummiest area of town with that drug-dealer, whatever his name was. Ryan thought he’d been more than accommodating letting Brendon go off to sort things out with Dallon but now he wanted to go see Jon too? Was Brendon taking advantage of him? Did he think Ryan was some kind of chump? Jon cheated on him - how could Brendon forgive him for that? No, Ryan really didn’t understand it, but he guessed he didn’t need to. Brendon and Jon had history and Ryan needed to trust him if their relationship was ever going to work out.

“Are you sure he’s even in Manhattan still?” he asked.

“I don’t know but I need to find out – if he’s not, that’ll be the end of it, I swear. I don’t want you to think I’m running out on you, not after last night but I want to get this over with as soon as possible and I can’t move on unless I talk to him, Ryan. Please. You have to trust me on this.”

Ryan took a deep inhale as all the possible outcomes of Brendon visiting his ex raced through his
head. Jon may have left Manhattan – and if that was the case, would Brendon want to chase him to whatever city he ended up in? What if he was in a bad way, still using, still hooking? Would Brendon deem it necessary to nurse the guy through kicking his habit? What if things had gone belly-up between Jon and his new love? What if Jon suddenly decided he wanted Brendon back, would he have to fight the guy off for Brendon’s attentions?

All of those possibilities left Ryan feeling a little uneasy - but then what if Brendon simply needed to close that chapter of his life and make peace with his past? Who was Ryan to stop him? He couldn’t dictate what the guy did or who he could or could not see – that was not the basis of a healthy relationship and being a jealous and controlling boyfriend was not likely to keep Brendon by his side.

Ryan nodded slowly. “I trust you.”

“Thank you,” Brendon smiled. “Thank you for understanding that this is something I need to do.”

“It’s not going to stop me from worrying about you every second you’re gone though.” Ryan didn’t want Brendon wandering those streets, mixing with junkies and dealers. “It’s not one of the nicer areas of the city, is it? Maybe I could get Shane to drive you…” Even as he said it, he knew it was not one of his best ideas. In fact, it was laughably bad.

Brendon gave him a look that told him so. “Uh, no. That guy already dislikes me as it is, I can’t imagine he’d be sold on driving me to my ex-boyfriend’s apartment, waiting outside while we talk and then driving me back again, do you? I’m fine, Ryan,” Brendon told him, rubbing at his arm, that handsome, reassuring smile still etched on his lips. “I spent years on those streets. I can look after myself, y’know?”

“I know. I just worry, that’s all.”

At the back of his mind, Ryan couldn’t help challenging Brendon’s reasons for going to see his ex – nothing was that important, surely – but he respected the man enough not to question them. Their relationship was still new and he was learning to take the things Brendon said at face value. It was hard, but he was getting there.

“This doesn’t lessen my feelings for you, Ryan – you make me happy and you’re the one I want to be with, not Jon. You being so cool about me going to see him… it means a lot.”

“What am I meant to do, keep you tied to the bed for the entire time we’re back in Manhattan?” he grinned.

Brendon bit his lip. “Now there’s an idea. I might hold you to that.” He pushed forward against Ryan’s lips and kissed him – it was a kiss that said: baby, you got nothing to worry about. It was a kiss that said I Love You. The boy pulled back and pecked Ryan’s nose before he climbed from the bed and walked towards the en-suite.

Watching Brendon leave to catch up with his ex-boyfriend was not quite how he imagined spending their first morning back together, but he could swallow his pride for a couple hours if it brought Brendon some peace.

“Hey,” he called before Brendon left the bedroom. The man looked back at him over his shoulder with a smile on his face, bed-messy hair and soft eyes – absolutely fucking flawless. “You’ll be back in time for my dad’s birthday, right?”

“Of course. I’m not going to forgo partying with George Ross to hang out in my shitty old apartment
with my ex and his new boyfriend, believe me. I’ll be there. I promise.”

“He’s stoked to meet you.”

“Are you sure he’ll recognize me without my ass in the air? Perhaps I need to bend over his couch so he knows it’s me.” Brendon arched his back and wiggled his ass and Ryan was finally able to laugh at the reminder that his father’s first introduction to Brendon was seeing him butt-naked and hard with Ryan’s face between his ass cheeks.

Brendon disappeared into the bathroom with a laugh and Ryan felt a smile pull at his lips. As he listened to the boy shower, Ryan realized love was more than not wanting to live without someone. It was silent understanding and joint reassurance, sharing and trust. It made allowances for human weaknesses – and if Brendon’s weakness was caring about Jon, then how could Ryan deny him that and still claim to be in love?

* * *

Brendon stood on the street and looked up at his old apartment building. The miserable, gray brickwork shone silver in the rain and it seemed like a suitably dismal day to go visit his ex-boyfriend. Jon - the man who’d been born under a black cloud.

The dark sky hung low and the wind was cold – this area of the city seemed so dirty compared to the Upper East Side, the forgotten reality that was Manhattan. He’d forgotten how depressing it was after weeks of being treated like royalty by Ryan Ross.

He appreciated it, of course he did, but he didn’t think he necessarily deserved it – the beautiful suite at the Bellagio, the flowers, the goddamn private jet from Las Vegas… it was all a little unnerving and stood in front of the sad, rundown apartment he once shared with Jon, it all felt a little like a dream. He kept wondering when he was going to wake up.

Against all odds, he’d fallen in love with the one man he’d been telling himself for months not to fall for. Falling in love with Ryan was something like being on a slippery slope – he could only fight against it for so long; after that, it just became futile. Ryan was more than anyone gave him credit for and he was constantly proving himself to be a fair and understanding lover – or boyfriend, as they apparently decided on that morning, the word sent shockwaves of excitement into Brendon’s chest. Ryan could offer Brendon the world – financial security, a beautiful lifestyle, a family… What on earth could he offer Ryan in return? He wasn’t rich, he didn’t have a career or skills he could make a living off of and almost every single person in his life abandoned him. Brendon had nothing and no one and committing to Ryan with that knowledge terrified him.

It was a daunting and complicated task, learning to deal with Ryan’s fame and money and they’d both been so lucky news of their relationship hadn’t leaked to the press yet because when it did, that would surely be the make or break moment but he loved the guy and he loved how he felt when Ryan was around. He felt content; as if he finally found that perfect relationship he’d been looking for since he was a boy. Of course, it was far from perfect but it was pretty damn close.

Brendon could live without all the lavish gifts and fancy hotels – hell, they could be living together in a place like this and he’d still be happy – but he couldn’t go back to living the life of the man he once was. He guessed that’s what he could offer Ryan – happiness… Companionship and support – all the things he never had.

Before he left Ryan’s apartment that morning, Brendon briefly explained to him the situation – he had some information about the man who attacked Jon that he felt Jon should know. He assured Ryan it wasn’t a big deal, that it really was nothing to worry about or be jealous over and Ryan
hadn’t pried. Brendon was thankful for that – he didn’t want to get into the whole Marc Willis thing. He left with a promise he’d be back as soon as possible.

Brendon leaving Ryan’s place to see Jon truly meant nothing. He had no desire to fall for the guy again or gripe that he and Joe truly screwed him over by hooking up behind his back all those months ago – none of that mattered anymore. Brendon didn’t harbor any feelings of jealousy or bitterness towards either of them now – he was in love with someone who adored him, so why would he choose to hate on Jon’s happiness?

This was just something he needed to do. He left Ryan alone in his apartment when he could’ve chosen to lay in bed with him all morning, safe, dry and warm - talking, making love, rediscovering each other after their time apart. Brendon reflected on the wonderful bareback sex they shared since he arrived back in New York, how gentle and passionate Ryan had been with him, how good it felt to finally admit he was in love, to feel something other than shame and regret and doubt for the first time in years…

As he stood outside the apartment waiting for someone to either arrive or leave so he could slip in behind them, Brendon began to have second thoughts. He was nervous about seeing Jon again – what if the guy just slammed the door in his face? What if he didn’t want to listen to what he had to say? Brendon sighed – he needed to swallow his pride and do what was right. He needed to make Jon aware that Marc Willis might be out for revenge after their run-in in Las Vegas; he just needed to warn the guy to keep his wits about him because if he didn’t, the thought of what-if would drive Brendon insane. This was something he needed to do for himself too, simply for peace of mind.

Brendon didn’t even know if Jon was still in the city or not and even if he was, he and Joe might’ve moved out of their old apartment to somewhere better – or somewhere worse which was more likely the case.

If Jon wasn’t at the apartment, then Brendon would try his best to locate him. If he left Manhattan, that would be the end of his search. So long as he knew his ex was safe and out of any immediate danger of running into Marc Willis, Brendon could rest easy. At the back of his mind, that’s what Brendon was hoping for – to knock on the door of their old apartment and be told by a stranger that Jon already moved back to Chicago.

He imagined a bright future for him and Joe, free of drugs and the risks of hustling dangerous streets, but he wondered about the reality. He wondered if Jon was still clean, whether he was still selling himself to the perverts of New York and whether Joe was still around, whether Jon was happy – that’s all Brendon really wanted, to see his ex clean and healthy, in a happy, loving relationship with someone who understood him.

During his months away in Vegas and Tahoe, Brendon had taken a long, hard look at the things he’d done that caused his relationship with Jon to fail so spectacularly. It was mainly so he wouldn’t make the same mistakes with Ryan, because he’d always been so unfathomably jealous when it came to Jon. He said such cruel things, all in the vain hope they’d rile Jon up enough that the man would show him some compassion. Brendon understood the error of his ways now and he was not prepared to ruin his relationship with Ryan on the basis of unwarranted suspicion and gratuitous contempt.

Eventually, after twenty minutes of waiting outside in the rain, someone left the apartment building. He slipped inside and looked around the cold hallway. Nothing had changed much – there was still graffiti covering the mailboxes, the landlord hadn’t fixed the heating and Brendon could hear the bass of loud dubstep shake the walls around him. He almost chickened out, turned around and left the building - his stomach felt sick with nerves - but after all they’d been through together, he owed Jon this much.
When he reached the door of his old apartment, he listened carefully for any noise behind it. The walls were thin and the door had never been good at blocking out the noise of the landing, but all seemed quiet. He remembered the morning he returned home after spending an evening with Ryan to find Jon and Joe together on their bed, stoned and laughing at some silly in-joke they shared. He remembered having to watch the two of them fall for each other over the following weeks, being awake one night to hear Jon admit he wasn’t in love with him anymore…

Those memories didn’t really upset him anymore. The only thing Brendon was worried about was that Jon might not being doing so well for himself – that he’d got back into drugs or was still hustling or that Pete had gotten involved with his life again – Ryan let that dude suck his cock, the thought absolutely horrified him but it was something Ryan let happen at the height of his addiction, it was something Ryan had most likely forgotten about, so Brendon was going to try his best to let that incident slip as well. What if Jon was already dead – a victim of his abysmal upbringing at not even thirty years old?

Brendon knocked at the door and waited for an answer. A million scenarios were running through his head and Brendon was terrified of the truth that lay in wait for him. Much to Brendon’s surprise, a few moments later, it was Jon who opened the door. His dark eyes widened in surprise and he gaped at Brendon, fishing for the words that evaded him.

“Brendon?” he choked eventually, knuckles turning white as he gripped the doorframe. “Shit… what- what the hell are you doing here?”

“Hey.” Brendon attempted a smile, raising one finger in a halfhearted wave. Jon looked good – he looked great, the best Brendon had seen him looking in years. His eyes were brighter, his face a little fuller, he had a full beard and his hair had grown back a little. At least Jon’s appearance was comforting. “I was wondering if I could come in for a bit?”

Jon paused, looking back into the apartment momentarily. “Sure,” he nodded, stepping back. “Come on in.”

The room was dark and cold, the curtains were still drawn and the bed unmade. Brendon looked around for any signs of Joe’s presence – there was an ashtray on the bedside, overflowing with blunts and cigarette ends and the room had a distinctly smoky smell to it. Clothes littered the floor and there were empty beer cans scattered around the room – Jon made quick work of gathering them together and putting them in the trash, picking up clothes and dumping them on the bed.

“Sorry about the mess,” he mumbled. “Fuck man, I wasn’t expecting it to be you.” There was no sign of any hard drug use that Brendon noticed but also no sign of Joe. Jon was alone and he stood awkwardly in the middle of the room with his hands pulled up into the sleeves of his sweater.

“Who were you expecting?” Brendon asked.

Jon gave him a peculiar look. “Joe,” he answered, as if Brendon was stupid for even asking. “He got a job working the graveyard shift at a parking garage in Harlem.” It sounded absolutely ghastly, Brendon thought – but still better than whoring oneself out on a dirty street corner. “He should probably be home pretty soon, actually. He’s always super tired when he comes in too, so…” Jon trailed off and raised his eyebrows. Brendon understood that look. He didn’t particularly want to be around for Joe’s return anyway.

“Well, I’m not planning on sticking around for long, I just wanted to see how things were with you.”

Jon splayed his hands to the heavens, gesturing around the room and then dropped them heavily back down to his side. “Same shit, different day,” he sighed. “So, what brings you back here? I
thought you went back to Vegas…”

Brendon lost eye contact with the man. “I did but… yeah, things didn’t go so well for me out in Vegas. I got back to New York last night. I’ve been thinking about you, that’s all. I tried calling, but couldn’t get through to you - I don’t know if that was purposeful on your part or not. It’s good Joe got a job, a legit one, I mean. How about you, are you working?” He was nervous; his mouth was working at a million miles a minute. It was as if his brain couldn’t quite keep up with it.

Jon averted his eyes and sniffed. “Why are you here, Brendon? If you need a place to stay then… I don’t know, we might be able to help you out for a few days, but…” Jon rubbed at the back of his head. “It’s kinda awkward, don’t you think?”

“I don’t need a place to stay.” And if I did, coming here and shacking up with you and your new boyfriend probably wouldn’t be my first option.

“So why are you here?”

“I just wanted to see you, that’s all.” Jesus, pull yourself together, Brendon scolded himself. Tell him the goddamn truth, just get it over with.

Jon knotted his brows. “But why?”

Brendon was already itching to get back to Ryan’s plush pad on the Upper East Side – being in his old studio apartment with his old boyfriend was depressing and he wanted to get this visit over with as soon as possible – he just wasn’t quite sure how to word it. He took a breath and waited for Jon to look at him.

“When I was in Vegas, I was at a bar and I ran into Marc Willis and…”

“Who the fuck’s Marc Willis?” Jon spat. Brendon could see the guy was becoming irritated with him but he couldn’t believe Jon didn’t remember that name.

Brendon blinked at him in disbelief. “Marc Willis… the guy who attacked you, Jon – the guy who almost killed you, remember?”

“Oh. Yeah… What about him?”

“Well, I was at a bar and he just walks in and he recognized me. He called me a whore in front of a bar full of strangers and I was angry. I was angry at what he did to you, I was angry that he embarrassed me…”

Jon’s eyes rolled in their sockets. “So let me guess, you acted without thinking – like you always do – and got into some kind of brawl with him? And now you’re worried he’ll come after me as revenge?”

He’d always been such a perceptive guy. Despite his history with drugs and how cold he acted towards Brendon, there wasn’t much that escaped Jon Walker’s attention. “Kind of. I followed him outside. I just wanted to scare him, but I almost killed him, Jon. I had him on the ground, I had his tie around his neck and I was pulling and pulling and he was begging me to stop. I was so incensed with rage, I don’t even know what came over me but something inside me told me to let him go that night. So I did.” Brendon looked up to see Jon staring at him with hard eyes. “He knows we know each other. He came looking for me.”

“What? So you’re on the run from him? Jesus, Brendon, then what the hell are you doing back in New York?” Something suddenly seemed to click in Jon’s head. “Oh god. Please don’t get any more
involved with him than you already are, Bren. That dude’s dangerous, you need to just leave him alone.”

Brendon huffed. “That’s not the reason I’m back in New York. This was almost two weeks ago. I just wanted to warn you to keep your wits about you – I mean, it’ll probably amount to nothing but… just be careful.”

“I always am. I don’t go asking for trouble you know, Brendon – and I’m not working anymore anyway – not after what happened with Marc whatever his name is, so… I appreciate your concern, but I’m doing just fine. You don’t need to worry about me.”

Brendon nodded. He couldn’t tell whether or not Jon was telling the truth about not working these days – Jon evaded the question when he first asked - but he decided to take his word for it. If Jon said he wasn’t working anymore, why would Brendon have reason to doubt him?

“You’re a good man for letting him go, Brendon,” Jon told him.

“It was hard.”

“I know, but he’s not worth the jail time, trust me. That fucker will get what’s coming to him, I’m certain of it.” The room fell into silence, Jon’s foreboding words ringing loud in Brendon’s ears. The man eventually decided to lighten the mood. “So, what are you doing with yourself? Why are you back in New York? Surely not just so you could tell me that?”

He wondered how much information he should give Jon. He wasn’t going to give him Ryan’s name – not when Jon was still living in the same shitty apartment, struggling to make ends meet. “Well, no. Things kind of went to shit in Vegas – I finally came out to my parents and they didn’t take the news too well at all. I started drinking a lot, I was doing a lot of drugs-”

“Brendon Urie doing drugs, surely not!” Jon chimed. “After all the shit you used to give me for doing the same thing?” The man smiled and Brendon had forgotten how handsome he was when he smiled.

He felt himself blush – he was kind of a hypocrite. “Yeah, I wasn’t smoking heroin though.”

“True,” Jon laughed. “So, what were you taking? Coke? Speed?”

That wasn’t really the part of the conversation Brendon wanted to concentrate on. “I was doing a lot of coke, spending all night getting fucked up and then have to go home to my mom and dad’s. They eventually threw me out,” Brendon sighed. “I was staying in a motel for a bit and I was struggling.”

“So, even after sending them all that money to pay your dad’s medical bills, they still disowned you?”

It still felt weird having to admit it – he had a family who didn’t want anything to do with him, but that was less about him being gay and more about the fact he fucked his sister’s husband… Which was another thing he wasn’t going to tell Jon about. “Yeah. I don’t think I’ll be seeing them again.”

Jon seemed to soften, his brow furrowed in concern. “Shit, Bren. That sucks. I’m sorry. Hey, listen… Joe and I don’t have much but he’s been making money on the side - slinging weed, selling acid when he manages to get his hands on it. We could give you like, a couple hundred bucks if you need it. It’s not much, but it might help you get back on your feet.”

The offer almost made Brendon want to cry – after all that passed between them and despite the fact that Jon and Joe hardly had any money at all, Jon was still willing to help him out. Ryan’s generosity
had always made him feel so uneasy; Jon’s almost broke his heart.

“I don’t need money, Jon. I fucked up in Vegas pretty bad actually, but then, uh… an old client of mine contacted me. We got talking and I explained the whole situation. He was really sweet and understanding and said he’d help me out. We met up and we’ve been together ever since.”

Jon stared at him. “What does that mean?”

“We’re together,” Brendon swallowed. “He lives here in the city – he’s the reason I’m back. He likes me – he says he loves me and I’m pretty certain I love him too.”

“A client?” Jon repeated. “You’re telling me you’ve fallen for a client?”

“It’s not what you think. He’s different, he’s-”

“He’s still a pervert, Brendon. He still paid to fuck you. Why on earth would you choose to fall for a client?”

“I don’t know,” he bit a little defensively – he didn’t expect Jon of all people to understand his relationship with Ryan. “Why do we fall for anyone? Why did we fall for each other, why did you fall for Joe? Because there’s just something about him, something that makes you happy, right? It’s the same thing with this guy. It’s not something I planned; it’s just something that happened. He’s fair and understanding and he treats me well. He makes me feel like I’m not just a worthless piece of shit. I don’t expect you to understand, but… he makes me happy, Jon.”

Jon gave a heavy sigh and seemed to consider Brendon’s words for a second. “Well, I guess that’s all that really counts. Just be careful. Men who pay for sex, in my experience anyway, are not the most mentally stable of folks. I’d hate to hear a few months down the line that he hurt you in any way.”

They still cared about each other. He found it hard to explain to Ryan, but Brendon guessed he’d always love Jon – there wasn’t anything romantic or sexual between them now but Brendon felt connected to the guy in some way, as if the universe was going to constantly draw them together.

“It’s not like that. I trust him. I’m actually meeting his family this afternoon,” he admitted – he was still nervous about that and he was probably looking for reassurance from Jon that everything would be okay.

“Wow, so it’s serious? Good luck to you. Joe keeps suggesting we go back to Chicago to meet his parents and the thought terrifies me. They actually seem pretty cool, but I think about them finding out about my past, about the drugs and the hooking and I think about how much they’ll probably hate me as soon as they discover that side of me. It’s really scary.”

“It’s all in the past though, right? You’re said you’re not working. You’re still clean, aren’t you?”

Jon smiled slowly. “Yeah. It’s been three and a half months now, so there’s that. I mean, I still smoke weed but I gotta have one vice.”

“Weed’s organic, anyway. It’s a plant. Right?” They both shared a laugh, remembering how that was always Jon’s defense for smoking marijuana. No one ever died from smoking pot, he’d claim whenever Brendon would bitch at him for smoking too much – it wasn’t the smoking that bothered him, it was the fact he used to smoke with Joe. “Well done,” he smiled. “I’m really proud of you, Jon. You seem so much happier than before – and you look great. It was the first thing I noticed when you opened the door; you look healthy and happy and I’m really pleased for you.”
“Thanks,” Jon blushed. “I am happy. I’m sorry things didn’t go so well between us towards the end, I’m sorry about the whole Joe-thing when we were together but I was confused for a long time after I quit doing drugs and it took me a while to get back on my feet after that guy attacked me – I didn’t leave the house for weeks; I felt like killing myself but Joe helped me through it. He’s been so supportive, Brendon, he’s so understanding and chill.”

Brendon felt himself smile – a few months ago, hearing Jon talking like that about Joe would’ve killed him, now he was just so thankful that the man he once loved so much found a guy who was perfect for him. Jon deserved that happiness. “I’m glad you found your match.”

“And I’m glad you found yours – even if he is a trick.” Jon pulled a face but his expression was kind; it wasn’t one of bitterness of judgment and things truly did seem easy between them. Brendon suddenly felt a huge fondness for Jon, he wanted to give the guy a hug, to feel his arms around him and reconcile their differences but there was the sound of a key in the door and Jon tipped his head towards it. “This’ll be Joe now.”

Brendon felt awkward all of a sudden – his reunion with Jon had gone better than he planned but he didn’t know what Joe’s reaction to him would be.

Sure enough, Joe Trohman entered the room with his eyes closed, playing air drums and singing along to the chorus of *Pour Some Sugar On Me*. Brendon bit his lip to keep from laughing and glanced over at Jon to see him gazing over at the guy with nothing but adoration in his eyes – it warmed his heart to know Jon felt about Joe the same way he felt about Ryan. Love was love, despite the circumstances.

He finished with the classic line – *I’m hot, sticky sweet, from my head to my feet*, running his hand down his body in jest and thrusting his hips forward before he opened his eyes. Joe stopped dead in his tracks, his arms falling awkwardly to his sides when he saw Brendon stood there. He pulled the headphones quickly from his ears and the rest of the song rang loud and tinny into the room.

“Uh… hey, Brendon. Shit,” he mumbled, “wasn’t expecting to see you here. What’s up, dude?”

Joe had cut his hair – maybe a more professional style for his job tending a parking garage? He actually looked pretty handsome - he could see why Jon had fallen in love with him. Brendon wondered if their relationship was sexual yet or whether it was still that gray, in-between area of romance and friendship.

“I was actually just on my way out.” There was no need for him to hang around any longer – he said what he needed to say to Jon and he was reassured his ex-boyfriend was finally happy after so many years being far from it. “Never took you for a Def Leppard fan,” he teased.

“Are you kidding me? Def Leppard was one of my favorite bands growing up. *Pour Some Sugar On Me* is a rock classic.”

“Brendon got back to New York last night – he was just checking up on us,” Jon informed Joe.

Joe nodded. “Well, that’s awesome and thoughtful of you,” Joe replied, approaching Jon with a peck on the cheek. “Good morning, handsome.”

“How was work?” Jon smiled.

“Boring as fuck. I’m so tired – graveyard shift really knocks it out of you.”

Brendon watched their exchange and thought about Ryan, home alone in his multi-million dollar apartment overlooking Central Park. Jon and Joe seemed happy enough living their little life together
and Brendon could finally rest easy in the knowledge that Jon had found someone who was right for him – the two of them had never been right for each other; they both had such vastly different needs. Joe flopped down on the bed and pulled a half-smoked blunt from the ashtray and Jon couldn’t take his eyes off him – they evidently wanted to be alone after spending all night apart.

“I’ll leave you guys to it then,” he said, gaining Jon’s full attention once more. “Oh, and thanks for that performance, Joe – I enjoyed that.”

Joe laughed as he lit up the blunt. “Anytime, buddy. I’m here all night, belting out the eighties classics so you don’t have to.”

He wasted way too much time hating Joe Trohman. There was nothing to dislike about him – apart from the fact he stole his boyfriend – the guy was dorky, silly and perhaps that’s what Jon needed – someone who wasn’t so goddamn serious all the time.

“Congrats on the job too, by the way.”

“Thanks, man. Night shifts aren’t ideal but work is work is work, right? Gotta make that dollar. I got a dependent to support now.” He stretched out his leg to poke Jon in the back of the knee.

“Dependent!” Jon scoffed, trying to hide the smile on his face. “Shut up.”

Brendon was surprised at just how warm and fuzzy seeing the two men interact made him feel. Joe was definitely a good man for Jon and above all else, Brendon was happy to see Jon happy. There was no bitterness or jealousy and after a few more minutes of goodbyes, he was pleased to leave the apartment knowing he could close that chapter of his life. Jon got the happy ending he deserved and his own fairytale was just beginning.
Chapter 54

Chapter Notes

coffeeforclosure on Tumblr created this wonderful Filthy Lucre Soundtrack the other week, so why don't you go take a listen? :)

Brendon was nervous.

He never had to go through the rigmarole of meeting someone’s parents before. Dallon’s mom and dad were a lot older than most - probably well into their seventies by now and that’s if they were still alive. They hardly ever left their homestead in whatever tiny town in Utah Dallon grew up in and Brendon only met them briefly on Dallon and Lydia’s wedding day - introduced simply as Lydia’s brother, Mr. and Mrs. Urie’s youngest by a red-faced groom who tried his hardest to keep his parents away from Brendon for the entire day.

Not that Brendon cared. He disliked Dallon’s mom and dad as much as he detested the man himself at the time, simply for filling their son with such fear, raising him to feel shame instead of pride so that he grew up lopsided, unable to accept his true self. The whole celebration was a complete nightmare, forever etched into his memory as one of the most heartbreaking and frustrating days of his life. If only he’d known then that things were set to get a whole lot worse for him after he left Las Vegas.

Even during his six year relationship with Jon, meeting-the-parents had never been discussed. Jon’s mother’s suicide happened ten years before they even met and his abusive, alcoholic father was out of the picture as far as Brendon knew - at least, Jon never talked about him. Brendon rarely asked questions about Jon’s past and there’d been no need to travel to Chicago to meet his family so he never even had the chance to practice what to say to a partner’s parents to make them like him.

Now, he sat in the back of Ryan’s chauffeur-driven Mercedes on his way to meet possibly the wealthiest and most famous in-laws he could ever dream of. His stomach was unsettled, twisting with nerves as he tried to keep a calm exterior.

Ryan was also antsy, jiggling his feet and drumming his fingers as they sat in standstill Manhattan traffic - and Ryan was meant to be the supportive one, holding Brendon’s hand through the terrifying first meeting. As he sat there, Brendon remembered Ryan’s own anxieties about attending his father’s birthday. He made a big fuss to make sure the day was going to unfold exactly how he wanted it - no surprise guests and no one other than family - but he still seemed a little tense.

“You okay?” he asked quietly. Shane and William sat up front, most likely eavesdropping on each minute detail of their conversation. Neither of them made much of an effort to make Brendon feel particularly welcome and this visibly irritated Ryan, even though he has yet to say anything.

Ryan seemed to stiffen a little at the question. He swallowed before speaking and gave a slow nod of his head. “I’m fine. Don’t worry about me - it’s been a while since I saw my family, that’s all and before I went to rehab, I’d get so high just to attend a function like this without having a nervous breakdown. I guess I got to start living life out of my comfort zone sooner or later though, right?” He flashed Brendon a strained smile.
Brendon looked at him skeptically - there was nothing wrong with hiding from the world every now and then. He’d much rather be alone in Ryan’s beautiful apartment right now, just hanging out, watching a movie together, taking a bath to ease his aching muscles… “You seem nervous and that doesn’t fill me with much confidence.”

“I’m fine,” Ryan reassured him again, his smile spreading even wider - fear, not comfort behind it. Brendon decided not to pry. He could detect Ryan’s fake smile a mile away but he didn’t want to get too heavy, especially not before Ryan’s post-rehab reunion with his family.

Brendon watched the world pass by through the window - the tourists in the middle of the sidewalk snapping pictures of the city around them, the angry cab drivers honking and swearing at the slow moving traffic. The rainclouds cleared since his visit with Jon, the sun was out and the sky was blue, but Manhattan always seemed so oppressive to him - too busy, too loud, swimming with bad memories. He already missed the peace and tranquility of Lake Tahoe.

“Are you nervous?” Ryan turned to him and asked as they sat in traffic on 5th Avenue. Ryan’s long fingers linked through his across the backseat and his thumb rubbed across Brendon’s knuckles. He took a breath and looked over at the man next to him. “Why? Should I be?”

Ryan smiled slowly, his thumb still working gentle circles on Brendon’s skin. “Well, you’re meeting my family for the first time, baby. That’s usually a pretty big deal, isn’t it?”

In the rearview mirror, Brendon caught Shane’s eye and looked away sharply. Shane, in particular, didn’t approve of their relationship at all - not that Brendon blamed him - but Shane made it perfectly clear he was under strict orders to keep his mouth closed. Those cold, hard eyes looked back at him in the reflection of the rearview and he didn’t have to say a word. They spoke for him – pure mistrust and bubbling contempt.

“I guess I am a little nervous,” he admitted. He felt it was too soon to meet George Ross and his wife. He wasn’t ready to take such a big step, but he was doing it for Ryan - because Ryan really wanted him there and he wanted to show the man he was serious about their relationship and not just with him for the incredible lifestyle he provided.

“Why?”

Brendon furrowed his brow. Wasn’t it obvious? “Uh, because I have no idea what to say to them? I mean, we probably don’t have much in common. Plus your dad saw me totally naked in Tahoe the other day and that’s kind of an awkward first impression, don’t you think?” Brendon laughed to try and relieve some of the stress he was feeling, but it came out sounding panicked and breathless.

Ryan pouted and reached out to place a reassuring hand at the back of Brendon’s neck. His fingertips traced idly over his skin and into his hairline. “You have absolutely no reason to be scared of George Ross, let me assure you. He’s probably just as nervous to meet you…”

Unlikely, Brendon thought to himself. He flashed Ryan another skeptical look. Ryan dropped his voice and locked their eyes. “I’m here for you, okay? Just be yourself. They’ll like you, I promise.”

Brendon ignored Ryan’s reassurances. “I feel stupid in this jacket too. It’s made to fit your skinny-ass frame, not mine.” He rolled his shoulders in the too-tight suit jacket he borrowed from Ryan and tried to loosen his tie.

After he returned to Ryan’s apartment following his visit with Jon and saw him impeccably dressed in what was quite obviously a designer, tailor-made suit, Brendon started to feel anxious that he
wasn’t going to look smart enough, that he didn’t have the right outfit to make a good first impression, that the Ross family would see straight through his cheap, old clothes and judge him for it.

Ryan claimed it really didn’t matter and he was worrying about nothing, but Brendon had a hard time believing that. He was about to be introduced to a bunch of billionaires - surely they’d know he wasn’t one of them if he turned up in the tattered shirt and tie he used to wear so he wouldn’t get thrown out of expensive hotels and restaurants when he was trying to pick up rich tricks.

He ended up borrowing a jacket from Ryan - it was too small in the shoulders and too long in the arms. He felt like an idiot. His self-confidence was quickly depleting and his nerves were starting to crack under the pressure.

“You can take the jacket off. You don’t have to wear it.” Ryan leaned across the seat and pressed his mouth close to Brendon’s ear. “In fact, you look mighty fine without it,” he grinned, squeezing Brendon’s bicep through the material. Ryan shifted and kissed at his neck, sucking the skin just below Brendon’s jaw until he felt the need to pull away. Shane was still glaring daggers at him in the rearview mirror, huffing and puffing to make his distaste of the situation clear.

“Stop,” he hissed. Ryan followed Brendon’s gaze to see his driver rolling his eyes at them, his jaw tense and his mouth drawn together in a pout.

Ryan’s expression changed and he reacted quickly, digging his heel into the back of Shane’s seat, leaving dirty footprints on the leather. “Keep your eyes on the fucking road, man,” he spat. Brendon saw Shane’s grip tighten around the steering wheel. “I might tell my dad that I can’t deal with having such a homophobe for a driver anymore and ask him to have you work for Jacob permanently, because this really upsets you, doesn’t it? Having to deal with me and Brendon as a couple.”

“Leave it,” Brendon warned.

“Oh, don’t even get me started, bro,” Shane sighed at the same time.

“Don’t get you started on what exactly - that you can’t accept the fact I’m clean, sober and happy for the first time in my life because you’re a homophobe?”

“Don’t piss me off, Ryan. I’m not in the fucking mood.”

Brendon quickly averted his eyes from the scene in front of him and flushed. He didn’t want another confrontation with Shane - he seemed to be the only one who found very little difficulty in speaking his mind and calling Ryan out about their new relationship. Brendon knew Ryan was just trying to stand up for the two of them and protect his honor, but it was a war that didn’t really need to be fought - especially when Brendon highly suspected that Shane’s aversion to him was, in fact, not homophobia at all, but based on his gut feeling that Brendon was once a hustler.

“Do we make you uncomfortable, Shane? You know, homophobia is often a sign of repressed sexual urges, no one’s going to judge you if you act on them. In fact, it might help you chill the fuck out a little…” A self-satisfied smirk pulled at Ryan’s lips. He was enjoying this - winding Shane up and waiting for him to snap. He continued to kick at the back of Shane’s seat until the driver turned around in irritation, making a haphazard grab for Ryan’s ankles. It was almost like watching a kid provoke a weary father. Ryan snatched his feet up and tucked them underneath him with a gleeful smile on his face that implied he got the reaction he desired.

Shane smacked the palm of his hand against the steering wheel. “Goddamn it, Ryan - if you really want to start this conversation with me I am more than willing to tell you what I think of
your boy and it ain’t got nothing to do with me being homophobic either. Not anymore. I’ve gotten over the fact you wanna bang dude’s and shit but you’re out of your mind if you think—"

“Shane, please don’t start on this again, I heard it enough.” William pinched the bridge of his nose like a frustrated mother and sighed. “We got a long journey ahead of us, I don’t want to hear you two bickering at each other again.”

This seemed to startle Ryan a little. He sat up in his seat and knotted his brows. “What do you mean we got a long journey? Where are we going?”

A small silence follow before William cleared his throat. “Your parents’ house in the Hamptons?” he said, avoiding Ryan’s gaze. His voice raised slightly at the end of his answer. He sounded cautious, braced for Ryan to make another scene. Sure enough, Ryan didn’t disappoint.

“What. The. Fuck? Why are we going up there? It’s a two hour drive - their apartment is literally a couple of blocks away. Why the fuck would he drag me up to the Hamptons? He knows I hate it. Jesus. I wouldn’t have bothered coming back to Manhattan if I’d known. Brendon and I could’ve rented a house for the weekend and been away from it all and I wouldn’t have to deal with this bullshit city.” Ryan hit the window with the palm of his hand.

Brendon guessed that even after weeks in rehab learning to become a better person and over two months of sobriety, Ryan was still a man who was used to getting what he wanted. Just because he’d fallen in love with the guy, didn’t mean he failed to notice his flaws. Ryan was human, but he was also insanely privileged and - if Brendon was being totally honest – sometimes, a bit of a brat.

“There was just a slight change of plan. It’s no big deal, is it?”

Ryan covered his face with his hands. “Why does no one tell me these things?” he wailed.

“Well, because-"

Shane cut William off quickly. “Because your dad knew you’d use it as an excuse not to show up today if you knew you’d have to sit in the back of a car for two hours and make the tiresome voyage to his mansion in the fucking Hamptons. Because he’s used to you giving absolutely any excuse not to see him.”

Ryan piped down, suitably chastised and sank into his seat like a miserable teenager. Up in Tahoe, Ryan shone. He was generous, kind and easy-going - he was the best possible version of himself. A few days back in New York and Brendon could already see the city weighing down on him, crushing his spirit. He reached his hand across the space between them and entwined their fingers. They had to spend two hours in this car with Shane and William? Great. Brendon should’ve known it wasn’t going to be as simple as driving a couple blocks to the Ross family townhouse.

Ryan leaned up against him, resting his head on Brendon’s shoulder with a sigh. That one small display of affection made Brendon’s heart pound. He suddenly felt very aware of his limbs and the weight of Ryan’s body against his and the two pairs of judgmental eyes looking back at him in the rearview mirror. He wished they had some privacy. What the hell was the point of a chauffeur-driven car if they couldn’t kick back and relax without being watched?

“I still don’t understand why he wants to have this thing up there.”

“You asked your dad to reschedule. You said you wouldn’t come unless it was a private affair - your dad guessed you wanted to keep your thing with Brendon on the down low, so he decided the house in the Hamptons was the best bet - no paparazzi, no journalists, no surprise guests… He’s right,
Ryan; there’s way more of a chance of the two of you being spotted in Manhattan, so actually, this whole thing is all for your benefit.” William sniffed. “Your dad really wants to see you. He’s made a huge effort to make sure you’re happy and it’s his *birthday*, he’s sixty… perhaps cut the guy some slack? He’s trying his best.”

Ryan sulked but kept his mouth closed, shifting his body so his head lay in Brendon’s lap. Brendon tried to ignore Shane’s glare and carded his fingers through Ryan’s hair instead. *My handsome, rich boyfriend*, Brendon thought with a sigh. *How on earth did he catch such a break?* He had nothing but bad luck for years and now he was in the backseat of a chauffeur-driven Mercedes with Ryan Ross’s face pressed against his crotch, on his way to a mansion in the Hamptons. There were worse ways he could be spending his afternoon.

He smoothed Ryan’s hair behind his ears and the man smiled up at him - a dazzling, white smile that made his heart skip a beat. Brendon suddenly couldn’t help himself, he leaned down to taste Ryan’s lips on his, cupping his jaw as they deepened their kiss. Brendon lost himself to the moment, his heart rate quickening as Ryan pulled him in, his dick getting hard as the man pressed against him. Ryan turned him on like no other.

The sound of Shane clearing his throat was what pulled them apart. One of the reasons he decided to kiss Ryan so passionately was to make the driver uncomfortable, so Brendon was happy when it worked. He held Shane’s disapproving gaze in the mirror and bit back a smug look that said: *don’t like me? Too bad. What the hell are you going to do about it, asshole?*  

Oh, if looks could kill…

Ryan pushed himself up from Brendon’s lap, his mouth still wet from their kiss and crossed his arms high over his chest. “So, tell me Shane, why do you watch us and roll your eyes when we’re together if you’re *not* homophobic? Sorry, but I’m not going to sit here and treat Brendon like an acquaintance so that you remain in your comfortable little bubble.”

Shane gave a heavy sigh. “Well, I’m sorry I’m the *only* one who’s brave enough to tell you this, but you’ve fallen for a fucking gold digger-“  

William piped up beside him nervously. “Shane, please. Don’t…”

“We’re all thinking it, I’m just saying it. And you two *didn’t* meet in NA or AA or whatever bullshit story you think you’re selling to everyone - I’m not stupid - and I don’t know if you’re paying him to hang around, Ryan or whether you lost some of your brain cells when you went to rehab and can’t see that he’s clearly no good for you, but you’re a sucker either way. Don’t expect me to have any sympathy for you when shit hits the fan. Which it no doubt will,” the man finished, glaring back at Brendon in the mirror. The car fell quiet and Brendon chewed at the inside of his lip - at least Shane hadn’t explicitly called him a hooker, even though he kind of implied it.

“Wow. Rude,” Brendon muttered. He tried not to let Shane’s words affect him, he tried to rise above the whole thing - he and Ryan knew the truth and so long as Ryan believed that Brendon loved him, nothing else mattered - but the gold digger comment hurt. He didn’t care about Ryan’s money. In fact, it’d be a hell of a lot easier if Ryan Ross wasn’t rich but Brendon couldn’t help who he fell in love with - he knew that from previous experiences.

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Ryan took a deep breath. “Didn’t your mother ever tell you if you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all? My relationship with Brendon is actually none of your business, asshole. All I ask is that you be civil and you can’t even do that.”

Brendon was getting a headache. That morning with Jon lifted a weight from his shoulders he’d been
carrying around for too long, he felt good for the first time in months. He cut his ties with Dallon, left Las Vegas for the last time and last night he’d finally been able to tell Ryan he loved him - but things were far from rosy. They should’ve stayed in Tahoe. This was all happening too quickly.

Ryan sat up, leaning forward to whisper in Shane’s ear. “Also, if you dare talk about him like that ever again or spread those horrible rumors you’re so set on, I will make sure you never work for any of my family members ever again. Do you understand?”

Shane rolled his eyes and sighed. William sat next to him in the passenger seat, blushing. “Yes. I’m sorry for speaking out of turn. Sir,” he spat. Brendon wasn’t the only one who caught that final little dig. Ryan chose to ignore it.

“Apologetize to Brendon, not me.”

“T’m sorry, Brendon,” Shane told him, holding his gaze in the rearview mirror again. “If you’re a straight-up, honest guy you’ll understand why I’m a little wary of strangers. Ryan’s my brother, man. I care about what happens to him and don’t want to see him f*cked around. I’m sure you’re a good guy and all, it’s just…” He trailed off, sinking down a little in the driver’s seat. “I’ve been stressed out lately - in my personal life, nothing to do with work,” he quickly added, noticing Ryan’s glare from the back seat. Brendon had a feeling Shane was biting his tongue. “I’m sorry for taking it out on you. You don’t deserve it and I was out of line.” The whole apology sounded a little forced, a little contrived but Brendon decided to accept it, just to keep the peace.

“No worries, man. You’re looking out for Ryan, I understand that,” he answered flatly. He was going to run into this same situation again and again as long as he was with Ryan - strangers judging his intentions and trying to convince Ryan he was no good for him.

“And I’m totally not homophobic. I got a gay cousin and he’s a real funny guy. He used to beat me up when we were kids - and I’m totally okay with admitting he could probably do the same now. Plus, I’m totally down with lesbians, so how can I be homophobic?” Shane laughed but no one else joined in. Brendon was actually a little embarrassed for him - Shane’s claim he wasn’t a homophobe reminded him of the white guy who told racist jokes and thought the fact they had a black best friend excused them from being offensive. Collectively and silently, they all judged Shane for spouting such ignorance - calling the man out on his bullshit again seemed futile.

Eventually they got out of the city and hit the freeway. Ryan leaned against him again, his arm slung low around Brendon’s hips and he relished in the comfort it brought him - the intimacy that had always been missing from his relationship with Jon, mutual support and affection. Nothing overtly sexual, just comfortable familiarity. After fifteen minutes listening to the steady hum of the road, Ryan fell asleep in his lap and Brendon feigned his own slumber until he eventually follow suit.

When he awoke, they were turning down a gravel driveway and Ryan was fidgeting in his seat next to him. He looked out the windshield as a huge white mansion settled on perfectly manicured grounds came into view. It looked like something out of movie - and Ryan was complaining about coming up here? Brendon suddenly felt more nervous than he ever had in his entire life.

He was mere minutes away from his first official meeting with Ryan’s family at their estate and he was terrified they’d take one look at him and just know he was no good for their son - just like Shane and William already had, just like every other person will when they find out Brendon didn’t come from money.

“So… This is where I grew up,” said Ryan, sounding uneasy as they drove up the driveway and eventually came to a stop in front of grand entrance way, all white stone marble and perfectly trimmed hedges either side of the front door.
“Wow. Ryan, it’s beautiful.”

Ryan simply shrugged. “It’s too big.”

Indeed it was. The mansion stretched out in front of them, sitting proud on the lush green lawn. There was not a blade of grass or leaf out of place and behind the house, just visible from the car, the waters of blue bay rippled in the wind.

He was expected to walk into a family situation - into Ryan’s childhood home - and charm the pants off of George Ross and his wife? How did Ryan expect him to do that when he couldn’t even keep the love and support of his own family? Thinking about what happened in Vegas made Brendon tearful but he needed to suck it up and be the supportive new boyfriend Ryan needed. After all, if he could get in George Ross’s good books, then he was pretty much good to go. If he could win George’s support then surely everything else would fall into place.

They climbed out from the car and Brendon gazed at his surroundings. He felt like he was dreaming or like the moment was slightly too much for him. He wasn’t equipped to deal with this situation, he wasn’t ready.

At least they were away from the city. It felt good to have fresh air in his lungs once more and nothing but the quiet of nature ringing in his ears. Brendon stood awkwardly by the side of the car, trying to rationalize everything that was currently happening to him.

“You okay?” Ryan asked, looking over the top of the car at him and slipping his sunglasses on to cover his eyes.

“I’m so nervous,” Brendon blurted out, shaking his head.

Ryan nodded and paused, humming in agreement. He didn’t try to invalidate Brendon’s feelings, he didn’t try and tell him he was worrying over nothing; instead he walked to the front of the car and held out his hand as an invitation. “I’m here for you,” he said as their fingers linked. “I’m nervous too, but we got this. Okay?”

Brendon nodded silently, his mouth dry, unable to talk. He fell into step beside Ryan, his heart pounding so hard inside of his chest he thought he was going to puke. Ryan obviously felt he needed to offer a little more reassurance. They stopped halfway across the driveway and Ryan turned to him, removing his sunglasses and propping them on top of his head.

“I love you more than anything else, alright? I’m not going to let them talk down to you. I’m not going to let anyone do that,” he said, rubbing Brendon’s shoulders. “It’s going to be fine. I’ll look after you and I won’t leave your side and if it all gets too much, we can leave. Okay?”

Brendon looked down at his feet. “It’s just all a little daunting, that’s all.”

“I know it is, but we’re going to have to do this sooner or later.” The man’s hands took a hold of his elbows and pulled him in, their bodies close as Ryan looked at him. “Brendon, I spent most of my life getting high to avoid situations exactly like this - being around my dad and Pamela and my brother and sister was always unbearable for me - but now that I’m sober, I realize I have to face up to all the things that scare me. Otherwise, it’s going to kill me. I have to push myself to be a better person and to do things I don’t want to do and I have to do it without drugs… and to be honest, the only reason I’m here is because you’re here with me. I couldn’t do this without you, baby. So, please… do this for me. It’s all I ask of you.”

Brendon bit his lip and held Ryan’s eye. He was still nervous - no, terrified - but Ryan had been
there for him when he needed him most. Ryan selflessly allowed him to go talk with both Dallon and Jon because he realized it was something Brendon needed to do for the sake of his sanity, so he could close that chapter of his life and start all over again. Ryan trusted him and he truly cared for him, so Brendon nodded and flashed a smile, as he linked their fingers.

“I can’t believe I’m meeting your parents.”

“I can,” Ryan replied with a smile, leaning closer to kiss him. Brendon closed his eyes as their lips touched, lingering against each other for a long moment. He pulled away and Ryan looked at him the same way he’d seen Jon look at Joe that morning. “You’re the best thing that’s ever happened to me, Brendon. I still get butterflies when I look at you.”

Brendon blushed and tried to hide his grin - he was a sucker for all that cheesy romance. It was something he’d never experienced before. “You can be a real sweetheart on occasions, Ryan. It’s a shame you only show this side of you to me.”

Ryan shoved him away with a laugh. “One step at a time now, honey,” he grinned and hand in hand, they walked towards the house. Brendon’s heart rate felt a little more even. Ryan had his back. It was going to be fine.

On the mantelpiece in the Ross family sitting room were dozens of silver-framed photographs of Ryan and his siblings growing up - cute baby pictures and awkward family portraits, snapshots of Christmases and summer vacations past. George was notably absent in all of them.

Brendon scanned them with a smile on his face. “You were a cute kid,” he said as he felt Ryan approach from behind and place his hands on his hips. He elbowed Ryan playfully in the ribs. “What happened, huh?”

His first impression of the Ross family was that they actually seemed pretty normal - well, as normal as one of the richest families in the world could be. Sure, they were wealthy and they owned an array of beautiful homes across the country but they argued and bickered just like anyone else.

George, it seemed, was trying hard to keep up appearances. He was overjoyed to see his youngest son again and on their arrival, he wrapped Ryan into a hug so tight, it almost lifted him off his feet. “It’s so good to see you again. You look so much better,” Brendon heard him whisper in his son’s ear. “I’m so proud of you, buddy. We missed having you around.”

Brendon did both men the favor of pretending he didn’t hear their exchange - it seemed too private for his ears, as if Ryan and George should’ve been given some time alone to catch up. It also hurt. It hurt to know his own father would never embrace him like Ryan’s had, that no matter what he did in life, his father would never be proud of him or tell him he loved him. It was still difficult to accept they just disowned him, seemingly with no remorse - what kind of parents did that?

George Ross turned his attentions to Brendon, gripping his hand firmly with both of his and looking sincerely into his eyes. “Brendon, it’s so wonderful to meet you again. How are you doing, my man?”

“Pretty good, thanks,” he bumbled, shaking George’s hand. He was a little starstruck. The man was Ryan’s height but with broader shoulders and a warm smile. He talked and moved confidently, the ease with which he welcomed Brendon into his house ironed out a few of those initial jitters. He figured some men were just destined for success. George Ross was one of them.

“How was your time in Vegas?” he asked. The question caught Brendon off-guard. He didn’t know
exactly how much Ryan told his father - maybe George knew all about his affair with his brother-in-law and the fact his entire family thought him better off dead. “Ryan tells me your family lives out there. What do they do for work?”

He shot a nervous glance in Ryan’s direction. Help me out here, he pleaded silently. I am not up for talking about my mom and dad right now, this is making me uncomfortable. “Uh, yeah… they uh-”

“Where’s mom?” Ryan interrupted as he slid out of his jacket, saving Brendon from answering any awkward questions about his homophobic family. Brendon was thankful for the distraction.

“Upstairs, still getting ready. Pamela!” George shouted up the staircase. “We got visitors. Get down here already!” His voice travelled, echoing around the marble hallway. He turned back to Brendon and Ryan and rolled his eyes. “Women, huh? I don’t understand why they take so damned long to get ready. She’s been up there for hours… What do they even do up there?” George stood at the bottom of the staircase and shook his head with a sigh. Yes, a very normal family indeed.

After a couple of birthday well-wishes and minute or two of small talk, Brendon and Ryan followed George into the sitting room. There was a plate of canapés on the glass coffee table and a bottle of sparkling fruit cider on ice. “Why don’t you two make yourself at home? Are you hungry, thirsty? Help yourself to food and drink - it’s alcohol free, I triple checked,” the man chuckled. A small silence followed and George floundered in the middle of the sitting room, trying to think of something else to say.

“Jacob’s on his way. Did you know? He’s flying off to Malawi tomorrow to help build a hospice for AIDS patients. Isn’t that wonderful? It’s a great opportunity for him - and a fantastic cause, I’m sure you boys agree. Such a terrible disease,” he mumbled, looking out the window with a red face as if he just realized what he implied.

“Oh, thank God,” Ryan sighed. “I was beginning to worry about the state of healthcare in Malawi, but Jake’s got it covered now. That’s good. I sure hope People magazine are flying out there with him, writing a big article about it and taking lots of photographs, otherwise nobody will know what a wonderful, selfless guy he is.”

George laughed as if there was some truth in Ryan’s words and poured three champagne flutes of sparkling cider. “Now, now - reign in that animosity for the afternoon, will you? I don’t want any arguments today.”

“The only reason Jacob does anything is so he can tell everyone about it later and boast about it at dinner parties. He’s-”

“I wish you two would just get on,” George interrupted. “There’s so much resentment between you and Jake and I don’t understand why. I’d like it if you’d just pretend to enjoy each other’s company - just for today. For me. It’s my birthday.”

“Alright, dad! I get it,” Ryan bit, his cheeks flushing. “I’ll try my best.”

George Ross gave a bright smile as he handed them their sparkling cider - Ryan’s promise was obviously enough for him. He straightened up and held up his glass. “This calls for a toast,” he said, moving on from the conversation quickly. Brendon wished it was real booze - a nice glass of champagne would settle his nerves a lot more than an alcohol-free substitute. “To family!” George clinked their glasses together and Brendon and Ryan both repeated the sentiment. “And to my son who makes me prouder each day. I’m happy to have you here, Ryan - and you too, Brendon. Welcome to our home.”
Brendon took a large gulp of his drink and looked around. The room was spacious and white, decorated with expensive pieces antique furniture and priceless works of art. The large window at the far end of the room looked out onto a sun terrace and swimming pool - beyond that, a jetty led to the blue waters of Mecox Bay. The house was meticulously clean and tidy and it didn’t feel particularly homey but the view was something else. It was everything he and Dallon fantasized about when he was a kid, it was the place he wished he could’ve escaped to with Jon when they were still together.

“It’s truly a beautiful home you have here, Mr. Ross - and such an incredible location too.”

Ryan’s father gave him a jovial slap on the back. “Please, call me George - none of this Mr. Ross nonsense. You boys make yourself comfortable - I’ll go check on Pamela.” George made a quick exit and Brendon and Ryan were left alone in the sitting room.

Brendon imagined the life he and Ryan could have up here, living in the Hamptons on the shores of a beautiful bay - a simple life, away from the city. Tahoe was beautiful, but this place was certainly a rival. When he met Ryan a couple months ago, he never dreamed he’d become privy to something like this - multi-million dollar houses and guzzling sparkling cider with George Ross.

A female voice chimed from the doorway. “Ryan, sweetie, how wonderful to see you again. Oh my, you look fabulous, dear. Let me look at you.” It was Pamela Ross, Ryan’s stepmother, a tiny lady who was dressed like she was going to a wedding in a smart two-piece suit that hugged her svelte figure. Ryan stood to greet her, wrapping her in a tight hug.

“Hey, mom. It’s good to see you again too,” Ryan huffed as Pamela squeezed him.

“I can’t feel your ribs when I hug you anymore,” she laughed, taking a step back to look at him. “Wow. Your father and I are so proud of you, we’re so happy you finally did the right thing and… Oh dear me.” Her voice wavered, cracking under the emotion of seeing Ryan healthy and sober for the first time in years. “Never mind,” she sniffed, blinking back tears. “We’re just so glad to have you here today.”

Brendon watched the scene unfold with a smile. He cursed his own parents for being so hateful, so blindly homophobic that they couldn’t accept him - even before news of his affair with Dallon broke. Ryan complained about his family just as much as the next person, he had his own personal issues with each of them but they loved him and they supported him; Brendon could only dream of a similar relationship.

“And you must be Brendon? I heard a lot about you… I’m Pamela, Ryan’s stepmother.” Brendon held out his hand in greeting. “Oh, sweetie, don’t be silly! Come here, give me a hug,” she laughed, batting his hand away and winding him into an embrace. Strangers made him feel more welcome in their house than his own parents. Even his mother couldn’t hug him when she found out he was gay - she couldn’t even stand to be in the same house as him.

Pamela talked to the both of them for a while, catching up with Ryan about his time in rehab and filling him in on all the family news. Brendon was happy enough to sit and listen, watching the family dynamic play out in front of him. Pamela was a sweet lady, she had kind eyes and a warm smile and very strong instinct to simply mother. She asked them each numerous times if they needed anything, if they were comfortable and if the room was the right temperature for them. Brendon had no complaints – he enjoyed watching Ryan interact with his family, the guy even managed to crack a few genuine smiles.

Brendon knew that deep down Ryan needed this for a long time. This time with his family reminded him that he had people around him who cared for him, that the entire world wasn’t against him and
he wasn’t alone. Ryan had a family he could depend on and Brendon wasn’t envious - he was happy to be a part of it.

When the doorbell rang about twenty minutes later, Pamela excused herself to go answer it. A loud voice could be heard coming from the hallway, complaining about traffic and Long Island drivers. “My brother’s here,” Ryan told him with a bored roll of his eyes. “He’s a pretentious prick, thinks he’s so much better than everyone else…”

Brendon could hear the hostility in Ryan’s voice and he didn’t want to fuel it. “Your dad and Pamela are really nice,” he pointed out, pushing his fingers into the back of Ryan’s hair. “And you’re looking extra handsome today. I’m honored to be meeting your family.”

Brendon loved making Ryan Ross blush, watching that bashful smile spread across his face. “You feel a little less nervous now?” he asked.

“A lot less, but… uh, can I ask? What have you told them I do for a living?”

“Just a little bit of modeling, that’s all” Ryan shrugged as if the lie was no big deal. Yeah, That’s what he thought. Christ, he didn’t know anything about the modeling industry. He was going to have to lie his ass off. “You can definitely get away with claiming you’re a model. What? You think my parents are going to question it? You’re goddamn gorgeous.”

Now it was Brendon’s turn to blush. “I’m too short to be a model,” he mumbled. Behind them, in the hallway, he could hear Ryan’s brother talking loud enough that they could hear every word. Pamela was trying to hush him and George was speaking in muffled tones Brendon couldn’t quite make out.

“I just can’t believe he brought some random dude to the sixtieth birthday he asked you to cancel… He’s always got to be the center of attention, ever since he was a kid and it’s getting ridiculous. Everyone’s always bending over backwards to make sure Ryan’s happy - screw everyone else, so long as Ryan shows up and manages not to throw a tantrum, it’s all good.”

Brendon heard it and he knew Ryan did too. The man squared his jaw and stared down at his feet.

“Jake, be nice - and keep your voice down. Jesus, can’t the two of you just get along?” George asked, his voice a little quieter, but still audible as they sat in silence.

“So, what? He’s gay now? He couldn’t just get clean and lay low for a while? He’s got to find some other way to stay relevant? That is so typical of him, it’s almost laughable. I don’t even know why I’m surprised, to be honest.”

“Oh Jacob, hush. Don’t talk about your brother like that. He’s doing really well right now; he’s clean and sober and he looks really healthy - you need to show him your support.”

“Oh wow, big deal. I never take drugs and it’s been eight years since my last drink. I eat healthy and stay in shape - no one gives me a big pat on the back for that.”

“Oh wow, big deal. I never take drugs and it’s been eight years since my last drink. I eat healthy and stay in shape - no one gives me a big pat on the back for that.”

“Yes, but everyone does when you go off to Africa, pose with a hammer and work a couple of hours out in the sun and then spend the next two weeks relaxing at a 5-star resort.” Jacob fell quiet after that. “Cut the guy some goddamn slack. Get in there and say hello - and tell him he looks better than he did a couple months ago.”

Brendon raised his eyebrows in quiet surprise. He thought Ryan was exaggerating when he claimed there’d always been tension between him and his older brother. From what he could gather, both of the Ross brothers were jealous of each other - Ryan was jealous of Jacob because he thought he could never live up to him in his father’s eyes, because Jacob was the golden child, flying off to
Africa and rebuilding hospitals, the clean-living, reliable son. Jacob was equally jealous of Ryan because Ryan was the one their father spent his entire time worrying about - he got all the attention for all the wrong reasons and Jacob was envious that no matter what good deed he did, Ryan was always there to trump him with his bad behavior.

Jacob Ross appeared in the doorway of the sitting room with a wide smile on his face and his arms outstretched. “Brother!” he enthused, striding towards the couch and leaning down to slap Ryan’s back. “You look better than you did a couple months ago. How are you? We missed you,” Jacob added, glancing Brendon’s way.

“Yeah? Your conversation with dad out there would lead me to believe otherwise.”

Jacob’s smile remained on his face, unfaltering as he ignored Ryan’s remark. “I missed you as much as you missed me, man.” He turned to Brendon and nodded at him. “So, you’re here with him?” he asked bluntly, tipping his head in Ryan’s direction.

“Uh, yeah, I am. My name’s Brendon. Pleased to meet you.” It didn’t come out sounding at all as cool or confident as he first hoped.

Jacob straight-up ignored him. “I didn’t know you were gay,” he said, giving his brother a side-eyed glance.

Ryan huffed, folding his arms across his chest. He looked like he really didn’t want to explain his sexuality to his older brother right now. “I don't think I am,” he shrugged. “There is such a thing as bisexuality. You should read up on it one day and educate yourself.”

“Bisexuality is just something made up by greedy people who can’t make up their minds if they like pussy or dick,” Jacob informed them, flopping down on the couch and stuffing a canapé into his mouth. “It’s very fitting for someone like you.”

Brendon braced himself for the fallout, for Ryan to explode or have a meltdown or march over to his brother and make a scene, but he remained quiet beside him. “That’s a very 1990s attitude you have there, Jacob. Perhaps shut the fuck up about stuff you don’t know shit about?”

Things were going okay until Jacob showed up. Now the atmosphere in the room was tense. Ryan and his brother carried on their bickering as if Brendon wasn’t even there. He guessed he didn’t miss this part of family life - disagreeable siblings. When George and Pamela returned to the room, the petty jibes subsided and all eyes suddenly turned to Brendon. His heart was thumping.

Jacob, in particular, made him nervous. He was way too entitled and overconfident. Brendon met rich folk like him before, those who thought they could talk down to him and make a joke out of degrading him. He’d grown used to it with tricks, but he was here at the Ross house as a guest - as Ryan’s boyfriend.

“So, where you from kid?”

Brendon didn’t want to answer to such a demeaning form of address but he sat a little straighter and swallowed his pride. “Well, I was brought up in Las Vegas, but when-”


“There’s lots of money in Vegas, son. Don’t be so hasty to judge it,” George Ross told him through a mouthful of canapés. *This was, by far, the most bizarre interaction he’d ever had in his life…*

“Dude, Vegas *sucks.* I mean, it’s cool if your main objective in life is to get totally fucked up and do
things you regret - Ryan - but seriously… it’s ugly, it’s too hot, it’s full of tweakers and skanky girls and no one really needs to spend more than three days of their life there. No offense,” Jacob added.

Brendon guessed money couldn’t buy manners. “None taken. I was never a huge fan of the place myself. That’s why I left when I was eighteen.”

“Really?” Jacob sucked his teeth. “What’s your surname? Is your family anyone I should know about?”

“Jacob, here’s an idea, why don’t you shut the fuck up? Because you’re acting like you’ve never met a human before ever.”

Jacob laughed, his attempt to sound innocent falling flat. He had this air about him that implied he was trying to get under Brendon’s skin - as a way to undermine his younger brother. “I’m just interested to get to know your new boyfriend, Ryan, that’s all. So, what do your parents do, Bria… Bradley? Sorry, what’s your name again?”

Ryan huffed beside him in frustration. Jacob Ross was being straight-up obnoxious but after years of practice, he knew how to deal with obnoxious rich guys. “You can’t remember it?” Brendon asked. “It’s Brendon. You were busy talking trash to Ryan when I introduced myself, so I didn’t expect you to catch it. I’ll let it slide.”

Jacob didn’t look particularly embarrassed at being called out, despite the fact that George seemed to find it amusing and Ryan was grinning like a proud Cheshire cat beside him. Instead, Jacob looked like he found his match, someone who wasn’t going to succumb to his bullshit. If Brendon wanted to walk the walk, he was going to have to talk the talk too.

Pamela was the first to break the silence, awkwardly and in typical mom fashion. “Would anyone like some fresh orange juice? I squeezed some just this afternoon. I’ll go grab the jug,” she whispered, excusing herself without waiting for an answer. George picked up that day’s newspaper and opened it up in front of his face, obviously trying his best to ignore what was happening between Brendon and his two sons.

“So, Ryan… did dad tell you? I’m flying out to Malawi tomorrow to help build a hospice.” He looked over at Brendon. “I do a lot of charity work - rebuilding communities after disasters, running marathons and generally just helping people who don’t have much going for them, y’know? It’s really satisfying to know I make such a big difference in peoples’ lives. Have you travelled to Africa or Europe at all, Brendon?”

Brendon shook his head. George and Pamela had both been very welcoming, they made him feel like he belonged and Brendon enjoyed their company, but he guessed he was going to have to try a little harder to win Jacob over. He seemed dead set on trying to show him up.

“That’s a shame. I spend so much money on traveling but it’s the one thing that makes me richer - in experience, I mean,” he smirked. “There are some people who don’t even leave the United States; some people don’t even have a passport. I can’t believe that in this day and age.”

“Some people can’t afford it,” Brendon shrugged, taking a sip of sparkling cider which was flat and warm by now. “Paying bills and rent and then traveling on top of that? It’s impossible for some people.”

Ryan’s brother reminded Brendon a little of Pete - that permanent, unreadable smile always on his face and a waft of arrogance to his every word. He was a good looking guy too - in a much more white-collar way than Ryan. Jacob Ross sported designer stubble and an expensive suit, there was
not a hair on his head out of place and he was more built than his brother - Jacob looked more like his father. The family had good genes. It was just a shame he was so full of himself - but then, he remembered thinking the same about Ryan when they first met.

“So, what is it that you do, Brendon?”

He should’ve known he couldn’t get away with avoiding that question for too much longer.

“Brendon’s a model. He’s way too modest about it though,” Ryan answered for him, smiling and elbowing his ribs. Brendon could feel the blush rising on his cheeks - now Jacob was definitely going to judge him and it was an easily refutable claim.

“You’re too short to be a model, surely?”

George Ross looked over the newspaper at his two sons and flashed Jacob a warning glare.

“We met in AA,” Ryan suddenly blurted. “You’ve been sober for years, haven’t you? I think that’s why we gelled so well - despite coming from pretty different backgrounds… We just seemed to understand each other and Brendon really helped me out when I left rehab and so… Jake, please stop doing this, stop trying to catch him out, stop with all the questions and the patronizing tone. Please, can we just chill and be nice to each other?”

“When you were kids I’d tell you to go outside, run around, blow off some steam,” George told them from behind his newspaper. “Does that still work?”

Jacob stood up from the couch and leaned forward to slap Brendon’s leg. “I’m just giving you a hard time, man. Don’t take it personally. If you’re going to be dating my shithead little brother, I want to make sure you can hold your own against the big boys.”

Even his apology sounded like a jibe. After the air was cleared, the conversation flowed a little easier. Ryan talked briefly about his time in rehab and about his renewed desire to stay sober. “It’s all down to Brendon, to be honest,” he admitted fondly. “I don’t think I’d still be here if he wasn’t for him.”

Jacob spoke more about how rewarding his charity work was - albeit, a little more modestly this time around. He told stories of his last trip to Europe and even managed to make the two of them laugh. As each minute ticked by, Brendon began to relax - the Ross family was a little dysfunctional but it made him smile to watch each of their protective walls come down.

Twenty minutes later, Jacob was halfway through regaling them all with a story that Ryan and George obviously heard before when there was a knock at the door.

“That’ll be your sister. Ryan, can you get that?”

“You get it.”

“It’s my birthday. Go and answer the door.”

Ryan sighed but got up from the couch all the same. Half an hour ago, Brendon would’ve wanted to stop him, to keep him by his side for mutual support, but he was a big boy, he could look after himself - and besides, listening to Jacob talk about himself was infinitely easier than having to answer questions about his past. Jacob seemed to be on a roll, talking animatedly about a disastrous bus ride he once took in Thailand.

Ryan disappeared from the sitting room and Jacob’s story came to a climactic end - Brendon acted
appropriately by commenting on just how crazy it all sounded. It was only then that Brendon realized there was some kind of commotion happening in the hallway. George was still buried deep in the newspaper and Jacob tapped away on his cellphone. Brendon attempted to eavesdrop on whatever was happening in the hallway, but he was aware of Ryan’s brother asking him another question.

“It’s not public knowledge yet - you and Ryan?” he asked, barely looking up from his phone.

“No. Not yet.”

“How long are you trying to keep it secret for?”

“As long as possible,” Brendon laughed - the thought of news breaking about his relationship with Ryan terrified him. He couldn’t even begin to process it and he didn’t want to dwell on it right now.

“George, happy birthday, my man! How the hell are you, you old bastard?”

George looked momentarily confused - he still had a smile on his face but he knotted his brows.

“What are you doing here? Didn’t you get the memo the party was cancelled?”

“Come on, now… How on earth could I miss my best buddy’s sixtieth? I thought we could get a round of golf in at Sebonack.”

Brendon looked over his shoulder to see a man he recognized immediately. A chill ran through his body and his mouth dropped open, unable to process the sight in front of him. He turned quickly back around and sunk lower on the couch. He couldn’t stop the shiver from rippling through his shoulders and he felt sick to his stomach.

“I have my family here, Marc. There was a change of plan… You drove all the way up here?”

And that was all the confirmation Brendon needed. It was Marc Willis stood behind him and he felt like he was about to have a panic attack - his blood ran cold and his heart was hammering inside his chest. Brendon’s cover was blown. He saw his life unravelling in front of his very eyes.

Marc Willis? George already got out of his seat to greet him and Brendon glanced over his shoulder again as he heard the two men retreat to make sure. It was him, there was no doubt about that.

What the hell was going on and where the fuck was Ryan? He needed to find him and explain himself.
Chapter 55

Things all happened very quickly. One second, he was sat talking merrily to Ryan’s family, feeling more and more at ease by the second and the next, he was cowering on the couch, his face burning as he attempted to avoid Marc Willis’ attention.

Brendon was trying hard to keep a lid on his complete and utter disbelief, but he couldn’t help feeling his every move, facial expression and color of his cheeks gave him away. It was so obvious something was wrong with him. He couldn’t hide that.

He had no idea where Ryan was and Marc Willis arrived five minutes ago. He said he’d stay with him and support him, so where the hell was he? Things were all going so very, very wrong.

He thought he left that part of his life behind - but how was he to know he’d run into an ex-client, Jon’s attacker and a man he had continuous run-ins with over the past couple of months at Ryan’s dad’s house? He felt sick to his stomach, as if he was about to pass out or puke all over the expensive cream rug in the lounge.

He remained seated where Ryan left him, praying for his speedy return - or at least, an easy escape route. Ryan’s father stood with Marc just behind him, talking about the most mundane bullshit - the weather, the falling price of real estate and the fact that George Ross was an old bastard now he reached sixty; they joked and bantered and Brendon listened without hardly even breathing. He was terrified and his head was swimming. He never wanted to disappear more in his entire life… Only that morning he had to remind Jon who Marc Willis was and now he had a harsh reminder himself.

He needed to leave - with or without Ryan, he couldn’t stay here, in the same house as Marc Willis. He knew who Brendon was. He almost killed Jon. Brendon had gone after him, looking for revenge and now it had all come crashing down around him. Shit just got real. It really was a small world. He didn’t know how he was going to wangle his way out of this situation this time.

Surely it wasn’t him. It couldn’t be… He tried to reassure himself with another quick glance over his shoulder - but it was him, there was no doubt about the fact that Marc Willis was standing in the same room as him, just a few feet away.

Where the hell was Ryan?

Brendon shifted nervously. The room suddenly felt too warm, as if the walls were closing in on him and he couldn’t breathe. He was burning up. The borrowed suit jacket felt even tight around his shoulders than it had before and damp under the arms. The collar of his shirt felt like it was strangling him. Brendon made a subtle attempt at loosening his tie.

On the couch in front of him, Jacob continued to scroll obliviously through his cellphone, a bored look on his face as he ignored Brendon’s presence. To the best of his knowledge, Marc hadn’t seen him yet, so perhaps he could sneak off before shit hit the fan - go find Ryan and ask for a tour of the rest of the house or ask to use the bathroom for five minutes to sort his head out? That’s what I’ll do. He needed some privacy, some time alone to think all this through.

He was about to open his mouth and ask Jacob to point him in the right direction when the man dropped his phone on the couch and looked at him pointedly. “So… how did you really meet my brother?”

Shit. Was Jacob already wise to their story being a lie too? Brendon wet his lips before he spoke and
attempted not to sound like his entire life was about to explode after he just got it back on track. “Just like Ryan said. We were in NA together back in Manhattan.”

“I thought Ryan said you two met in AA?” The man seemed eager to call Brendon out on his mistake.

“Well, NA, AA - they’re one and the same. I attend both, so…”

He didn’t know what else to say, his attentions were elsewhere because, from behind him, he could hear Marc talking to George about Ryan - asking how he was doing after his stay in rehab and what was it that caused him to leave the facility so early. He desperately tried to listen in, but Jacob was still talking to him.

“So, Ryan actually attended those meetings, huh? To tell you the truth, man, I never really believed he did. I thought that’s what he told my dad and Pamela to keep them quiet. Ryan’s kind of his own worst enemy as I’m sure you know. He’s always been that way - even when he was a kid. He’s staying clean then?”

“Mm-hmm,” Brendon nodded, his ear still turned towards the conversation behind him. Jacob was being mighty distracting.

“I gotta ask you; do you think he’ll stick to it this time? Ryan’s tried to quit drugs before, you know and it was never very successful. I don’t think it’d take much for him to slip up again and go back to his old ways. If he did, he’d probably be dead within a week. It kind of scares me to think about it.”

“He’s staying clean,” Brendon told him. “Unless he’s sneaking off behind my back and suddenly got very good at hiding it. He’s doing really well. You should be proud of him.”

“I am,” Jacob nodded. “Good for him. I mean, my brother’s a fucking knucklehead but I’m glad he’s staying off the drugs. He seems like he’s in a good mood for the first time in years. Whether that’s got anything to do with you or not, I don’t know but it’s nice to see him happy for once.”

Brendon was sure he was missing some kind of moment between him and Ryan’s older brother, perhaps it was Jacob’s way of showing he accepted their relationship, but he couldn’t dwell on it. He had other matters to attend to. He shook his head slightly to clear his thoughts. “I’m sorry but would you mind telling me where the bathroom is?”

Jacob paused, holding Brendon’s gaze as if he was still trying to figure him out. “Sure,” he sighed eventually. “Straight down the hallway and it’s the first door on the left past the kitchen.”

Brendon nodded a silent thank you. He felt too weak for words; his throat was dry and when he rose from the couch, his muscles felt heavy. He couldn’t believe he was in this situation again. He couldn’t believe he never mentioned Marc’s name to Ryan before - they possibly could’ve avoided this situation if he had.

He managed to sneak past George and Marc without either of them saying anything to him and left the sitting room swiftly, keeping his eyes glued to the ground until he reached the hallway. Why hadn’t he gone to the cops? Why hadn’t he forced Jon to go down to the station and give a statement? Marc needed to face the legal repercussions of his actions. Losing his wife and half his fortune wasn’t nearly enough.

Brendon felt as if he was about to pass out. He needed fresh air or Ryan’s support or a drink or something that could help him better deal with this situation. Shit. Jon was right, he shouldn’t have gotten involved with Marc Willis - but how was he to know that sick fuck had anything to do with
the Ross family? How was he to know his first meeting with Ryan’s parents would be ruined by the arrival of the man he despised and feared more than anyone else? Now, he had to go tell his new boyfriend that not only was one of his father’s friend’s an old trick of his but that he was a dangerous and violent man as well, one who was capable of ruining everything for them.

He walked as calmly as he possibly could towards the bathroom and pressed down on the handle. It was locked. Brendon tapped at the door. “Ryan?” he called. “Are you in there? Open up.”

Almost immediately the door opened and Brendon was shocked at the sight that greeted him. He stepped quickly inside and locked the door, watching as Ryan sat on the lid of the toilet seat and put his head between his knees. His breathing was labored, reduced to undignified gulps for air and short, shuddery exhales - as if he couldn’t quite take enough air into his lungs. Brendon sank to his knees in front of him, his heart pounding but for a totally different reason this time.

“Hey. What’s wrong?” he asked, covering Ryan’s hands with his own. Ryan tried to speak, but he couldn’t get out much more than a couple gasps of air. Brendon held his palm over Ryan’s forehead to find it clammy, his hair already stuck to it with perspiration. Jacob’s words a few minutes earlier echoed around his head - but Ryan wouldn’t slip back to his old habits, surely not? “Ryan, did you take something?” The guy couldn’t even breathe, let alone talk. “Baby,” he soothed, taking Ryan’s face in his hands. “Come on, breathe. Tell me what’s wrong.”

Ryan was close to hyperventilating, in the middle of a full blown freak-out. Had Ryan really snuck away to take drugs again? Perhaps he was having a bad reaction that needed medical attention? Brendon didn’t know what the hell to do in this situation. He chewed at his lip. “I’ll go get your dad. Do you need some water?” he asked, standing up to leave the bathroom.

Ryan made a grab for his hand. “No. Stay,” he managed to choke through his tears.

“Well, are you going to tell me what’s wrong?”

It was a few moments later that the man attempted to speak again. His voice was shaky and still uneven, his red cheeks were streaked with tears. “My dad promised. He promised not to invite anyone else.” The words seemed like a monstrous effort and after getting them out, he started to gulp for air again.

Brendon couldn’t help but breathe a huge sigh of relief. “Is that what this is about? Jesus, Ryan. I thought you’d come in here and taken drugs. You scared the life out of me. I was really worried about you. Come on. I need you out there, man.”

Ryan shook his head, pushing Brendon away and fanning himself with his hand. “I can’t go out there. He said it’d just be us. He lied to me.”

If Ryan was going to have a panic attack every time he wasn’t in total control of a situation then maybe he should go back to rehab, Brendon thought to himself. Or at least, back to his shrink in LA. This was no way to live his life, a complete breakdown at the smallest change of plan. Ryan’s breathing was interrupted every few seconds by the sound of a strangled cry trying to escape his throat, retching up sobs he couldn’t control.

“Baby, breathe. In for five, out for five,” he soothed, rubbing at his back. After a few long minutes, Ryan’s breathing seemed to return to normal, he fell quiet and looked down at his feet. The only remaining symptom was a couple shuddery breaths every few seconds.

“I asked my dad not to invite anyone else. I told him to cancel all other guests,” Ryan sniffed. “He doesn’t give a shit about me. He never has.”
Brendon rolled his eyes. “Don’t talk like that. He loves you. I don’t think your dad was expecting him. I think he turned up of his own accord, baby. Ryan, listen - how does your father know that guy because… oh shit.” He needed to get it all out, he needed to be open and honest with Ryan about the one last thing he’d been keeping a secret. He covered his face with his hands, closed his eyes and let go of a deep sigh. “I know him,” he whispered.

Ryan stopped sniveling immediately. He looked up at him from the toilet seat, his red eyes wide and his mouth open in surprise. When he spoke, his voice was so small, as if it wasn’t even coming from him. It was hardly even a squeak. “What- what d’you mean you know him?” Ryan swallowed loudly. “How?” But Ryan already looked like he could guess how he knew Marc Willis.

Brendon dragged his hands down his face and blinked at Ryan through his fingers. It was now or never. If Ryan broke up with him over this, it would break his heart, but at least he could say it was because he’d been honest with the guy, instead of telling lies. Brendon spoke quietly. “He’s an old client. He’s the guy who attacked Jon.” Even saying it out loud gave him the chills.

“W-What?” Ryan looked like he just had the air kicked out of him. He looked like a kid who’d just been told their dog died. He shook his head in disbelief. “No. I don’t believe you.”

“He knows who I am, Ryan. He knows what I do, he—”

“You and him?” Ryan interrupted, standing abruptly from the toilet. “You slept with him? He paid you?”

Silence hung between them. It was hardly a good start to their relationship, telling Ryan he’d fucked his dad’s best friend. He guessed his judgment had been pretty lacking when he decided to sleep with Marc Willis all those months ago. It was relatively easy money the first time; it was everything that followed that he regretted. Brendon averted his eyes and gave a small nod of confirmation. “Yeah,” he said. “A couple times.”

Ryan’s legs almost gave way with the shock. His reaction was surprising to say the least. He almost wailed, crouching down on the floor with his hands over his face. Brendon didn’t get it - Ryan knew how he made his money before they met. Hell, Ryan himself had been just a client at one point too. He told Brendon he accepted him, that he could forgive all his past sins but when confronted with them, he couldn’t handle it. “Oh god,” he cried from the floor. “I think I’m going to be sick. Brendon, tell me you’re lying.”

Brendon could hear his heartbeat thumping loud in his chest. Ryan’s reaction was… unsettling and Brendon felt on edge. “It was a long time ago,” he defended himself. “Before I even met you.”

“It was long time ago,” he defended himself. “Before I even met you.”

Ryan stood from the floor and touched his hand to his forehead. “Did he hurt you?”

It had hurt for a little while - after that, it just tapered off into the same dull pain it always did. “It was nothing I wasn’t used to at the time,” he shrugged, biting at his lip. “I saw him a couple of times, before we met. The last time though, he got a little rough with me, it took me some time to recover and when I did, I realized he’d taken my money.”

Ryan squeezed his eyes closed and tears leaked from them. After a couple beats of silence, he said, “And he attacked Jon too?” Ryan’s voice sounded as if he was trying not to cry, trying not to fall back into the same panic attack he’d just gotten over. He couldn’t even meet Brendon’s eyes.

“He almost killed Jon, Ryan… As I said, we met up a couple times and then he ripped me off, so I went to his office and basically, I blackmailed him out of a grand. I threatened to tell his wife if he didn’t pay up. After he attacked Jon, I was so angry. I wanted some kind of revenge, I wanted him to
pay for what he did. So I found his wife and I told her what he did and who he was and I’m pretty sure she left him after that.” Brendon took a breath - Ryan’s face was streaked with tears by now and he shook as Brendon spoke, refusing to believe that they had history.

“When I was in Vegas, when you were still in rehab, I ran into him in a bar and the bar was pretty shady, I kind of got to know the owner a little but… anyway, that dude Marc called me out for being a hustler in front of everyone and I guess my pride got in the way. I followed him out to the parking lot and confronted him. I was close to killing him that night, Ryan; he begged me for his life.” It wasn’t his proudest moment. Regardless of what terrible fate Brendon thought Marc deserved, he didn’t want it to be at his hands. “I stopped, I couldn’t go through with it and the next morning, I found out you left rehab and were in Las Vegas so I forgot all about him. You made me happy, Ryan, I wasn’t thinking about that part of my life anymore but when I went back home to deal with Dallon, the guy who owns the bar I’d been drinking at, Spencer, he said Marc came looking for me, but he thought my name was Jon, because when I went and told his wife, that’s what I told her my name was because I’m fucking stupid and.”

“Stop. Slow down. I can’t cope with this.” Ryan was shaking. His whole body was trembling. “He hurt you and he attacked Jon? How long has he been paying men for sex? How many more people do you think he’s done this to?” he asked in desperation.

Brendon shrugged slowly. “I don’t know, Ryan. I’m sorry.”

The small bathroom fell quiet, but Brendon could hear the shudder of Ryan’s breath over the sound of the Ross family talking jovially with Marc Willis in the sitting room. “I think I need some air,” Ryan said, reaching across Brendon to open the bathroom door. He looked like he was about to puke.

If he was being honest, he thought Ryan was slightly overreacting. Brendon didn't think it was right that he was making him feel so guilty over a trick he hadn’t slept with in months. He understood it was a bit close to home - and perhaps a bit of a shock to find out his father’s pal wasn’t the man he thought he was all these years but Ryan promised him acceptance. Why was he so quick to run with faced with the truth?

“You can’t hold this against me,” he stressed, stepping in front of Ryan and blocking his way. “You know what I used to do for money. It meant nothing to me. It never did - not until I met you.”

“This isn’t even about that,” Ryan spat, pushing at Brendon’s chest. Brendon noticed the fury in his eyes and he suddenly wanted to shout Ryan had no right to act this way; he was sorry - they could leave, drive back to Manhattan and curl up in bed together until they both felt strong enough to deal with the situation. “I’m sorry, Brendon. I’m so sorry for letting you down, but I think I need to remove myself from this situation before I have another panic attack.” Brendon could almost hear the hysteria in his voice - he could see it etched all over his face. Ryan pushed Brendon aside and started to open the bathroom door.

Once again, Brendon made moves to try and stop him, circling his wrists with his fingers and trying to hold him still. “Ryan, you can’t just leave me here alone! I need you out there. Jesus, I don’t like this situation any more than you do, but you can’t just run away from this.”

“Yes I can. I’ve been doing it for years,” he snapped. “Now, let me leave before I pass out. I really need to go and lie down.” Ryan struggled free from Brendon’s grip and exited into the hallway - they were within earshot now, Brendon was going to have to remain calm but what the fuck? He was really leaving?

“Ryan, what am I meant to tell everyone?”
“Brendon, you think of something. Tell my dad I’m sick or something, I got food poisoning, I don’t know. Say I’m going to have a rest up in the attic and that I don’t want him to follow me up there. Got it?”

Brendon marched straight after him, tailing him until they reached the bottom of the staircase. He pulled Ryan to face him by his arm. “You can’t talk to me like you talk to William or Shane. I’m meant to be your partner, Ryan. I deserve to be treated as your equal, not someone your dad employs to look after you.”

In that moment, Brendon knew he pushed it too far, he knew he said too much. Ryan looked upset - more than that, he looked completely devastated. “I want to be alone,” he said simply,shrugging free of Brendon’s grip and climbing the stairs. Brendon watched him leave, his heart thumping in fury at the entire situation. How could he? How could he just leave him like this? He was furious Ryan could be so thoughtless and to leave him all alone to face Marc and his family was just plain selfish. Brendon was left in a state of utter shock and confusion but he couldn’t stop thinking about the man in the sitting room and how capable he was of ruining everything for him. He was still staring at the empty staircase when the sound of George calling his name snapped him out of his thoughts.

“There you are! Are you okay?” he asked curiously, standing in the threshold of the kitchen with the empty bottle of sparkling cider. George’s eyes quickly scanned the hallway. “Where’s Ryan?”

Brendon’s mouth was dry when he attempted to speak. “He uh, he said he wasn’t feeling very well. He’s gone to lie down in the attic, I think.”

“Oh.” George tried hard not to roll his eyes, but he sighed heavy and shook his head in disappointment instead. Brendon guessed George Ross knew what it meant when his son disappeared into the attic. He probably spent his entire childhood up there. “And he just left you down here alone?” Brendon gave a silent nod - yes, that’s exactly what he did and I’m pissed off. I’m not overreacting, am I? Ryan’s being ridiculous.

George looked up at the stairs and gave another heavy sigh. He looked crestfallen, as if the news just ruined his day. “Brendon, can I ask you something? He’s not… he’s okay, isn’t he? I mean, he’s looking after himself and keeping his nose clean, right? I worry about him almost constantly.”

“Ryan’s clean,” Brendon nodded. “I think some days he finds it more difficult than others, but that’s natural. Maybe today is just one of those days…” He didn’t know who he was trying to reassure, George or himself. “He gets a little antsy when there’s a change of plan,” he said, nodding towards the sitting room.

“I know, I know. I don’t know why he turned up here, to be honest.” George shook his head in irritation. So, get rid of him, Brendon wanted to say. “I called to cancel and left a message with his secretary but he claims he didn’t get it.” Another huffed sigh. “Well, Ryan seems a lot happier with you in his life and that’s great. The only thing a parent ever wants for their kid is for them to be happy.” He paused and then laughed at himself for sounding too soppy - but Brendon was getting a little choked up thinking about his own parents. “Anyway! Come back and have a seat, don’t hang around out here on your own.”

He desperately tried to think up some excuse, something viable enough that he wouldn’t have to return to the sitting room and face Marc Willis but his mind was blank and he was feeling a little tongue-tied. Sometimes, Brendon realized, you have to do things you really don’t want to do, simply to avoid offending people and making a scene. This was one of those times. He could do nothing but follow George Ross back into the sitting room and accept his fate. He tried to console himself with the fact that the last time he and Marc saw each other, the man was sniveling in the dirt of a Vegas dive bar’s parking lot, begging for his life. Brendon guessed he had the upper hand right now.
I’ve been through worse before. I can handle this, Brendon told himself as he entered the sitting room. He guessed Marc was still in the closet and calling Brendon out in front of his best friend’s family would mean he’d have to admit how he knew him - and that would undoubtedly raise some awkward questions. He was counting on Marc staying quiet, simply so he could save face.

I am the better person in this situation, he repeated like a mantra inside his head. Marc’s a piece of shit and I know more about him than he does about me. He will get his comeuppance. Like Jon said that one time: karma. Everyone gets when they deserve in the end.

Brendon kept his head up and tried to muster up the confidence he felt he was greatly lacking. There, in front of him, Marc Willis sat on the couch next to Jacob, engaged in a conversation interesting enough that neither of them looked up to see him enter. “Take a seat,” George nodded at him, sitting down next to his wife. Brendon sat on a third couch on his own and only then did Marc Willis look over at him.

At first, it seemed like he didn’t quite recognize him, he looked back at Jacob to continue their conversation, but then the man did a double take, sitting back on the couch in shock. Brendon could see the silent panic in his eyes, the total confusion etched all over his face. Marc glanced quickly at the faces around the room, but none of them were paying him any mind - Jacob was engrossed in his phone again and Brendon could hear Pamela quietly asking her husband where Ryan had got to.

“Don’t tell me,” Jacob sighed, overhearing his parents’ hushed conversation. “Ryan’s run off because he can’t deal with even the slightest disruption, he’s probably up in the attic right now, crying because he can’t get his own way.”

“Give it a rest, Jake,” George sighed.

Brendon suddenly felt very self-conscious. Marc continued to glare at him from across the room and he tried to give off an air of confidence but it was slowly deserting him. He was irritated at the reminder that Marc Willis was still an attractive older man with a thick head of his own hair and wrinkles that made him ruggedly handsome. He guessed that’s one of the reasons why he continually got away with so much shit. He was like a real life Patrick Bateman - dashing good-looks, a great job and millions in the bank, but a complete psycho underneath it all. Brendon couldn’t look at him for long. The man sickened him.

“So, I’m right?” Jacob piped up again. He was relentless in his attempt to call Ryan out for his behavior, as if he couldn’t rest until his younger brother was suitably put in his place.

George had been on edge since finding out about Ryan’s disappearance himself. He looked like he was just as put out by it as Brendon was - more than that, George looked truly worried about his son’s wellbeing. Brendon obviously wasn’t the only one to jump to the worst possible conclusion when Ryan started acting strange. “Your brother wasn’t feeling very well,” he said. “He went up to the attic for a little lie down.”

Jacob looked up at his father with his eyebrow quirked and a horrible, smug look on his face. “Well, there’s a surprise,” he said incredulously. He nudged Marc’s below with his. “What did I tell you? Ryan disappears up to his little hideout as soon as something doesn’t go his way. He’s like a fucking kid still,” he bit, now visibly irritated at the whole situation. “He was fine before Marc arrived; now all of a sudden, he’s feeling sick.” Jacob air-quoted the word with a roll of his eyes. “And you thought rehab would change him. He hasn’t changed a bit, he’s such an attention-seeking little brat, he’s—”

“Jake!” George snapped. “Give it a goddamn rest, will you, son? We have to remember that he’s been through a lot. We got to take baby-steps with him, it’ll probably be a slow process. I promised
him it’d just be us, he’s sensitive to plans changing right now.”

From across the room, Marc let a sheepish smile creep cross his lips. “Oh dear, I’m sorry, I hope I didn’t ruin your little shindig by showing up unannounced,” he chuckled as if he was apologizing just to be facetious. “And I was hoping to catch up with Ryan about his time in rehab too. How’s he doing, George?” The thought of letting Marc anywhere near Ryan was enough to make Brendon balk. The man turned Brendon’s stomach. Marc kept stealing cautious little glances at him every couple of seconds.

“He’s good,” Ryan’s father nodded. “He’s healthier and happier than he’s been in years - it’s a shame he’s not feeling well today, I’d been looking forward to seeing him for ages… Are you sure he’s okay?” George asked quietly, looking over at Brendon in concern. The man sounded so concerned that Brendon felt he had to make light of the situation. He felt all eyes settle on him, Marc’s included, all looking at him expectantly.

“I think it was maybe something he ate. He was feeling a little queasy in the car on our way here actually. He really wanted to come back out here but he didn’t look well at all.”

George gave a heavy sigh and then slapped his knees. “Well, I really wish Ryan was around to do this next bit, but seeing as he’s not, I guess we’ll just have to go ahead without him.”

Brendon felt his whole body tense up as he realized he was mere seconds away from having his real name divulged to the man who’d been looking to seek revenge on him since their first run-in. This was it - his entire life was about to be blown apart. Again.

“Brendon, Marc Willis here is one of my oldest friends from university. He’s a very successful businessman who now works on Wall Street and owns a couple properties in both New York and Miami. Marc, this is Brendon Urie, he’s a uh… a good friend of Ryan’s who’s visiting with us today.” George glanced uneasily over at Brendon and looked a little embarrassed that he fluffed their introduction, downgrading Brendon from partner simply to ‘friend’.

The silence that followed was awkward as Brendon tried to avoid Marc’s eye - his cheeks were getting red again and he felt like everyone in the room just knew the secret he was trying to hide. Marc was a lot better at keeping a poker face than Brendon was.

“Wow,” the man breathed. “So… Brendon, is it? What a pleasure to meet you. You’re a friend of Ryan’s? How did you two meet?”

On the surface, Marc’s questions seemed polite enough but Brendon knew what his game was. “I’m his partner - and it’s a long story how we met. It’s probably better we wait for Ryan to get into it.”

Marc blinked at him and once again, the smile returned to his face. “I had no idea Ryan was gay. I mean back when he was a teenager I thought it was just a phase, a little bit of teenage rebellion, that’s all. Huh. Shows how much I know about that sort of thing.” He laughed. Brendon wanted to stand up and punch the guy right in the face for being so disgustingly obnoxious.

“That’s what I keep saying. Everything Ryan does is for attention - today proves my point exactly. He used to do this when he was a teenager, remember? No one’s happy unless Ryan’s happy. The world stops turning for him, doesn’t it?” Jacob said.

“Jacob, if you can’t stop berating your brother behind his back, I’m just going to ask if you can leave. I was really looking forward to spending time as a family today and things haven’t gone to plan but let it not ruin the entire day, please.”
Jacob Ross sat back on the couch with a petulant roll of his eyes and stared at his cellphone again. Brendon was pissed and yet again, he was in a situation he really didn’t want to be in - facing Marc Willis again, listening to all Jacob’s rude accusations without Ryan around to stick up for himself.

“So, what is it you do for work, Brendon?”

“This and that,” he answered with a shrug. He could sense George watching them, listening in on their conversation with a quirked eyebrow because there was definitely some kind of animosity between him and Marc Willis. Brendon couldn’t hide it anymore. It was an effort even being in the same room as the guy.

“Well, you must be quite the catch if Ryan brought you to meet the parents already, huh?” It was typical older-generation talk, cutting jibes dressed up as compliments. “I remember Ryan talking to me about dating and all that when he was a teenager. He had quite the imagination when he was sixteen. Yes, young Ryan was always full of tall stories. You could never quite tell when he was telling the truth or not - but we were close at one point.”

Brendon frowned. There was something in the way Marc spoke that concerned him, all of this bringing up his childhood as if he had some kind of claim on the guy, some stake on him before Brendon did. It was almost like Marc was trying to make him jealous.

Pamela spoke up for the first time in a while from the couch next to her husband. “You and Ryan were close, weren’t you? Perhaps because George used to spend a lot of his time at work? He was so fond of you, he used to talk about you all the time. What happened?” she reflected affectionately.

“I guess drugs happened,” Marc replied with a grin.

“Uh, no. Ryan used to have a huge crush on you,” Jacob added with a laugh, slapping Marc’s thigh. “It was actually kind of sweet.”

Marc’s eyes met Brendon’s and he looked away quickly, guiltily. In that small, split second, the realization hit him like a ton of bricks. Everything suddenly made sense - Ryan completely freaking out and running off as soon as Marc arrived, his total devastation when he found out the man was an old trick… Brendon sat alone on the couch as the Ross family talked around him, his head spinning as he tried to organize his thoughts and his stomach turning, making him nauseous.

How could I be so dull, so wrapped up in my own problems that I hadn’t realize the reason Ryan had such a meltdown over Marc Willis was that..? Someone was talking to him. He blinked the room back into focus and looked around.

It was George. “Brendon, are you feeling alright?” His eyebrows were knotted in concern. Brendon gave a quick nod and cleared his throat. He felt sick to his stomach and the urge to go find Ryan and just wrap him in the tightest hug and not let go was overwhelming. If Marc disgusted him before it had nothing on how he felt about the man now. He was reeling with anger, shaking in his seat. First Jon, now Ryan? How could this man cause so much destruction?

He got up from the couch and felt his legs shake under his weight. He felt dazed, as if he was floating outside of reality. “Excuse me,” he murmured, his voice weak. “I actually think I’ll go check up on Ryan. Would you mind pointing me in the right direction?” Brendon gazed at the space around him, trying to gather his thoughts and he was sure he must’ve looked a complete mess, but he needed to get out of the sitting room and away from Marc Willis as quickly as possible.

George stood slowly. “Is everything alright?” he asked, walking towards him and placing a
reassuring hand on his shoulder.

“I’m fine. I just... I think I should check on Ryan.”

Together, they walked towards the hallway, but from behind them Marc called George’s name and the man floundered in the threshold, two expectant eyebrows raised. “What is it?” he bit.

“I’ve got a bottle of 1938 Mortlach scotch in the car I brought with me - your favorite… I’ve been saving it for today, I thought we could crack open a bottle to celebrate, then maybe shoot a quick eighteen out at Sebonack. What d’you think?”

“Not right now, Marc.”

“Come on. That bottle of scotch cost me damn near sixteen grand. It’s been sitting on the shelf gathering dust since 2010...”

“Marc, I hope you don’t think I’m speaking out of turn, but you showing up here today, quite frankly, threw everything to shit. It’s the first time I’ve seen Ryan in over two months and it was meant to be just family.”

Marc knew Brendon figured it all out and now he was trying desperately to prevent him from spending any time alone with George. “Well, I’m sorry I ruined the day, folks but it’s not my fault your son has pretty limited social skills - and showing up with this guy,” he said, splaying his hand in Brendon’s direction. “I mean, is this some kind of joke?” He put his hands on his hips and let loose a nervous laugh. Marc was running scared now, deep worry lines set on his forehead.

If he was sure without a shadow of a doubt that Marc was the man who attacked Ryan when he was still a boy, Brendon would’ve called him out at that exact moment. Instead, he flashed the man a look that said: I know exactly who you are, you sick cunt. You better watch your fucking back.

“Please don’t turn up here unannounced and disrespect my family. I’m going to have to ask you to leave, Marc,” George told him, turning his back on the man and giving Brendon a gentle push into the hallway. Brendon followed his lead until they reached the staircase. “I’m sorry about that,” he said with a slow shake of his head. “Brendon, this is going to sound like a weird question, but has Ryan ever mentioned Marc to you before?”

By now, Brendon was desperate to check on Ryan, just to confirm his suspicions and lie down next to him, offer him a shoulder to cry on. He couldn’t believe he’d been so slow to figure it all out... “I don’t know, Mr. Ross. I’m sorry. I really want to go check on him though. I’m sure everything’s fine, but maybe he needs a little company up there, y’know?”

George looked like he felt rather ridiculous even asking such a question and Brendon all of a sudden wanted to grab him by the shoulders and tell him everything he knew - but he couldn’t divulge something he wasn’t even sure of himself. Ryan said he never told anyone and it wasn’t Brendon’s story to tell

Within the next couple minutes, Brendon was following George’s directions towards the attic, his stomach unsettled as he tried to think of what to say. By the time he climbed the stairs and knocked on the door, there were tears in his eyes and his heart was beating uncontrollably inside his chest.

“Ryan, baby. It’s me, can I come in?”

There was no answer and Brendon pushed down on the handle, into the room to see Ryan curled up on a bed with his back to him, surrounded by moving boxes and loose records. Without saying a thing, he walked over to the mattress and lay down next to him, wrapping his arms around Ryan’s
chest. His voice was wavering the next time he spoke. “Ryan, it’s him, isn’t it? The guy you told me about - when you were younger? He’s the guy downstairs.”

Ryan’s shoulders started to shake and he heaved out a cry. The man turned in his arms and buried his face in Brendon’s chest. “It’s my fault,” he sobbed. “All of this - what he did to you, what he did to Jon - it’s all my fault.”

“Oh my god, baby, no. None of this is your fault, don’t ever think that. I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry I didn’t figure it out sooner.”

“I hate him, Brendon. I hate him more than anything else - and to think of you and him… I just can’t…” Ryan broke down again. His tears wet Brendon’s shirt and his fingers clawed at his shoulders. Brendon let him cry against him and it was that moment he realized he truly loved the guy - that he wanted to stick by him and support him and make sure he was happy. For better or worse, Brendon knew Ryan was his one true love.
Chapter 56

Chapter Notes

A special shoutout this week to Tumblr user xgibleyx, who created another stunning Filthy Lucre fanart and to the supremely supportive missn00b (also on Tumblr) who made a pretty damn cool Filthy Lucre edit. Thank you once again!

I know my updates are not happening quite as often as they once were. For those of you who don't know, I recently moved house and everything has been a little hectic for the past month and in a couple days my family, who I've not seen in over a year, are coming to visit for three weeks so I can't say I'll have time to sit down and write for quite a while (probably over a month) but you can always SUBSCRIBE so that AO3 sends you an email when I next update or follow me on Tumblr, where I usually keep everyone updated on my progress. Enjoy the update!

See tags for triggers

When Ryan was a teenager, the attic in his parents’ house in the Hamptons was his sanctuary. During his troubled adolescence, it was his only place of refuge and he’d often spend days at a time hanging out up there on his own. He would sit on the window ledge and smoke badly rolled joints or swig on alcohol he managed to steal from his dad’s drink cabinet.

When Ryan threw a tantrum and said he was going up to the attic, his entire family knew what it meant. It meant he wanted to mope and wallow in his teenage angst alone, without any disruptions from meddling family members. Usually, his parents left him to it - he was the problematic third child, he was an insolent little brat and never tried hard in school and they regarded Ryan’s behavior with a weary despondency.

“Ryan’s up in the attic again,” Pamela would inform his father when he returned home after working all week out in the city. “I haven’t seen him in three days, honey.”

George Ross would roll his eyes as he read the newspaper - all he ever wanted when he came home was peace and quiet, dealing with his teenage son’s mood swings was never high on George’s list of priorities. “Oh dear. What’s the problem this time?” he’d ask, but it was always a rhetorical question, he never expected an answer and George never bothered to check up on him.

Ryan didn’t blame him. He was a difficult child and an even more difficult teenager. His problem was he’d always found it so difficult to give a fuck and after Marc attacked him, Ryan truly stopped caring about almost everything - he flunked all his classes and dropped out of school, he started drinking until he blacked out and taking drugs to forget, to keep his parents at the furthest possible distance so they never had the time to figure him out. They called him disrespectful and negligent of other people’s feelings. During an argument when he was seventeen, George shouted that he was a little bastard who ought to watch his step and Ryan remembered standing at the top of the staircase and shouting back, I might as well be a bastard, I mean, my dad’s never fucking here for me before storming up to the attic and slamming the door. The next day, Ryan appeared for breakfast and the confrontation was never mentioned again. George ignored it, like he always did.
The attic was the only place that ever offered Ryan any kind of comfort and whenever things went wrong, whenever he was feeling particularly down or angry or he simply didn’t want to talk to anyone, he’d escape up into the loft and there he’d stay until the storm in his head stopped raging.

The room had everything he needed as a teenager - his father’s old record player and a vast array of music to go with it, there were magazines, books and family photo albums all stored away in boxes and the most comfortable bed in the house remained in the middle of the large space, just like it always had. He hadn’t ventured up to the attic in years and as a fully mature adult, his childhood hideaway didn’t seem to offer the same comfort. Music no longer had the power to help him forget his problems, jerking off over old porno mags now seemed so juvenile and of course, he could no longer sit on the windowsill and enjoy an innocent joint or a sneaky little drink. All his old vices were now forbidden.

He pressed his face into the covers of the bed and punched the pillow until he was exhausted. His insides hurt, his throat and jaw ached from trying so hard to keep his emotions in check and if Ryan was being honest, when he stormed off, he wanted Brendon to follow him. He wanted him to ask the right questions so he’d have a reason to say the words that had always been so difficult to get out.

He tried to follow Dr. Stump’s advice: take a breath, count to ten, breathe - but it was useless. He was falling apart. He’d overcome so much in the past few months but how on earth was he going to get over this?

The thought of Marc and Brendon being together in that way sickened him. He felt physically nauseous every time he thought about it - the fact that the man he hated more than anyone else, the man who’d been the cause of all his problems for the last decade, paid to fuck the boy he loved… It was horrifying and Ryan couldn’t get the image out of his head, no matter how hard he tried.

He didn’t know how long he was alone in that dusty attic, but when he eventually heard Brendon enter the room and felt him lay down beside him, Ryan was relieved to have the company. Brendon’s arms felt good around his shoulders, grounding, comforting - as if they were the only thing keeping him together. When Brendon told him he figured it all out, he broke down - big, gulping sobs wretched up from deep inside his chest, like a little boy who hadn’t learned how to control his emotions. He clawed at Brendon’s shoulders and pulled them closer together until he could feel the man’s heart beating against his ear.

It was his fault. All he could think about was the fact his silence when he was fifteen caused other people to suffer at the hands of Marc Willis, including the man he’d fallen in love with. The guilt was unsurmountable, driving Ryan to the point of distraction until he was bordering on another panic attack. Brendon talked him through it, his voice low and soft and soothing in his ear, his hands rubbing over his shoulder blades and down his back until all Ryan was capable of were shuddery little breaths, every couple of seconds.

“Your dad already asked him to leave, he was upset he just turned up out of the blue,” Brendon said, once Ryan calmed down a little more.

Ryan still felt terrible. Every time he thought about Marc, he imagined him fucking Brendon, getting pleasure out of hurting him and he couldn’t help but think it was all his fault. Brendon remained quiet beside him, stroking his hair and kissing his forehead and Ryan tried hard to concentrate on something other than the ache in his chest, but it was becoming so difficult.

“It’s my fault,” he cried. “I can’t help but blame myself for not telling anyone - maybe if I had, then…” He couldn’t finish, his mind filled in the blanks for him and he squeezed his eyes closed, pushing out tears against Brendon’s shirt. Brendon tightened his grip around Ryan’s shoulders.
“It’s not your fault, Ryan,” he stated, as if his words were unarguable fact. His voice was calm and strong and subtly reassuring. “I never told anyone either - and neither did Jon… The only person you can blame for this is Marc. You’ll drive yourself crazy if you think if you blame yourself for what he did.”

Ryan dipped his head forward against Brendon’s chest and sniffed. That was easier said than done. The one thing that had been eating him up inside for years and now he had no choice but to confront it. “Do you think Marc will say anything to my dad?” he asked. He was still a little tearful, feeling pathetic and forlorn as Brendon cradled him in his arms.

“About me?”

“Surely he’s figured out how we know each other by now?”

Brendon shook his head, but he paused a while before he spoke again, as if he wasn’t quite sure of the answer himself. “I doubt it. If he did, he’ll have to admit that he knows me as well, and I doubt he’d want to do that, not in front of your dad.”

“What if he did? My parents are going to find out eventually and Marc is such an asshole - what if he tries to get revenge by going to the press?”

“Well…” Brendon replied, sounding even more unsure of himself. It was as if he couldn’t give the answer Ryan wanted to hear. “We’ll cross that bridge when we get to it,” he finished quietly, with a soft peck against Ryan’s head.

For the first time, Ryan realized what a mess they were in - Marc was an old client of Brendon’s, whether Ryan liked it or not, they had history and it was personal. Brendon had been the one who told Marc’s wife what kind of man she really married, they had numerous run ins and Ryan had absolutely no clue. His secret wasn’t just affecting him anymore, it was affecting Brendon too. He was going to have to tell his dad…

“I just can’t believe we didn’t figure all this out until now. I tried to tell myself for years that what that asshole did to me was just a one-off thing. I kept making ridiculous excuses for him and it kills me to think he got away with doing it again and again because I was too scared to say anything. It hurts so much, Brendon. I don’t know how I’m going to get over knowing that I wasn’t the only one. Please don’t- I’m so sorry for what he did to you - and to Jon, holy shit… I know how much you care about him.” The tears started again, his chest constricted and suddenly he couldn’t breathe again.

Brendon held Ryan’s face in his hands until their eyes met. “Ryan, listen to me. This isn’t your fault. You can’t blame yourself for what he did - no one in their right mind would ever hold you accountable, you were still a boy when it happened and what happened to Jon and I, it’s all just part of the job… I love you. I’ve never been surer about anyone before in my life and I want you to believe me when I say that I want to help you through this. You’re the only reason I made it out of Las Vegas alive, baby. You were there for me when nobody else wanted to know me and now it’s my turn to help you. That’s what a relationship is all about. I won’t give up on you, Ryan. This doesn’t change anything between us and I’m not going anywhere. Okay?”

Ryan managed a sad smile back at him and a slow nod of his head. He ran the pad of his thumb over Brendon’s bottom lip. “Whatever did I do to deserve a guy like you?” he breathed. A small silence passed between them, Ryan drank in the details of Brendon’s face and then wet his lips. “I’m going to tell my dad what Marc did. He deserves to know, doesn’t he?”

Brendon nodded slowly, turning his lips against the tips of Ryan’s fingers to press feather-light kisses
against each of them. “Your father really cares about you and he wants nothing more than for you to be happy. You can’t carry on living your life like this, Ryan, it’s not healthy.”

Ryan sighed in resignation. He knew Brendon was right - a part of him felt some sort of sick relief that it had all come to a head in the way it did, that circumstance was pushing him into finally being honest with George about what happened to him as a teenager, but the other part of him was terrified. The thought of talking to his dad after so long made his blood run cold as he tried to comprehend it. He felt like he put it off too long to just drop that bombshell on his father.

“I’m scared,” he choked, fully aware of how pathetic he must’ve sounded.

“You deserve closure, baby.”

And that’s all he’d ever needed - closure, to finally be able to sleep at night knowing he wasn’t harboring the weight of his past on his own anymore. He felt like a stronger man with Brendon by his side than he did a couple months ago, but it didn’t make the thought of finally being honest with his father any less scary. He suddenly felt too exhausted to even think clearly - it was all too much for him, he couldn’t keep torturing himself like this.

Ryan closed his eyes and bumped his lips against Brendon’s, arching his body against him as he deepened the kiss. “I love you so much,” he mumbled as Brendon kissed back, pushing his fingers into the back of Ryan’s hair, their tongues sliding languidly together. Ryan’s eyes remained closed and after a short moment of struggle, he succeeded in rolling over onto his back, pulling Brendon on top of him. Brendon pulled back to look at him, running his fingers along Ryan’s jaw. “I don’t know what the hell I’d do without you.”

He watched a slow smile pull at Brendon’s lips. “No one’s ever made me feel as good as you do, Ryan. I know it’s hard to believe right now, but everything’s going to be fine. We’ll get through this. We’ll be okay.”

He liked that - we instead of you and I, as if they were both in this together. Despite everything that was currently happening, Ryan stomach gave a little flutter of excitement - he had a boyfriend who loved him and wanted to stand by him in his time of need, a wonderful man who knew all there was to know about him and didn’t judge him for it. He was so thankful he met Brendon when he did - the universe was certainly on his side that day, because meeting Brendon had been some lucky stroke of fate. He couldn’t begin to imagine what a mess he’d be if their paths hadn’t crossed.

They lay together in silence, Brendon’s arms wrapped tightly around Ryan’s shoulders and his face buried into the man’s chest. He was exhausted mentally and emotionally drained and his brain throbbed inside his skull - he hadn’t had one of these stress headaches in a while. He always had to deal with the aftermath of seeing Marc on his own, but not anymore. Brendon made some pretty sweet promises back there.

Ryan never thought he needed anyone to take care of him, he thought he was just fine on his own, unaccountable for his actions and not responsible for anyone else’s happiness - it was how he’d grown used to living his life. Before he went to rehab, Ryan didn’t care about the people he disappointed or how much worry and stress he caused the ones who loved him. He was selfish and egocentric and he trod the path of self-destruction with his eyes taped closed, stumbling blindly through life with little to no consideration for his own well-being. He didn’t hate himself enough to take his own life but he took all those drugs not caring if they killed him.

Now he had something to live for - someone to live for - and he didn’t want to disappoint him or cause the guy any more hardship. He guessed that’s what true love is - it wasn’t physical or even romantic, it was the desire to put the other person first, time after time. It was acceptance of
everything that is, has been and will be. It was being comfortable enough to fall asleep in someone’s arms.

Brendon’s breathing was slow, his heartbeat steady and comforting in his ear. Ryan was just about drifting off when there was a quiet knock at the door. He felt his heart rate surge immediately, his exhaustion all but forgotten as they both stared at the door as if a monster was about to break in.

“Ryan, it’s dad. You in there, buddy?”

“At least he knocked this time,” Brendon whispered as they untangled themselves from each other. Ryan couldn’t help but hold back a laugh - at least Brendon’s comment did a good job at relieving some of the tension he was feeling.

“Yeah,” he called back. “Come in.” This really was do or die. Ryan was finally going to have to confront his demons if he wanted to escape his past.

George opened the door and entered cautiously, looking around the room at everywhere other than the bed. They were still under the covers, fully clothed but under the covers together nonetheless. His father looked a little uncomfortable but he flashed a warm smile towards the both of them. “You’re missing the party,” he said.

Ryan groaned. He was so beat, too tired to even move. He draped him arm over his eyes in an attempt to block out reality. Brendon sat up, swinging his legs off the side of the bed as George approached. An awkward silence ensued and a stifled sigh from his father. “I’m sorry about Marc showing up here like that. I left a message with his PA saying the party got cancelled but I think there were a few crossed wires… Ryan, what’s going on, buddy?” his father asked, concerned eyes and a furrowed brow. “Do you want to talk about something?” George sat down on the edge of the bed and the mattress dipped under his weight. Brendon, not so subtly, gripped his shoulder and gave him a shake. He flashed him a small, reassuring glance until Ryan sighed and rubbed at his eyes.

“Yeah. I think we need to talk.”

Brendon leaned over to kiss him, right in front of George with no shame. Ryan’s father looked politely away and stared down at the floor as Brendon’s lips connected with the corner of his mouth, his hand moving slowly along Ryan’s jaw before he pulled back to whisper in his ear. “You’re gonna be alright.”

Those few simple words filled him with strength like never before - he suddenly realized he had a person in his life who he couldn’t let down, someone he wanted to please and make happy - he had to do this for Brendon, because Marc had already caused too much destruction.

“I’ll leave you two alone to talk,” Brendon said, pulling back and giving Ryan’s fingers a final squeeze before he stood from the bed and excused himself. As he watched Brendon leave the room, Ryan was overcome with a brief sense of panic but the look of concern on his father’s face made all that seep away. He was tired of this charade. He didn’t want to live this lie any longer.

“So, what’s up?” George asked as soon as Brendon’s footsteps disappeared down the stairs. He kicked back on the bed next to his son and nudged him with his elbow. “You got the whole family concerned about you - even Jake’s worried.”

Ryan huffed a quiet laugh. “Damn, things must be bad if Jake’s worried.”

His father squeezed his shoulder. “We all love you, Ryan and we’re really proud you’ve come so far… Brendon seems like a really nice guy and it’s clear he’s really fond of you. So… why did you
disappear up here, huh?” Ryan didn’t answer him and George continued with a sigh. “It seemed like
you never left this place when you were a teenager,” his father reminded him, looking up at the
cobwebs on the ceiling.

Again, Ryan couldn’t reply - not just yet. He and his father sat in silence. How on earth was he
going to word this? How was he meant to just drop into the conversation that his father’s best friend
raped him when he was fifteen and he kept it a secret all this time?

“Is this something to do with Marc turning up here?”

“Yeah,” Ryan nodded. “It’s everything to do with that.”

His father sighed. “You don’t much like Marc, do you?”

“I hate him.”

There was a short beat of silence before George asked, “Why?”

Ryan sat up on the mattress and looked down at his hands, chewing at the inside of his cheek - his
heart was hammering behind his ribs, his muscles were shaking - he almost felt like he was about to
pass out, but he needed to do this. “Dad… Marc did something to me when I was fifteen that I never
told you and mom about.”

“What- what do you mean he *did* something to you? What?”

Ryan took one final breath. “Marc raped me at his house one night - a few weeks before my
sixteenth birthday.”

“What?” His father stared at him, a look of complete horror on his face. “Ryan, are you serious?”

He barely managed a nod and then the floodgates opened. “We hung out a lot, more times than I
ever told you and mom about and he used to ask me all these really inappropriate questions - about
sex and all that… my sexuality,” Ryan swallowed. “I guess I led him on for a bit. I liked the attention
and I had this stupid, fucked up crush on him.” He shuddered at the memory, pressing his fingers
against the bridge of his nose.

“It was late and I’d been to a party and I didn’t want to come home because I knew you’d shout at
me for staying out all night. It was like, 2AM or something and for some reason I ended up at his
place out in Manhattan and… I was high and he asked me…” Ryan trailed off, embarrassed that he
was about to admit the next part to his father. “He asked me to perform oral sex on him - so I did, but
I didn’t like it and he started being really rough and mean. I think I called him a pedophile and he got
really angry at that. He punched me in the face and then he raped me on his couch.” Ryan dared a
look up at his father, the horror hadn’t faded from George’s face.

“I begged him to stop, dad. I said I didn’t want it, but he carried on. Remember that quarter million
dollars he wired me? Remember how he told everyone it was for my birthday?”

George looked to the side and Ryan saw the recollection of the memory flickering in his eyes. His
father nodded in silence, his eyes wide, chest rising and falling rapidly as Ryan told his story. “He
put that money in my account the day after it happened. He sent me a birthday card that year that
basically said no one would ever believe me if I told them.”

His father looked dumbfounded. “Marc Willis did that? My friend? He *raped* you? When you were
fifteen?” George wheezed, choking on his words - his eyes were watering and his lip trembling. The
mass of emotions that crossed his father’s face made Ryan feel sick to his stomach. He’d kept a
secret for this long and at what cost?

It seemed like everything had finally fallen into place for George, years of his son’s destructive behavior and addiction suddenly all made sense. “Ryan, please tell me this isn’t true…” But Ryan didn’t have to answer. George continued, raising a shaking hand to cover his mouth in shock. “Oh my god… Ryan, why didn’t you ever tell me?”

Ryan shrugged. Why? Because he was too scared, too proud and too embarrassed to tell his father he’d been taken advantage of like that, because he didn’t want to be a victim and taking drugs to forget his problems had always been easier than confronting them. “I guess I was stupid enough to listen to him when he said no one would believe me. I can’t stand to be anywhere near him, dad. I feel like he’s ruined my entire life so far.”

His father let out a choked cry and pulled Ryan into a crushing hug against his chest. For the first few moments, Ryan let his hands dangle awkwardly by his sides. Despite the fact he felt he needed one, the hug felt weird, alien almost. George had never been a particularly affectionate father, even when he was a kid.

“I’m sorry for ruining your birthday party,” he sniffed into his dad’s shirt.

“Shit, Ryan. Oh my god, come here. I am so sorry. I’m so, so sorry I never figured it all out, that I never asked the right questions, that you felt you couldn’t tell me… Shit - I failed you as a father.” George buried his face into his son’s hair and then he started to cry. He guessed this was another reason he’d never told anyone - he wasn’t good at dealing with other people’s sadness.

“I love you, Ryan. My son - how could I have ever let this happen?”

In the attic, in which Ryan had spent most of his adolescence hiding away from George Ross and the rest of his family, Ryan wrapped his arms desperately around his father’s shoulders and let all his pent up sadness - years and years of tears - come flowing out. His dad held him until Ryan was too tired to even cry anymore, exhausted after finally telling the story that had been stuck in his throat for so long.

* * *

Brendon sat at the top of the wide steps that led into the Ross family home with his head in his hands. What had he done to catch such a shitty break? Who did he piss off in a past life? It seemed like when everything was looking up for him, there was some destructive force intent on making him miserable again. He had a hot, rich boyfriend who loved him - everything should’ve been peachy, but life really wasn’t that simple.

He wasn’t a bad person - sure, he’d done some scrupulous things for money and he let down a couple ex-boyfriends in the past but Brendon always did everything with the right intentions. He wanted a quiet, peaceful, drama-free life somewhere up in the mountains. So, why was he constantly dealing with so much shit?

Things definitely changed from this morning. This morning, Brendon had been naïve enough to think he put all his troubles behind him and now? Well, now he had a completely different set of problems to deal with - how hadn’t he figured out they were both talking about the same man when he and Ryan started opening up to each other about their pasts? How could he have been so slow to piece it all together?

It all added up now. The details of Ryan’s attack were so similar to his and Jon’s and the fact that rich Wall Street motherfucker was a friend of George Ross made sense too now he thought about it,
but Brendon never really considered asking Ryan his rapist’s name. It always seemed like he had such a hard time talking about it anyway and Brendon didn’t want to pry.

There were a million questions tumbling through his head - none of which had easy answers but now he had even more of a reason to hate that prick, Marc Willis. Not that he needed another one. Marc Willis was a serial sex offender and evidently didn’t only attack down and out hookers but anyone who was weak enough to be manipulated – Ryan, when he was a teenager with a crush, Jon, who was just desperate enough for money that he forwent his usual morals and god knows how many other victims Marc targeted in his time.

Marc was kind of an abstract threat before today - he didn’t know Brendon’s name and Jon was one of thousands of guys with the same name in Manhattan alone - but now, the danger was very real. He was Ryan’s dad’s best friend; he was a part of Ryan’s life, whether Brendon liked it or not and he suddenly had to think of a way to deal with that.

He was terrified Marc would try and seek revenge on him - either by telling George and his family what Brendon used to do for a living or anonymously going to the press and selling him and Ryan out - Brendon didn’t want to put anything past that slimy motherfucker, god knows what he was capable of.

What if he did try and target Jon? Brendon wasn’t too worried about his own safety - Ryan had his back on that one - but Jon and Joe were still struggling for cash, living in that same shitty apartment and probably doing less than desirable things for money. It was a long shot, Brendon tried to tell himself, Jon was street-smart but it was still an uncomfortable thought at the back of his head.

And Ryan… Poor Ryan, having to hide a secret that big on his own all this time, unable to trust anyone enough to let them know. Brendon could understand why the man had grown up with so much apathy towards his family and anger at the world now. Ryan was full of self-loathing and Brendon never really got it - that desire to kill the pain inside him with booze and drugs and a lonely life surrounded with fake friends. After seeing how Marc turned up out of the blue to ruin the day and after witnessing Ryan in the midst of a full-blow panic attack, Brendon felt a little more understanding. He put his head in his hands and sighed - he just wanted to fall asleep, at least that way he’d get some kind of escape from his thoughts.

“Trouble in paradise, huh? That didn’t take long.”

The voice stirred him from his introspection and he looked up, blinking against the sunlight to see Shane stood up against the trunk of the car, smoking a cigarette. Brendon had no idea how long he’d been stood there, watching him mutter to himself on the top step, but the guy made him uncomfortable. He already didn’t really like Shane and the man made it more than obvious he wasn’t Brendon’s biggest fan either, so he decided not to answer. What the hell was there to say anyway?

“Everything alright in there?” Shane asked when his jibe was met with silence. He gave a nod towards the house.

Brendon gathered himself up. He had a strong desire to put Shane in his place, tell him to quit sticking his nose in places it wasn’t wanted and have some goddamn respect but he fell short.

“Ryan’s just…” Just what? Just telling his dad about the sexual abuse he suffered at the hands of a family friend more than a decade ago? “You know? I think he’s a bit stressed out.”

Shane rolled his eyes and tried not to smirk. “Ryan just being Ryan again, am I right? Bro, you better get used to these mood swings because they’re a regular thing.”

“It’s nothing I can’t deal with,” Brendon said, holding the man’s gaze - and that much was true,
regardless of what was currently happening, Brendon didn’t have any intentions of leaving Ryan high and dry.

Shane chuckled and took a drag off his cigarette. “That’s what I thought when I first started this job: *what’s a spoiled little rich kid gonna do that I can’t deal with?* I’m the guy’s *driver*, that’s my job title, man but he had me doing all sorts for him - buying drugs, sitting in the projects while he got high… picking up hustlers,” he finished with a raise of his eyebrows in Brendon’s direction.

Brendon wasn’t being drawn into this again, he was going to nip this conversation in the bud right now. “He always lined your pockets though, right? You didn’t do any of that shit for free.”

Shane tried to hold back another smirk. “The dude’s generous, I’ll give him that, even if he is a fucking asshole - but you already know how generous Ryan is with his money, don’t you, *Brendon*?” Shane sucked at his teeth, visibly irritated when Brendon made no effort to argue back - what was the point? It wasn’t going to get him anywhere and he had more important things to be worrying about than what Ryan’s *driver* thought of him.

“You ain’t shit, bro - Ryan’s gonna get bored of you and bored of being gay, just like he does of everything else and then he’ll kick your ass to the curb and you’ll be back in the gutter where you belong.”

“Says the guy who has to wait outside when I get to go in there and meet the family.” He offered the guy a simpering smile and held his glare for a few more seconds before turning away. Silence descended over them and after Shane finished his cigarette, he sloped away to sit back in the driver’s seat of the car. Brendon was thankful for the peace and quiet. He didn’t particularly want to talk to anyone right now, especially some judgmental homophobe who seemed intent on calling Brendon out on his past. He sat on the steps and reflected on the past few months of his life.

He was dating *Ryan Ross* and even on a good day, he had a hard time processing that. More than that, he was in *love* with the guy - a burning, deep desire and affection he never felt for anyone before - he was meeting Ryan’s family and experiencing a lifestyle he never even thought possible. Things changed so dramatically for him and after years of being in destructive relationships, he now had the promise of a bright future, with the son of one of the richest men in the world. It was a dream come true but perhaps that was the problem… *Maybe Shane was right?*

It all happened very fast - what if Ryan did get fed up of him? Where would he go? What would he do? He was *reliant* on the guy and if he was being honest, it bothered him. He knew the conclusions most people would jump to after finding out he had no money - people like Shane and William and Jacob… but he was in *love*. *How could he walk away?* He couldn’t make sense of it and he couldn’t rationalize it, but wasn’t that half the point? He’d never been able to make sense of the men he loved in the past, but for some reason, for a short while with both Dallon and Jon, it just *worked*.

He tried to tell himself that he shouldn’t worry about the future, that he should just enjoy it while it was happening and stop deeming himself unworthy of Ryan’s attentions. He tried to silence that voice in his head that agreed with everything Shane told him - they loved each other, that much was obvious, so why on earth was he already planning how he’d cope if it all went wrong? Because Brendon dared to dream big in the past and he’d always, *always* been left disappointed.

He hoped Ryan was talking to his dad - it was something that was long overdue and Ryan needed to share the weight of that burden with someone who could *do* something about it. A very selfish part of him wanted George to find out simply so the responsibility of what to do about that prick wasn’t solely in his hands anymore. Maybe it would be good for everyone to finally be on the same page, to stop the secrets and lies and just be honest about everything…
Brendon became restless, an hour passed slowly and the sun dipped behind the clouds. The air grew colder and Brendon shivered on the steps. Pamela came out to check on him, only disappearing when Brendon assured her for the third time he was okay and didn’t need anything to eat or drink. Jacob eventually left, only gracing Brendon with an acknowledgment through the window of his car as he kicked up gravel on the driveway. He guessed the party George had been so eager about was well and truly over.

He sat on the wide, marble steps for another half hour, mulling everything over in his mind and thinking about Ryan - about how wonderful it felt to tell the guy he loved him last night and how peaceful he always looked before waking up in the morning… By the time his thoughts were interrupted by the sound of the front door opening behind him, a subconscious smile started to pull at his lips - he had it bad for Ryan Ross. He really fucking loved him.

He turned, expecting to see his boyfriend but it was George looking - Brendon had to admit - like a complete wreck. His eyes were red, his shirt was disheveled and untucked as he stood at the top of the steps. George looked like he’d been crying and with one look, Brendon could tell he knew. He caught his breath and bit his lip as George started down the steps towards him.

“Ryan already told you?” he asked quietly, taking a seat beside him.

Brendon nodded - he wanted to assure George that he hadn’t known for long, that he never knew the dude’s name and he had, however briefly, tried to convince Ryan to tell someone in authority about what happened. He didn’t know how much Ryan told his father but he assumed George wouldn’t be sitting with him if he knew about his past. Maybe Ryan hadn’t told him his best friend was a repeat offender, not just some guy trying his luck one time with someone too young to stand up for himself. Marc had no remorse for anything and Brendon knew that had to be changed if any of them ever wanted to move on. “Ryan told me when we were in Tahoe.”

George Ross shook his head slowly. “I just can’t believe it - he kept it to himself all these years as that son of a bitch pretended to be my best friend. I was a fool not to figure it all out. It’s obvious now that I think about it.”

“It’s not your fault.” It came out almost as a squeak though and didn’t sound at all reassuring. Brendon reached out to squeeze George’s shoulder - it was a meager comfort for someone who just found out such awful news. A moment passed between them and then it was gone as soon as they both noted it.

George stood from his spot on the steps and started to descend the rest of the way. “Come with me,” he said, without turning back. Brendon watched him cross the driveway, the gravel crunching under his shoes. He glanced back at the house, hoping to see Ryan hiding at the window, but there was no one there. His heart started to pump - wherever George was going, Brendon would much rather curl up in bed with Ryan but he must’ve paused too long on the stairs because George turned back towards him and tipped his head in the direction of the garage. “You better come with me, Brendon or else I’m going to kill the bastard.”

The words did nothing to ease his nerves. He pushed himself up and followed George across the driveway - he was unsteady on his legs, they felt like they were about to give way underneath him as they approached a door at the side of the garage and entered into darkness.

When George turned on the lights, Brendon had never seen so many expensive cars all in one place before in his life - the Ross family’s garage was bigger than his parents’ house and full of Lamborghinis and Porsches, a Ferrari, a Bentley, a Bugatti… He looked around the space in a daze - the shiny, luxury vehicles all sparkling under the light. From the corner of his eye, Brendon counted a total of eleven cars and much to his mute excitement, George walked over to an Aston Martin DB5
and climbed in the front seat. *Motherfucking James Bond drove a car like this,* he thought with a distinct roll of excitement in his belly as he sat in the passenger seat.

It was moments like this when Brendon couldn’t comprehend the situation he was in at all - driving around with George Ross in a perfectly maintained James Bond car… Then he remembered the only reason they were doing this - because George said he might not be able to stop himself from killing Marc Willis if Brendon wasn’t there beside him. The nerves returned with a vengeance as they pulled out into the driveway and onto the main road.

Brendon began to suspect he made a mistake getting into the car with George. He’d been too nervous to refuse his demand and too determined to make a good impression - he really wanted George Ross to like him - plus, he kind of wanted to be there to watch Marc get his comeuppance.

They sped along the quiet country road at almost eighty miles an hour, each bump in the road sending Brendon’s heart rate skyward. He watched the speedometer climb - eighty five, ninety, ninety five miles an hour and he was in the passenger seat, putting his life in the hands of a man who’d just been told his best friend sexually abused his son. He dared a look over at the man to see him blinking tears out of his eyes.

Outside the window, the trees and fields flew past, blurring green and brown. Brendon glanced back at the speedometer - George’s driving was making him a little jittery. He was driving fast, too fast - almost one hundred and ten miles an hour along a winding country road. He didn’t know shit about expensive cars or how safe they were if you crashed them at more than fifty miles over the speed limit but he didn’t want to end up in any kind of collision, wrapped around a tree in the passenger seat of George Ross’ car.

“Mr. Ross? Perhaps you should slow down a second? Are you sure you want to do this right now? Maybe pull over and take a moment to breathe and think things through?”

George slammed his hand against the steering wheel. “I can’t believe it. I just can’t believe I didn’t put it all together. Why didn’t I figure it all out? How could I have been so ignorant?”

“Mr. Ross, look at the speed you’re going,” Brendon exclaimed. “You need to slow down and pull over.”

Thankfully, George did slow down - to about eighty miles an hour, which almost felt like a crawl after they’d bombed down the road at one hundred and ten - but he didn’t pull over. Brendon watched his knuckles turn white as he gripped the leather steering wheel, but he didn’t say anything, just silently fumed and slowly dropped the car down to the speed limit.

Brendon sat next to him, too anxious to start another conversation. He didn’t know this area, he had no idea where they were headed apart from ‘to confront Marc Willis.’ *This is all going to end so badly for me,* Brendon thought - they’d been tempting fate for so long now that even Brendon started to believe their lies. *Ryan was never a client, he never paid to fuck him, they met and fell in love - that’s all there was to it.*

“Is Ryan okay?” he asked after a little while.

“He’s asleep - quite understandably exhausted.” Brendon nodded in understanding - he knew, first hand, how an emotional, roller coaster of a day could really take it out of you.

“You must think I’m a terrible father not to notice something like that, not to ask questions all those times Ryan’s behavior made me suspicious. That asshole got away with it, because I was too busy working to take sufficient care of my boy. Jesus Christ, it’s my fault.” George’s voice wavered,
dangerously close to cracking and Brendon couldn’t watch another man cry. It was too painful.

He looked out the window at the passing mansions, homes with Bentleys and boats parked in the driveway - multi-million dollar properties that Brendon would always find something he didn’t like about them. They were all too big, not welcoming enough or just looked empty and cold.

“It’s not your fault. You never had any reason to suspect anything.” He glanced over at George, the man either wouldn’t or couldn’t look back at him. “You’re not a bad father - you love him, you helped him when he needed it. When I went back to Vegas, I was staying with my parents and…” He took a breath, unsure whether he should even go into that sorry business with George - it would definitely give the guy somewhat of an idea of his background.

For the first time since they got into the car, Ryan’s father looked over at him. “Carry on,” he prompted.

“They threw me out the house. I hadn’t come out before I left Vegas and for varying reasons I never went back there to visit them. My dad asked me to leave - they didn’t help me out, they didn’t give me any money or make sure I had a place to go, they never checked up on me and all because I’m gay,” he sniffed. He finished with a bitter laugh. “I mean, it’s not like I can help it.”

The two of them fell quiet and suddenly the car felt too warm, too stuffy and way too small. He could almost feel the heat rolling off his body. Brendon cracked the window to get some fresh air.

“What I’m trying to say is: you’re not a bad father - not by a long shot. My dad said I’m dead to him.” He felt his nose tickle with the emotion saying those words drummed up inside of him. “That’s not just a bad father that says that, that’s a seriously terrible person. It sucks to know that the people who brought me into the world now wish I wasn’t even alive.”

That was mostly to do with the fact he fucked Lydia’s perfect little husband - but George didn’t need to know that.

“I’m sorry about what happened with your parents. No one deserves to be treated like that. My first impression is that your mom and dad are missing out on calling a very fine young man their son. You make Ryan happy - you’re all good in my book.”

It was becoming hard to breathe. Brendon’s throat tightened until it was painful, his eyes were glassy with tears and he sniffed, trying to contain all his emotions. “I love Ryan - I know I don’t have any money and I can’t offer him anything but I really do love him, Mr. Ross.”

“Oh Brendon, people these days put too much importance on money and nothing else - I’m guilty of that myself - but you have so much more to offer each other. Don’t you ever forget that.”

Brendon looked down at where his hands folded in his lap and twisted his thumbs to stop himself from tearing up. Think happy thoughts, think happy thoughts, he told himself - it was tough, but after a few more miles of silence, he felt strong enough to look up at his surroundings. The car turned into a driveway and was now crawling along slowly - perhaps this was where Marc Willis was staying? The thought made his blood run cold - he’d been dreaming of getting revenge on Marc for months now but like this? He wasn’t sure he wanted any part of it.

They pulled up to an intercom in front of a large, cast iron gate and George wound down the window and pressed a couple of buttons. After a few seconds, a recognizable voice crackled through the speaker.

“Marc, it’s George. Hey, listen, I’m sorry about earlier - the party kind of fell apart so I thought I’d take you up on that game of golf. Crack open that nice whisky too, why don’t we?”
Brendon couldn’t really hear Marc’s reply but the gate opened and George drove forward. After a short silence, the man took his eyes off the road and looked over at him. “You got my back, right?” he said.

Brendon’s mouth was dry as he tried to answer. Words failed him, but he nodded. So long as you got mine, he thought as they drove through the quiet, private roads of a impeccably maintained estate, a row of small, neat houses either side of them - picket fences bordering each green lawn and blossoming flowers cascading from window boxes in each little home. It was a perfect, real life visual of a fairytale village - but it was very quiet, almost completely deserted. He hadn’t known quite what to expect, but it certainly wasn’t this - cookie-cutter homes with immaculate gardens. Was this where the bastard lived?

As they drove, George told him that after being asked to leave the Ross residence, Marc Willis claimed he was going to make the most of a wasted trip up to the Hamptons and go play a round of golf. He had a membership at Sebonack Golf Club, one of the priciest private clubs in the country - membership started at around half a million dollars, so it was only for really serious golfers with money to blow. Marc often left the city to spend a weekend at one of the numerous vacation homes that bordered the golf course. George knew the address, Marc always stayed in the same spot - much needed time away from the missus, he called it. Brendon cringed - he knew what that meant. He started to feel uneasy, he guessed it was all going to come out about his past as soon as Marc Willis saw him on his doorstep. Brendon just hoped George was too incensed with rage to listen to anything he said.

They pulled into a paved driveway and George turned off the engine, sitting in silence for a moment as he stared up at the house. Things could surely not get any worse for him than they were now - he was outside Marc Willis’s vacation home, he promised George he had his back and everything was soon to come tumbling down around them.

“Stay here,” George said as he got out the car without a second look back at Brendon. He guessed this was what he’d been dreaming of - revenge, a suitable punishment for the man who ruined the two men he cared about most - but he couldn’t help feeling apprehensive about the whole situation. George was not in the best frame of mind. What if he did something rash? What if he pushed it too far? Brendon wasn’t getting sent down for conspiring to murder this guy - some Wall Street suit killed by a hooker? No way.

“George,” he called, before the man shut the door. “Do you think this is a good idea - confronting him like this? Maybe you should take some time to just rest on it?”

George Ross looked back at him. “He hurt my son, Brendon. What would you do?” The car door slammed and Brendon was left in silence as he watched the man walk the rest of the way up the driveway and knock at the front door. George looked over his shoulder, checking his deserted surrounding for any nosy neighbors. Brendon did the same thing and he didn’t see anyone - when he turned back to look at the house, Marc was already at the door. He sank down as far as he could in the leather passenger seat - he really didn’t want Marc to spot him and start spouting off to George about his true colors.

For a moment, the two men looked like they were talking amiably enough. Brendon watched unsettled as Marc smiled, laughed and eventually stood back from the door to let George inside. Ryan’s father wasn’t even two steps into the house before he swung his fist - an uppercut - straight into Marc’s face. He didn’t hear the punch, but he heard the yell of surprise from Marc’s mouth, saw him hunch over, holding his nose, furiously trying to blink the vision back to his eyes.

George didn’t look like much of a fighter, so Brendon was surprised to see blood dripping through
Marc’s fingers onto the doorstep. The man stumbled back into the house, trying to push George away but the man forced his way inside - another punch before they both disappeared from view.

Brendon fumbled his seatbelt open in haste, springing from the car and up the driveway before he could even talk himself out of it. In the hallway, the two men scuffled - Marc was bleeding, trying and failing to land punches and George’s face was contorted in red, raw anger, fists swinging. Neither of them noticed Brendon stood on the doorstep, gaping at the scene in front of him.

“Is it true, motherfucker? I want to hear you admit it!” George had Marc by the collar of his shirt now, his knuckles red as he pushed the man up against the hallway wall.

The look on Marc’s face was one of pure, wide-eyed terror. Blood continued to drip from his nose, over his lips, staining his teeth as he talked. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” he spluttered. George shoved him back and Marc’s head knocked against the wall with a thud as he desperately tried to pull George’s wrists away. “You know exactly what I’m talking about, you sick fuck. You raped my son - he told me all about it. How could you? You were meant to be my friend.”

“He’s lying; he’s making it up for attention. Why would I do such a thing? I’m not even gay. Come on. Up until a few months ago I was married…”

“That quarter of a million dollars? You said that was for his sixteenth birthday.”

“It was!”

“It was hush money, stop bullshitting me. Why the fuck would Ryan lie about something like this?”

“I don’t know! George, for fuck’s sake, think about what you’re accusing me of.” Marc pushed George back with enough force that the man lost his grip on his collar. They both stood there, blinking at each other while Brendon looked on. “Why don’t we just take a moment to think about this rationally, buddy. Come on…”

“Don’t ‘buddy’ me, you lying prick - we are far from buddies… You raped him.” Brendon heard the crack in George’s voice, he saw him blinking his eyes a little faster, trying to clear the tears that threatened to spill from them.

Marc didn’t try to deny it, he wiped the blood from his nose, smearing it across his face – then he looked over at Brendon, his cold eyes moving down and back up his body. “What the fuck are you doing here? Is this all part of your grand plan, Brendon? How’s Jon, huh?”

Brendon felt himself shake - fear or anger, he couldn’t tell - but he was sensible enough not to answer back. Marc put his hands on his hips and looked around the hallway before settling his ugly gaze back on George. “I didn’t touch him,” he sighed. “Why the hell would I?”

“Deny it one more time, you bastard. I dare you.”

The man spat blood onto the wooden floor of the hallway. “I didn’t rape him - he wanted it.”

Brendon watched George’s eyes ignite, all his worst fears coming true in that one short moment. He couldn’t believe how much glee Marc seemed to be taking from all this, how little remorse the guy showed.

“Liar,” George breathed. “He was fifteen - and you took advantage of him. You hurt my boy and then acted like my best friend for years - no wonder he’s so messed up. How could you, Marc?”
“What was I meant to do, huh? He was practically falling all over me whenever we were alone together.”

George shook his head, refusing to believe Marc’s words. “So, you’re admitting it? It’s all true? He was a teenager with a crush, Marc…”

“Yeah, and do you ever wonder why that boy’s got daddy issues? You were never around - I was a better father figure to him than you ever were,” the man goaded.

Brendon could hear the blood pumping through his veins. Marc didn’t deserve any sympathy - whatever reservations he had about coming over here and confronting the prick before, flew out the window as he watched George’s closed fist swing out and connect with a crack against Marc’s cheekbone. The man almost howled, clutching his face and cursing as he tried to stumble away.

This is justice, Brendon thought as George landed another hit. This is where Marc finally gets what he deserves.

He fell back against the wall, dazed by the punch, his eyes already rolling in their sockets. George gripped Marc’s collar in his fists and held him up, spit flying from his mouth as he yelled in his face. “I thought you were a good guy, I trusted you. You came to my house today to fuck with him.”

Marc Willis wrapped his fingers around George’s wrists, weakly trying to force him away, but George was too strong and he looked possessed by an emotion that Brendon knew all too well - complete and utter hatred.

He crowded Marc against the wall and jabbed his knee hard between the man’s legs. Marc doubled over, grabbing at his crotch - then came another punch and another, the unmistakable crack of bone ringing in Brendon’s ears as Marc spluttered and slid to the floor with a groan. George stood astride him, his hair no longer neat and slicked back but falling into his eyes, his face red, his knuckles already seeping blood. He put his foot over Marc’s face. Brendon saw him press his weight down against what was most likely a broken cheekbone. Brendon was holding his breath, stood stiff in the doorway, unable to move.

“Listen here, you piece of shit. If you ever come around my family again, I will make your life a living hell. You got away with this for over ten fucking years and you better believe I’m making it my number one priority to make sure the world knows what kind of man you are.”

Marc’s arms and legs flailed and he pushed George’s foot away with a huff, scrambling to sit up and regain a little power over the situation. He failed, cowering on the floor as Marc stood over him - it was a grossly satisfying position to see him in.

“If I was you, Marc,” George sneered, getting right in the man’s face as Marc pulled away from him, “I’d do everyone a favor and put a gun to my head because that’s surely a better fate than the life you’ll face when this goes public.”

“Please,” Marc begged through a mouthful of blood and a busted lip. “George… It’s just a misunderstanding…”

Brendon never was a man who enjoyed violence against other people. It always seemed so senseless, so juvenile to use his fists against someone to solve his problems but this was like watching a car crash. Nothing could make him turn away - not when George’s foot connected with the man’s stomach and Marc’s eyes grew wide, a winded breath leaving his body as he curled up on the floor in the fetal position, his hands covering his face. Neither did Brendon look away when Ryan’s father straddled the man beneath him, sitting on his chest so he couldn’t escape, turned his hands into fists and pummeled Marc’s face, one fist after the other, until blood stained the wall and the floor beneath
them. Marc Willis stopped struggling after seven or eight hard punches. His body went limp and he gurgled though broken teeth, a bloody air bubble between his lips as George continued his assault.

Brendon was shaking - who knows how long he just stood there watching - but he suddenly startled. Marc wasn’t moving anymore, his face was bruised and swollen and his blood stained the front of George shirt. His neck and face - he looked like he killed the motherfucker…

“Mr. Ross,” Brendon called, his voice sounding alien as he spoke, higher than usual and full of fear. George carried on, caught in a blind rage, the tears streaming from his eyes. Brendon stepped forward, touching a gentle hand against George’s shoulder. “Mr. Ross, stop. I think - I think he’s done.”

Ryan’s father dropped his hands to his side and blinked in horror at what lay in front of him. “Oh my god,” he breathed. He gripped blindly for Brendon’s hand, his blood-slick fingers sliding straight through Brendon’s and back down to his side. “Shit.”

Marc’s body remained motionless on the floor and Brendon couldn’t tear his eyes away. He was still gaping at the bloody mess when George got up, dusted himself off and pushed his hair back from his face. “Come on,” he said, grabbing Brendon’s arm and pulling him backwards. “Let’s leave.” He stood, rooted to the spot as George tried to drag him to the door. “Brendon, come on. We got to get out of here.”

A few more seconds and then he turned away, following George back to the car, his hands shaking, his stomach twisting with a delayed sickness inside his belly. George pulled out the driveway and sped back along the main road at over one hundred miles an hour. Brendon didn’t mind the speed they were driving this time - he wanted to get the fuck away from the scene of the crime as quickly as possible. That and what he swore he’d seen only seconds before he turned away out of Marc Willis’s house - the man’s eyes blinking slowly and his chest rise and fall.
George and Brendon finished the drive back to the Ross mansion in silence. Brendon stared out the window at the millionaires’ yards passing by in a blur and bit his lip until he tore through the skin. The radio played, some jazz station muffled in the background, until George turned it off completely but the following silence rang loud in Brendon’s ears. He couldn’t get that one image out of his head - of Marc’s blood pooled around him on the floor of his hallway, gurgled from between his lips and seeping out his ears… That same blood still stained George’s hands - it was caked under his fingernails - his knuckles were raw and torn as he gripped the steering wheel and to say it made Brendon uneasy was an understatement.

Brendon felt like a character in a horror movie, a fool who’d run away before checking the villain was dead. He was so certain that he saw Marc still breathing, silently begging for help right before he turned away, that he couldn't stop thinking about it. He hadn’t imagined it, the man’s lips moved in an inaudible plea and he was breathing... but what of it? he asked himself, trying to shake the thoughts free from his mind.

This was karma. The cunt deserved it - but Brendon felt sick, nauseous, right to the very pit of his stomach at what he just witnessed. His heart hadn’t stopped pounding, his hands were clammy and shaking and he could taste the bile at the back of his throat. Jesus. George Ross absolutely lost it.

He tried to sort out the thoughts in his head. So what if Marc Willis was dead? If George killed the guy, did that make him an accomplice to murder? He suddenly saw his sweet little life with Ryan Ross falling irrevocably to shit - this really would be the final nail in the coffin for his parents. Their son - gay, a marriage wrecker and imprisoned for the murder of a Manhattan businessman… Brendon would get locked away and spend the rest of his life trying to defend himself against a prison full of men who were a lot tougher than him - but at least, he had his revenge, right?

But what if the bastard was still alive? Would he finally learn his lesson? Would Ryan be satisfied George beat the shit out of him and yet the man was still free to walk the streets? Would Brendon be satisfied with that? And how would Marc get his own revenge once he recovered? Would he spill the beans on Ryan and Brendon’s relationship? Would he go to the press revealing Brendon to be a whore? Go after Jon?

His mind was racing and it wouldn’t slow down. The one thing currently keeping Brendon sane was the thought that if Marc was still alive, if he somehow recovered from his beating in private, he would be too scared to report what happened because if he was to go to the cops, surely he’d have to explain why a long standing family friend suddenly turned up on his door to beat him half to death. Maybe that would keep him quiet - fear of ruining his public image and everyone finding out he was a monster.

That’s what Brendon was hoping for anyway, because he was beginning to tire of constantly watching his back, that feeling he always had on the peripherals of his mind that everything was going to come tumbling down around him and he’d be left with nothing - even less than what he started with.

Either way, Marc Willis was lying immobile, beaten on the floor of his vacation home and it scared Brendon how satisfying he found that fact.

George pulled the car into the driveway and made an abrupt stop on the gravel in front of the house. Brendon dared a glance over at him and then took a shuddery breath. It was a painful sight, George was crying - silent, wet tears leaked from his eyes - and he quickly tried to wipe them away when he
saw Brendon watching him.

He somehow felt connected to the guy - Brendon just witnessed Ryan’s father at his most fragile, his most emotionally volatile and he thought that somehow forged a bond between the two of them. He had to admit though, it wasn’t exactly how he pictured his first meeting with his new boyfriend’s father…

“Are you okay?” he asked after a moment.

George pulled a handkerchief out of his jacket pocket and blew his nose. “Not particularly,” he mumbled, still dabbing at his eyes.

Brendon looked out the window. He pulled at the torn skin on the inside of his lip with his teeth and wondered how Ryan would react to the news. Brendon honestly couldn’t gauge what the man’s reaction would be and it scared him. Ryan had been doing so well up in Tahoe and now, a couple of days after arriving back in New York, everything exploded in his face. Brendon was anxious to get back to the man. He was bone-tired - he felt like he could sleep for a year after a couple of painkillers and Ryan’s lips on his skin.

After another couple seconds, he shifted in his seat. “I should- I should go check on Ryan,” he said, cautiously reaching for the door handle. He didn’t know whether George expected him to hang around. “He’s probably wondering where I am.” He was almost halfway out of the car before George called him back.

“I’m sorry you were there to see that. I don’t know what came over me… I just lost sight of myself, I… I hardly even remember doing it.” He looked down at his torn knuckles, turning his hands over to stare at his blood-stained palms - then he looked back at Brendon. “You understand my reasons for doing what I did, don’t you?”

Brendon nodded - of course he did. Marc’s comeuppance was long overdue. “He deserved it,” he shrugged. “Karma.”

George cleared his throat. “You should uh… you should go make sure Ryan’s okay. I’ll deal with everything else, don’t you worry.” He tucked his handkerchief back inside his pocket and sniffed hard. “You got my back, right Brendon?”

His stress levels were off the charts - he really wanted to lie down and close his eyes for about a week or until all this blew over, at least. Trouble just seemed to follow him wherever he went. “So long as you got mine,” Brendon said, wetting his lips.

George Ross nodded in reply. “Brendon, that goes without saying. I promise. You don’t have to worry about this.”

That was easier said than done. George only knew about Marc’s attack on Ryan, he still had no idea about Brendon’s history with the man, that he’d been the one to ruin Marc’s marriage and through some sick twist of fate, had numerous run-ins with. Marc even mentioned Jon’s name back there… but perhaps that escaped George’s attention?

Brendon closed the car door and started towards the house, he heard Ryan’s father following shortly behind him and felt his pace slow until he was in step with the man. When they reached the front entranceway, George placed a strong hand on Brendon’s shoulder and squeezed.

“If anything comes of this, you had nothing to do with it. You weren’t even there, okay? This is on me and me alone. I got it all under control,” he reassured. “I only ask one thing from you?”
“What’s that?”

“You need to try and convince Ryan to go to the police and make a statement about this. Ryan’s stubborn as hell and I don’t think he’ll listen to me, but you’re different - he trusts you.” George’s eyes were still red and watery.

Brendon swallowed - he knew that wouldn’t be an easy task, but it was a small price to pay considering George just promised to protect his name. “I’ll try my best, Mr. Ross.”

“Christ. Call me George, for god’s sake,” the man exclaimed, gripping Brendon’s shoulders and giving him a gentle shake and much to Brendon’s surprise - and discomfort - George Ross pulled him into his chest and sighed over his shoulder. The man sounded like he needed a hug, a little reassurance that what happened ten years ago wasn’t his fault, so Brendon closed his arms loosely around him and gave him a pat on the back. It felt a little weird, but Brendon could deal - even the strongest of men needed a little emotional support every now and then.

“You’re a good kid. I’m glad you’re here, Brendon. Ryan’s a different person since he met you.” He pulled back from the hug quickly and straightened himself up before he opened the front door. Brendon swayed on the spot for a couple of moments in surprise before he followed the man indoors - a couple of hours after meeting Ryan’s father and he already felt more appreciated than the whole month he was living with his parents.

George nodded at the staircase. “Go see how he’s doing. I’m going to get cleaned up and then I’ll speak to Pamela - if Ryan wants to come talk to me, tell him he’s more than welcome. I’m here for him - and you, if ever you need to chat.” The man removed his jacket and loosened his tie, walking away towards the bathroom with an unmistakable slump to his shoulders.

The time it took Brendon to get to the top of the staircase seemed to pass by in slow motion. He was eager to check on Ryan, draw the man into his arms and reassure him everything was going to be okay. Ryan didn’t answer after Brendon knocked the door - he was probably still asleep and, sure enough, when Brendon entered the room, he saw him sprawled out on the bed where he left him, tangled in the sheets and breathing softly.

It was approaching evening and dusky orange light spilled in from the window, streaking across the bed covers and over Ryan’s long limbs - illuminating him, his face soft with sleep, his chest slowly rising and falling as Brendon watched him.

He felt that roll in his stomach, the swell of his heart that he once felt with both Jon and Dallon - but not like this, this was that feeling magnified. He felt consumed by it, as if his love was too strong to be contained within his body and started to radiate out of his pores. It seems cliché, Brendon thought to himself, but when he looked at Ryan, his troubles melted away.

He walked over to the bed and kicked off his shoes, slowly removing his clothes until he was down to his briefs. He felt so grimy after witnessing Marc’s beating that he was glad to be rid of them. He climbed onto the bed beside Ryan and snuggled into his side, waiting for his breathing to hitch when he stirred beside him.

Ryan groggily raised his head and squinted over at him. “It’s you,” he mumbled. He remembered how disappointed Jon always sounded when he arrived home - in Ryan’s voice though was nothing but relief.

“It’s me…” Brendon soothed, stroking along the man’s jaw. He took it upon himself to lean over him and join their lips. They kissed, there was heat and and the comfort that he belonged. “I love you. You’re beautiful, Ryan. I love you.”
Brendon could still feel his muscles jittering under his skin, his heart beating out of time as their bodies pressed against each other on the bed. Ryan was still fully clothed, warm from his nap with the creased imprints of the bedsheets on his cheek. Brendon felt the desperation behind Ryan’s kiss, he could feel his body arching up underneath him as they made out. It was a minute later when Brendon pulled back and rested his forehead gently on Ryan’s.

“You can wake me up like that more often,” Ryan smiled - his eyes were still sad, bloodshot and ringed with red. Brendon pecked his nose in response. “How long was I asleep?”

Brendon settled down into the crook of Ryan’s arm. “An hour. Maybe two,” he shrugged. “Your dad’s downstairs talking to Pamela.”

Ryan’s muscles stiffened slightly, but he gave a nod. Brendon wanted to scoop him up into his arms and whisper into his ear that he was loved and cared for and never let him go. He felt it now more than ever - he was so in love, he found that fairytale romance he’d always been searching for. He realized he made some poor decisions in the past - he followed his heart, not his head but this time, with Ryan, he felt they were both finally aligned. For the first time in his life, Brendon felt he found his place in the world - and it was right here, lying in Ryan’s bed, warm and content despite everything that led him there.

He pulled the covers up around their bodies. “Are we going to stay here tonight?”

“I think so. I can’t face the drive back to the city right now. Plus, my dad would probably be upset if we both left… Did you talk to him when I was asleep?”

Brendon pulled the bedsheets up even further until they covered his mouth. “A little bit. He’s really upset; he blames himself for not being around more when you were a kid…” He wanted to tread lightly regarding what just happened at Marc Willis’s vacation home, but Ryan didn’t seem interested in hearing it anyway. He rolled over on top of Brendon and kissed down his neck.

“I don’t want to talk about that right now… I was thinking, maybe we can hang around here for a couple of days? It’s quieter out here than it is in Manhattan and my parents will probably leave tomorrow evening to go back to the city. We can go skinny-dipping in the lake. We can fuck on the patio…” he suggested, sucking at Brendon’s collarbone.

“Sounds perfect,” Brendon sighed as Ryan’s lips moved down, lower, around his nipple then toward his belly button. A beautiful lakeside mansion in the Hamptons or a multi-million dollar penthouse on the Upper East Side - it didn’t make any difference to Brendon. So long as they were together.

Ryan’s mouth stopped just shy of the waistband of Brendon’s underwear. He smiled against his ear. “When we get bored of it up here, I’ll take you on vacation. Anywhere you want to go. We can do it all; we can see the world together. I’ll take you to Venice and Rome and Paris; we can go to the Caribbean and laze around on a beach all day - I bet you’d look hot in a tight little pair of Speedos.”

Ryan hid his smile against Brendon’s collarbone. “Where d’you fancy, sunshine?”

Brendon gently pushed Ryan back to smile at him, letting his hand rub along his jaw and into his hair, his fingers carding through the curls. “Well… there’s this one little place in Tahoe that I simply love,” he replied with a grin. “It’s the most romantic place I’ve ever been - and it’s crazy beautiful up there too.”

Another soft kiss as Ryan cradled Brendon’s face between his hands. “We can make that place our home, if you’d like? I’m sure my dad would give us the place. Or we can go house hunting, choose somewhere together. I’ll sell my apartment in New York - we could probably buy us a nice place in Tahoe and a couple cute vacation homes.”
“Do you think people are going to tell you that you’re moving too fast with me?” Brendon asked him. He told Ryan before, he didn’t expect gifts or special treatment - but secretly, deep down inside his heart, Ryan’s excitement about their future together thrilled him.

“Do you feel like we’re moving too fast?”

No. Brendon shook his head.

“Then who gives a shit? Come on, I want to spoil you. I want to restart my life with you - let me make a fuss over you and take you on vacation. It’s what I want for the both of us and you, more than anyone, deserve to get away for a couple of weeks.”

Brendon felt his heart melt. He pulled Ryan in for another kiss. “How are you feeling?” he asked.

Ryan sighed. “Man… Like I can live my life again. Like I can say I finally did the right thing and I can be honest about who I am and why I did the stuff that I did. I feel free, Brendon and it feels wonderful. I mean, I still feel shitty and angry and the fact you and that fucking asshole knew each other…” Ryan looked away from Brendon’s eyes, shaking his head. “That’s my worst nightmare - but it doesn’t make me think any less of you. It just makes me hate him more than I ever thought possible.”

“If I’d have known, I’d have told you.”

“I know you would.”

“Your dad wants you to go to the cops. He wants you to file a report.”

Ryan shook his head. “I want him dead, Brendon - he doesn’t deserve to live after what he did to you… and to Jon and fuck knows how many other guys’ lives he ruined.”

Brendon took a deep breath. Ryan wanted Marc dead - maybe he got his wish? Ryan stretched on the bed, pushing his hips up until they caught Brendon’s eye. “It’s been a long day and I feel gross - you fancy taking a bath together? My head’s killing me,” he said, offering his hand.

Brendon wrapped Ryan’s fingers in his own. “Now that sounds like a great idea.”

Before they left the attic, Brendon grabbed Ryan by the waist and pulled their bodies together, backing Ryan slowly up against the wall. “I’m proud of you for talking to your dad. That took a lot of courage. Whatever happens,” Brendon said, looking into Ryan’s eyes, “I’m going to be here for you. Whenever you’re down, I want you to talk to me about it and I’ll try my absolute best to make certain you get through it. Okay?”

Ryan flashed him a smile that implied he was trying hard not to cry. “Let’s just have tonight. Sometimes you talk about something so much, it becomes exhausting - the same thing over and over, it just gets to a point where there’s nothing more to say, y’know?”

Brendon nodded. He knew - that’s how he felt about his entire life so far. Ryan led Brendon by the hand towards the bathroom and as soon as the door closed behind them, it didn't take them long to join in another heated kiss, stripping each other from their clothes as Brendon finally felt himself relax.

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The marble bathtub was big enough to comfortably fit the two of them and Ryan sighed in satisfaction as he felt his muscles slowly relax in the warm water. Mentally, he still felt a little shaken
up from the day’s events, a little jittery and breathless - the same way he felt as a child when things
got too much for him - but the bubble bath and the man he was sharing it with were doing a good job
at soothing those woes.

Brendon sat between Ryan’s legs with his back against his chest, his eyes closed and Ryan watched
him, trying to take in each subtle detail of his face and body - the beautiful boy who promised to stick
by him. He matched their breathing and rested his head back - he didn’t think it was possible to feel
this calm without drugs. A hefty weight had been removed from his shoulders and Ryan felt at peace
- as if he finally laid his final demon to rest.

Around the side of the tub, scented candles gave the room a warm, comfortable glow and classical
music played through the in-wall speakers - some piano piece Ryan first remembered hearing coming
from his father’s study when he was a kid. It was a pretty piece, but he didn’t know the composer.
He always instantly hated everything his dad liked when he was younger.

“Claude Debussy,” Brendon informed him with a sigh. “Clair de Lune - it’s the French phrase for
‘moonlight’ if what my music teacher told me was correct, inspired by a poem of the same name. I
had to play it for a piano recital once. My entire family was there and it was always my mom’s
favorite piece - I was so nervous, I fucked up the entire thing and they failed me. I started crying.
Damn, I was such a nerd in school.”

Ryan bit his lip to hold back a laugh and trailed his fingertips down Brendon’s arm, linking their
fingers under the surface of the water. “A pianist too, huh? There’s still so much I don’t know about
you, isn’t there? Do you have any other talents you’re hiding from me?”

The man chuckled, resting his head back on Ryan’s shoulder as Ryan sucked kisses against the skin
of his neck. “You mean great head and spouting off random facts about dead composers isn’t enough
for you? I also make a mean carbonara.”

“Come off it,” Ryan scoffed. “I know you can’t cook for shit.”

“Hey!” Brendon jabbed his elbow back, catching Ryan in the ribs and making him squirm. “You
watch your mouth. One more mean word out of you and I’m gonna have to shut you up.” Brendon
turned around, knelt between Ryan’s legs and gripped his face in his hands. His lips hovered a
couple of inches above Ryan’s, his eyes glinted in the candlelight - Ryan felt his heart swell with
emotion. Brendon was breathtaking and he was all his. He felt like the luckiest guy in the entire
world.

“Oh yeah? Sounds fun… you’re an awful cook, Brendon Urie. One of the worst.”

Brendon looked down at him seriously. “You’re right, I am a crappy cook… but I do
an awesome tossed salad.”

Ryan cracked up as Brendon’s lips touched his. His stomach surged into his throat - he never
believed those love songs he grew up listening to until now. He wrapped his arms around the boy’s
waist and pulled their bodies together, still laughing. He felt his cock harden against Brendon’s
stomach as they kissed - fuck, they kissed like never before. Ryan braced his feet against the edge of
the bathtub and Brendon moved into his lap – bucking his hips up, his hard dick sliding against
Brendon’s as they thrust against each other. Still, they didn’t break their kiss.

“I love you,” Ryan mumbled against Brendon’s lips when he pulled away for long enough.

Brendon whispered it back. “I love you too, Ryan. So much.”
He still couldn’t describe how good it felt to hear those words. “Thank you,” Ryan almost choked. “For today, I mean. It means a lot…”

Brendon shook his head with a smile. “That’s what I’m here for, baby. I’m not going to quit on you - not ever. You can trust me.” He gave Ryan’s nose a gentle peck and then settled back against the opposite side of the bath. Ryan slipped his feet between the boy’s legs and they lazed in the tub for over an hour, refilling it with more hot water when needed and talking in hushed tones about their future together.

Ryan already told Brendon he wanted to show him the world, but the guy wasn’t used to having someone around to take care of him and Ryan didn’t want to come on too strong and overwhelm him. In their quieter moments, however, Ryan couldn’t help himself from fantasizing about it – him and Brendon on a private beach in the Bahamas together or at some boutique hotel room in Paris, ordering room service every night, hardly leaving the hotel room because they’d be so caught up in each other… He wanted to show Brendon all the cities he loved most in the world - they’d stay at the best hotels and dine at the finest restaurants and Ryan would do it all with Brendon proudly by his side. He wasn’t afraid to live any more; Brendon coming into his life sculpted his whole future into something he was no longer scared of.

When the water turned cold again, Brendon stood up and wrinkled his nose. Ryan watched the water run down his chest and stomach and off the end of his dick - his shoulders were still lathered with suds, his skin slick and wet. Goddamn.

“My fingers look like prunes,” Brendon claimed. “We should get out and dry off. We got a good view of the stars from that attic window, huh?”

They did indeed. They were still the same stars Ryan grew up wasting wishes on but they seemed infinitely brighter with Brendon by his side. A couple months ago, he’d have rolled his eyes at a lover suggesting something so mundane - stargazing… how predictably romantic - but now? Now, Ryan would throw a lasso around each and every one of those beautiful stars and pull them out of the sky if it made Brendon smile.

Ryan shifted onto his knees in the tub and braced his hand on Brendon’s hips. The man’s pink dick hung half hard between his legs, inches in front of Ryan’s mouth. Ryan blinked up at him and attempted to clear his throat. “Can I suck you off?”

“I dunno,” Brendon teased. “Can you?”

A grin pulled at Ryan’s lips and he took it as the challenge it was intended to be. He closed his mouth around Brendon’s cock and started to suck. He didn’t taste much like anything - just water and clean skin - as Ryan hollowed his cheeks around the man and tried to pace himself. There was something so arousing about being on his knees for Brendon - if he could look even half as desirable sucking cock as Brendon did then he’d be stoked.

Ryan repeated all the tricks he learned from him, a mixture of sucking and kissing and gentle biting until Brendon’s head fell back with a sigh. With no encouragement - save for Brendon’s hot moans - Ryan slowly opened his throat and took him to the hilt. Brendon was kind enough to keep his hips still.

The man cursed above him, his fingers gripping at Ryan’s wet hair. Ryan pulled back just in time to stop himself from gagging. He looked back up at Brendon and wiped his mouth. “So… can I?”

“Yeah.” Brendon’s hand cradled his cheek. He smiled down at him, this dopey, lovestruck grin on his face that made Ryan’s stomach flutter. “You really can.”
The two of them climbed from the tub and wrapped themselves in warm, fluffy white towels. Ryan peered around the doorframe to check if the coast was clear and his mom or dad weren’t milling about - because that’d be a mood killer - and then they ran hand in hand, back to the comfort of the attic.

A bedside lamp gave the space a romantic glow and much to Ryan’s delight, it was a clear night. The attic window gave them a perfect view of the stars and the crescent moon reflected in the lake. They surveyed them together for a couple of moments; Ryan spied off what he knew about the constellations, which admittedly wasn’t much and Brendon pretended to be impressed. When he ran out of stuff to say, Ryan found himself staring at the man beside him, trying to engrain that very moment into his memory - he felt so free, so fortunate. He lived his entire life having everything he wanted handed to him on a plate and he never appreciated any of it until now.

They moved to the bed, the moonlight peeking in through the window and soon, they were a tangle of limbs under the sheets - making out, breathing heavily and touching wherever they could get their hands on. Brendon’s lips moved down Ryan’s neck, ghosting over his skin - he moved lower, sucking on his nipples, pressing wet kisses down the length of his stomach until his mouth was in line with his cock.

Ryan was hard, of course and when Brendon’s tongue touched the head of his dick and licked away his pre-come, he let his eyes flutter shut - he felt like he’d been waiting for this moment for hours and his entire body was aching for release. Brendon took him into his mouth and started slowly, his head bobbing up and down between Ryan’s legs, his tongue swirling around the head of his dick.

Ryan did not possess the same decorum and patience Brendon displayed in the bathroom - Ryan pressed his hand against the back of Brendon’s head and thrust his hips up until his dick hit the back of the boy’s throat - that seemed to kick-start things. Within seconds, Brendon was sucking his cock like he had the first night they met, deep-throating him like the pro he was. Brendon had a mouth like a vacuum - it felt like he was sucking Ryan’s nuts up through the shaft of his cock.

Brendon stuck with it for a couple more minutes and Ryan was sure he would’ve continued until he finished in his mouth, but Ryan was getting a little too close to climax and he really didn’t want their night to end just yet. He uttered a weak warning and pushed the boy back, but Brendon wasn’t giving up that easily.

“I could come just listening to the sounds you make when I suck your cock,” the boy groaned, going straight back to what he was doing. Ryan allowed him to continue, biting his lip and tensing his muscles in an attempt to stop his orgasm.

“Brendon… babe, I don’t wanna come just yet,” he moaned when he felt Brendon’s tongue on his balls. Brendon pulled away with a moan and wiped his mouth; he followed the same trail of kisses back up Ryan’s body and then straddled his hips. His mouth was red and wet, his eyes were barely open as he thrust against him. Ryan reached his hands around to grab Brendon’s ass and slipped his dick between the boy’s ass cheeks.

“I hope to fuck you brought something you can lube me up with because otherwise I’m going to be sore in the morning,” Brendon rolled his hips forward and his hard dick left a trail of pre-come on Ryan’s belly. Ryan’s own cock was already throbbing, slick and wet with Brendon’s spit, trapped between the tight clench of the boy’s buttocks.

Of course, he brought lube. Before Marc turned up and ruined everything, Ryan planned on sneaking away with Brendon and fucking him around the side of the house or in his old childhood bedroom as he gave him the grand tour. Hell, he had a sexy, super-hot and totally irresistible boyfriend - he wasn't going anywhere unprepared.
Brendon was sucking on his neck. “Lube’s in the inside pocket of my jacket, hanging up on the back of the door.”

Ryan felt him pout. “Why does it gotta be so far away?”

Regardless, the boy hopped off the bed and returned with the bottle, his fingers already coated in the stuff. He put one foot up on the bed and pulled his dick out the way with his free hand. Reaching back between his legs, Brendon started to finger his ass - Ryan had a pretty sweet view from his position on the mattress… It was sinful and erotic to watch, but it wasn’t what Ryan felt he needed right now.

“Hold up a second,” he heard himself say. “Come here. Lay down next to me.”

Brendon did as he was told and Ryan’s heart rate started to pick up. He was so nervous, but it wasn’t the usual anxiety he dealt with - it was adrenaline pumping through his veins. Ryan spread his legs a little on the mattress and slowly directed Brendon’s hand between them - Brendon looked confused for a moment and his fingers faltered for a second before Ryan felt them press against his taint. He shifted a little more and Brendon’s hand slipped further, digits pressing gently around his asshole.

“Do you want me to finger you, huh?”

Ryan took a second to catch his breath and licked his lips. “I want you to fuck me.”

He watched Brendon’s expression fall to one of concern and he really hoped he hadn’t read the situation wrong - he hadn’t stopped thinking about it since Brendon left for Las Vegas. He wanted this - more than anything else, he wanted Brendon to fuck him. “I want to know how good it can be. I’m tired of associating it with pain.”

Brendon fell forward on top of him and nestled his head in the crook of Ryan’s neck. “I never topped before,” he sniffed. Ryan stroked at the back of his hair.

“Are you sure you want to try this tonight? You know, after everything? We can wait…”

Ryan had never been more sure - he wanted Brendon to top him and not just because he wanted the memory of that one time with Marc to be replaced with something sweeter and more loving, but because the idea aroused him. He wanted to be fucked. He wanted Brendon to make love to him and screw him slowly, until he saw stars. He wanted to know how a proper prostate orgasm felt at the hands of another man.

“I want this,” he said, determination in his voice. “And I want it to be with you.”

Brendon nodded and pressed a kiss against the side of Ryan’s mouth. He sighed and closed his eyes when he felt Brendon’s finger rubbing at his hole, slipping it inside, barely just the tip. He moved it in and out and it was a strange sensation, but it wasn’t particularly unpleasant - still though, Ryan couldn’t stop himself from tensing up. Brendon’s finger was only knuckle deep, but it was an intrusion he couldn’t help feeling nervous about.

“Relax,” Brendon soothed. “You’re positive you want to do this?”

“Yeah. You’ll talk me through it, right?” Ryan choked out a moan as Brendon’s finger slipped
deeper - he’d used a liberal amount of lube and it actually felt pretty damn good.

“Of course, I will. You’re in safe hands - I know how to make taking a dick as comfortable as possible, trust me.”

Ryan pushed Brendon’s damp hair away from his eyes. “I want to feel you inside me tonight - but slowly… and you’re probably gonna have to use that entire thing of lube.” He managed a breathless laugh as he felt Brendon’s finger flex inside him.

“We can take it as slow as you want, baby,” Brendon breathed against his ear. “And I’ll lube you up nice and good, don’t you worry.”

“So, you want to?” Ryan asked cautiously. He guessed he was still nervous - the worst thing that could happen right now is that Brendon admitted he really didn’t want to fuck him, it wasn’t his thing or he thought it wasn’t the right time, but Brendon laughed and the sound put all of Ryan’s fears to rest.

“Of course I do, dummy, this is a big deal for both of us - but just as a fair warning, this will be the first time I ever topped anyone, so don’t be surprised if I nut really quick. You’re tight around my finger, I can’t imagine how you’ll feel around my dick.” Brendon raised his eyebrows at him and flashed Ryan that smirk that just about killed him. The mouth on that boy - that straight-up dirty talk made Ryan’s balls tighten.

Brendon nuzzled his nose into Ryan’s neck and slowly removed his finger. “Hey, this kinda feels like we’re losing our virginity to each other, huh?

Ryan caught his breath. “Yeah,” he sighed - and it kind of did. He felt like a virgin - that weird mixture of trepidation and excitement making his heart pound in all the right ways. Brendon slipped his finger back inside him and Ryan closed his eyes - he was going to concentrate on the pleasure - try and put everything that had happened to ruin the day to the back of his mind.

Brendon pulled out all the stops to please him. He fingered Ryan slowly at the same time he sucked his cock and it felt incredible - he didn’t know why he waited so long to ask Brendon to do this… After that, the man pulled him onto all fours, buried his face between his ass cheeks and rimmed him for close to fifteen minutes, Brendon’s tongue replaced by his finger each time he pulled away.

Foreplay was still a reasonably new experience for Ryan - he was usually good to go after a quick blowjob - but the time Brendon was taking to fully turn him on and how cautious and gentle the guy was being with him too brought Ryan to a whole new level. By the time Brendon pushed him over onto his back and attempted to slip a second finger inside him, he was wound-up and eager enough that he made very little protest. It was slightly more of a stretch, but the discomfort lasted only a few moments before the pleasure returned.

“How d’you feel?” Brendon asked, when after what seemed like an agonizingly slow process and a whole lot more lube than Ryan ever used on Brendon, he was finally two fingers deep, fucking him easily, loosening him up for another.

Ryan managed to open his eyes and nod breathlessly down at him. “Feels good.” And it did feel good - not nearly as bad as he thought it would be. Christ, he needed Brendon closer though; he wanted to feel the warmth of his skin against his - having to watch Brendon sat up between his spread legs just wasn’t cutting it. He felt too far away.

Ryan pulled the man in for a slow kiss. He felt Brendon’s fingers flex inside him and all of a sudden, there it was, that feeling, that indescribable warmth at the bottom of his stomach, shooting
through his dick and balls and ass - that lightning bolt of arousal followed by the slow burn of pressure on his prostate. He shamelessly cried out, arching his back and Brendon pressed his mouth against his ear.

“How about now, gorgeous? Does that feel better than good?”

Ryan couldn’t form the words. He nodded desperately and pressed his hand over his eyes. Brendon didn’t let up with the pressure on his prostate and it was driving Ryan crazy - no wonder Brendon was always so eager to get properly prepped.

“If God didn’t want us to be gay then why would he put the male G-spot up our ass, huh?” He felt Brendon’s finger swirl around that spot, again and again and shit… his whole body broke out in goosebumps, his jaw was already starting to shake as he tried to bite back his orgasm. He felt like he’d died and gone to heaven. When Brendon pulled away and his lips closed around the head of Ryan’s cock it was almost too much. The pleasure spread through his entire body and made him shiver.

Brendon worked up to three fingers within the next ten minutes - three was demonstrably more painful than two and it took a few stops and starts before the man was able to push them in and out without Ryan’s body putting up too much of a protest. They kissed and touched each other and every time he thought about what was currently happening to him, Ryan felt the urge to tear up - he never thought he was worthy of love until now. He loved and trusted Brendon like no other and it was an overwhelming realization. This was a huge step for him and he never imagined he’d be able to go through with it until a few days ago.

Three fingers slowly turned into three plus Brendon’s thumb and Ryan’s cock was throbbing between his legs. This was something bordering on spiritual and soon, he was feeling desperate enough that he caught Brendon’s eye and decided he needed to move things along - Brendon’s slow teasing was driving him mad.

“I’m ready now,” he whispered. “I want it.”

Brendon pulled his hand away and sat up between Ryan’s legs - he looked a little dazed himself.

“You want me to wear a condom?”

Ryan shook his head. No, that wouldn’t be necessary.

“It’s best if you’re on your side and I’m behind you, but if you want to do it facing each other, we can.” Brendon began to lube up his dick and Ryan shifted onto his left hand side. “It’ll hurt a little bit at first - it always does - but I’ll be as gentle and slow as you want me to be and we can stop anytime you want.”

Ryan nodded and swallowed, he felt Brendon get into position behind him - he sure felt like a virgin now, a kid who was determined not to let his tribulations get the better of him. It’s going to be totally different this time, he told himself. Brendon loves you, the last thing he wants to do is hurt you. Ryan closed his eyes as Brendon lifted his leg up, giving him better access to his ass - more lubrication, a few more minutes of slow fingering and some sweet nothings whispered in Ryan’s ear before he could feel the head of Brendon’s dick against his hole.

“Relax,” the man soothed. Ryan wasn’t even aware he was tensing up. He took a breath and let it out shakily. “Trust me, I know how you can make this easier on yourself. Breathe - in and out, in and out - try and let the tension drain from your body.” The two men breathed together for a few moments. Ryan let each of his limbs go slack against the mattress - this would probably be easier with drugs, he thought to himself. “Now,” Brendon whispered when he felt Ryan’s muscles relax,
“bear down on me - *that’s it* - and we can take it slow.”

He felt Brendon’s cock push into him not even an inch before he cried out and grabbed a hold of Brendon’s arm. *Holy shit, was it uncomfortable* - even being fucked with four fingers hadn’t prepared him for a real dick.

Brendon pulled out and then back in, each time slipping a little further in. Ryan bit his lip and screwed up his face and Brendon kept having to remind him to breathe - he’d be lying if he claimed it didn’t hurt, because it *did* and not only that, but it was a strange feeling to get used to. However, with each passing moment, Ryan knew they were closer and closer to his fantasy - the pain was actually kind of addictive and he was so mentally aroused that it overrode everything else.

At one point, Brendon pushed in a little too quick. “Fuck!” Ryan cried. He immediately felt his body tense up at the intrusion. “Slower.”

“Sorry, my bad.” Brendon kissed his shoulder and wrapped his hand around Ryan’s cock, soothing him and waiting patiently until Ryan nodded for him to continue.

It took a long time for Brendon to slip his dick all the way inside him - more stops and starts than Ryan would’ve liked to admit and continual encouragement from Brendon that he was doing okay. The man stalled his movements until Ryan felt comfortable enough to let him continue and then he started to fuck him. The groan that Brendon let out against his shoulder was incentive enough not to ask him to stop just yet and after a minute or two, Ryan’s pain was now mixed with a weird pleasure he never experienced before - having his ass filled and his dick played with at the same time, Brendon’s chest up against his back, his hot breath at his neck…

“Christ, Ryan… you’re so tight, you feel so good - oh man…” He let the man’s moans spur him on. He was still moving slowly in and out, in and out, his hand sliding up and down Ryan’s dick with his movements.

Ryan didn’t know who needed to take it slower - him or Brendon. A couple of times during the first couple of minutes, Brendon had to stop completely and suck in a breath. The idea that he felt so good, a man like *Brendon* was finding it difficult to last more than five minutes with him, filled Ryan with the oddest sense of pride. He felt beautiful and sexy and desirable and it wasn’t long before he felt the pain disappear, replaced by nothing but white hot heat at the base of his dick as Brendon slipped easily in and out of him. He let his head fall back against Brendon’s shoulder and shuddered as the boy sucked at his neck.

“This feels good,” Ryan gasped.

“Too good,” Brendon replied, almost with a whine. “Fuck Ryan, I’m gonna… Shit…” Brendon pulled out quickly, grabbing at the base of his cock. Ryan cried out at the sudden loss and rolled over onto his back - he didn’t want it to be over yet, they only just got started.

“Did you come?” Ryan didn’t think he had, but Brendon looked absolutely *undone*.

“Not quite… I might need a second though.” Brendon moved between Ryan’s knees and hooked his legs over his shoulders. They kissed as Brendon pushed back inside him - in this position, he slid in deeper and it was a weird sensation at first but Brendon was also able to hit his prostate and *that* feeling made the entire thing worth it.

Ryan felt his muscles being wound tighter and tighter and he gripped Brendon’s shoulders as the boy fucked him - it was a comfortable rhythm, faster than before and Brendon caught that spot every single time.
The man was sweating, his chest and forehead slick with perspiration. They watched each other and moved in sync, every breath and groan Ryan made was read perfectly by Brendon, who did exactly what Ryan wanted without even being told. He could feel that burn of arousal deep inside him, flowing through his bones as Brendon leaned forward to whisper in his ear. “You’re doing really well. You’re a natural at this - I wish you knew how incredible you feel…”

Ryan laughed, his hand stroking through Brendon’s hair. Holy shit, he felt good - each thrust of Brendon’s hips pushed him closer toward orgasm, he felt his toes curl and his chest tighten and Brendon buried his face against his shoulder.

“I can’t last much longer, Ryan. Can - oh shit - can I come inside you, baby?”

Fuck - the question almost tipped him over the edge. He screwed up his eyes and arched his back, nodding his head as his jaw trembled. The idea of taking Brendon’s load up his ass made his balls tighten.

Brendon wrapped his hand around Ryan’s cock and began jerking him off - the pressure on his prostate, the stretch and slide of Brendon’s cock inside him, the look on the man’s face as they fucked… everything aligned and Ryan started to tremble.

Brendon was panting in his ear, groaning out curse words peppered with Ryan’s name. He felt his body clamp up tight and then - release. Perfect, beautiful, blinding release.

Ryan came - pumps of come shooting out of his dick as Brendon rode out inside him with a moan. He felt like they both left the earth together for a split second - he saw stars and when he came back down, it was a few seconds before he was aware of Brendon’s hot come inside him as he gently fucked him through the aftershocks.

Ryan still felt a little giddy when Brendon pulled out, he blinked the stars from his eyes and shivered when he felt the boy collapse down next to him and sigh. “That, my love, was something else…” Brendon sighed, drawing patterns on Ryan’s chest with his fingertips. Ryan could do little more than nod in silence and try to regain his breath - his entire body was pulsating. He never dreamed that could feel so good.

Brendon kissed his jaw and pulled the covers over him. “How was that for a first time?” the boy grinned against his ear.

Ryan could feel the come trickling out of him onto the bedsheets and managed a breathless laugh. “Better than I could ever have imagined.” He turned onto his side and clutched at Brendon’s face, pulling him in for a final kiss. “You made me forget who I am. You made me feel so much more than I thought I was capable of - not just tonight but every second I’m around you. You make me a better person, Brendon. You make me so happy.”

The smile that appeared on Brendon’s face melted Ryan’s heart - the boy turned his life upside down, he’d shaken him up like a snow globe and only now were the pieces starting to settle. Brendon pulled him against his chest and stroked the back of his hair.

“Oh, please do keep talking, Ryan - my ego is sky high right now.”

“I’m serious. I feel like I spent my entire life walking through the dark on my own - and now, I found you - you’re like my shining sun, lighting my way. Brendon Urie, my little ray of sunshine.”

“Dude, shut up,” Brendon laughed, pushing him away. “That’s the orgasm talking.”

Ryan blushed, but when he glanced back over at Brendon, he still had the biggest smile painted on
his face and he was twice as red as Ryan. They both caught each other’s eye and laughed. He’d never been happier than this exact moment. He couldn’t wipe the grin from his face.

Brendon rolled against Ryan’s side and they both blinked up at the ceiling. “You know the feeling’s mutual, right? You know I’m crazy about you. I think we’re made for each other, I think we’re soulmates - our paths were just meant to cross and they did - and I’ve never been happier. I love you.”

Ryan felt the warmth of the boy’s words inside his heart - that feeling that he finally found his home. He felt Brendon’s body relax against him, his breathing slow and steady, warm against his skin. Ryan let those words linger in his head as Brendon fell asleep beside him. He gazed out the window at the night sky.

He could make a wish on every single one of those stars, but that’d be greedy - he had everything he needed right here in his arms.
Chapter 58

A month passed since Marc Willis’s appearance at his father’s house forced Ryan to admit his past and confront his demons. It had been a tough few weeks and his emotions had been on a roller coaster ride – constantly up and down, high and low, it was exhausting – but now, he finally felt like he leveled out.

He talked to his father – they sat and discussed all the times Ryan felt his dad wronged him in his youth and in turn, George admitted that he probably hadn’t been there to support his son when he was growing up. They agreed Ryan would’ve still gotten into drugs and shut himself off from his family emotionally, but with all their cards on the table, they were both able to acknowledge their fuck-ups – Ryan shouldn’t have waited so long to tell his father what happened when he was fifteen and George shouldn’t have simply written his son off as a liability, a spoiled brat who, despite all the fantastic opportunities presented to him, was never really happy with what he had. George claimed he should’ve sought help for his youngest son years ago, but Ryan admitted he probably never would’ve accepted it. He wanted to suffer.

Over the course of the following month, each of his family members learned of Ryan’s attack and they each apologized to him guiltily. Questions of “Why didn’t you tell us sooner?” turned into remorseful statements like “I should’ve known something was wrong” and “If only I paid more attention when you were young… This is my fault.”

His parents both blamed themselves. Pamela was devastated and much like his father, she admitted that it all seemed obvious now that she knew the true, devastating facts.

His brother sat down with him one day and they ended up having a heart-to-heart that lasted well into the early hours of the morning and even his ever-illusive sister managed to pry herself away from work and show her face one afternoon to make sure he was doing okay. She disclosed the fact that she never liked Marc much anyway, he’d always given off a creepy vibe around her but she never, even for a second, thought he was capable of such an atrocity.

His father seemed like a completely different man after finding out what happened between his son and best friend. The man who Ryan had always seen as a cold and distracted father seemed a little softer, as if his outer walls had fallen and crumbled. Now, there was hardly any animosity left between George and Ryan and over the past few weeks, the Rosses all came together as a family for the first time Ryan could remember.

It was something rare and beautiful – that’s not to say it wasn’t emotionally exhausting, because it was – but the fact the air cleared after numerous soul-baring talks with his parents and siblings was a surprisingly cathartic experience.

Two days after George’s birthday, Ryan caught Brendon and his father in the corner of the dining room together talking in serious, hushed tones. When he inquired later that evening what they’d been talking about, Ryan sat in his bedroom in shocked silence as Brendon told him how George drove him to Marc Willis’ vacation home and beat the ever-living shit out of the man. It had been the cause of Brendon and Ryan’s first real argument.

“Were you ever going to tell me that or is this yet another thing you got to keep a secret from me, because God forbid I find out and go off the rails again? Jesus! I expected better from you, Brendon,” Ryan bit after Brendon managed to explain the whole situation.

He was unable to rationalize his feelings regarding what he’d just been told. Firstly, he was pissed at
George for putting Brendon in that situation, taking him to face the man who damn near ruined his life and secondly, he was upset that neither of them thought it was a good idea to tell him what happened that day – as if they could somehow keep it a secret and Ryan wouldn’t ever find out.

“Your dad was trying to protect you. Believe me, it was difficult keeping all that to myself – I thought your dad might’ve killed him. He just absolutely lost it, Ryan.”

Ryan felt a sick sense of pride in his father for the first time, an uneasy satisfaction that perhaps Marc finally got what he always deserved. However, the fear that George may have seriously endangered Brendon remained. Ryan folded his arms across his chest. “So, where is he now? Because evidently, the prick’s not dead.”

Brendon shrugged. “I don’t know. Your dad drove past there yesterday and said his car was gone and the house was all locked up. Apparently, he didn’t show up for work today.” Brendon picked at a loose thread at the hem of his t-shirt and then looked up at Ryan with tears in his eyes. “I’m worried about Jon,” he said with a sigh.

Hearing that name always unsettled Ryan, but he understood – or at least he tried to convince himself he did. “Then call him,” he mumbled in reply. “Do whatever you have to do. Just remember, he’s not your responsibility anymore.”

After his father’s birthday, Pamela and George hung around for a couple of days, both of them walking on eggshells before they returned, upon Ryan’s insistence, to their lives in Manhattan.

“Brendon’s a great guy,” his father told him the morning he left for the city. “I think he’s really good for you. Pamela and I… you have our support. Whatever happens.”

Ryan thought about dropping the Hooker Bombshell right then and there to put his father’s claim to the test, but he remained silent. He’d been surrounded by tearful family members for close to a week and he and Brendon needed some privacy, some real time alone to get to know each other - plus, it sucked having to fuck in silence every night and hearing his dad’s snores coming from the room across the hallway was kind of a turnoff when he was meant to be concentrating during a blowjob or rimming…

Ryan and Brendon were fully engrossed in the sweet, honeymoon period of their relationship and where Brendon was concerned, Ryan had never been happier. Everything the boy did gave him a little jolt inside his stomach – every tender kiss they shared, every fond smile Brendon flashed his way – he felt like the luckiest man in the goddamn world.

Brendon was sexy and sweet and he constantly made Ryan laugh. He spent most of his life so bored by the people around him, but Brendon could talk for hours and Ryan would still want to hear more. They got to know each other as intimately as any other committed couple in the month they’d been sharing his parents’ Hamptons home and he lived for those chilly evenings they’d spend out on the patio together, wrapped up warm against the breeze, telling stories until they both got too tired to speak.

Ryan loved the man – holy shit, did he love him. His outlook on life improved tenfold since Brendon agreed to be his boyfriend. Ryan suddenly craved a normal life, something simple and easy – he didn’t long for those hedonistic LA parties anymore, or the drug scene he’d been so involved with before rehab. Being in love and making sure Brendon was happy was the only high he wanted to chase these days.

However, their honeymoon was eventually tainted by the constant presence or really, the constant lack of Marc Willis. Marc’s sudden disappearance had been reported in the New York Times and on
a couple of Internet news sites. Ryan guessed it was news to the business people of Wall Street and it was good fodder for tabloids trying to fill their pages. Millionaire businessman goes missing without a trace - it was a sensational headline when worded that way.

Ryan tried his best to ignore the stories – they stressed him out and the negative effect they also had on Brendon was obvious. They attempted to distract themselves in other ways and for the most part, remained hidden away in Hamptons, just the two of them.

Marc was reported missing by his secretary after failing to turn up at work for an entire week. Ryan was distressed to learn that his father, having been one of the last known people to see Marc, had been questioned by police at his work one afternoon. George kept his cool and simply claimed Marc turned up at the house on his birthday, had a couple of drinks and then left to play golf. The policemen apologized for disturbing him, wished him a good day and left without further questioning.

Two weeks later, Marc was located in Dubai. His whereabouts were reported briefly in a small blurb on page fifteen of the New York Times that morning and life carried on as normal. No one seemed suspicious, no one even seemed bothered that the man just upped and left the country without telling anyone and Ryan was unsure how he felt about the situation.

He felt better about the fact that Marc was no longer in the same country, or even the same side of the world as him and Brendon anymore – out of sight, out of mind, as they say – but it still felt like an unsatisfying outcome.

Brendon kept trying to suggest that he should go to the cops and inform them what happened but he wasn’t ready to take that step just yet. It still hurt to think about it and over the past month, he’d grown tired of talking about it too – all those stress headaches and sleepless nights – there were only so many times he could go over the same story. He wasn’t mentally prepared to make a report and every time Brendon tried to suggest he should, Ryan shut him down in the same way.

“Remember that you didn’t report him either. Plus, there’s nothing the cops can do right now anyway – the bastard ran off to Dubai and I’m sure it’s no coincidence that Dubai has no extradition laws with the US. Unless he comes back to America, the law can’t touch him.”

He guessed a part of him was thankful. Ryan needed time to not worry about things so much - to just be carefree and happy - if only for a couple of weeks. When he explained it like that, Brendon seemed to understand.

Ryan and Brendon had been alone in his parents’ mansion in the Hamptons for close to a month. They had sex almost every day and once or twice a week, Ryan would ask Brendon to fuck him until they both came. They figured out a comfortable familiarity between the two of them by now and it worked every single time.

It took a while for Ryan to discover what he was comfortable with and what worked best for them as a couple, but they were getting there. Ryan still had limits, there were certain things Brendon tried that made him uneasy, but they always communicated about it – what felt good, what didn’t and how far Ryan was willing to go for that orgasm.

Ryan enjoyed riding Brendon’s dick the best - he liked feeling like he had a certain amount of control over the situation. Even when he chose to bottom, Ryan wasn’t much of a passive partner – Brendon called him his little power bottom.

Brendon Urie was still a pro at turning him on and sometimes, the sex was so intense it made Ryan ponder the existence of God – not the white, bearded God up in the sky, but certainly something he
couldn’t explain. *How was it possible to reach such monstrous heights of arousal time and time again, each time better than the last?* Sex like that made him lose sight of himself – or maybe it just made him more aware, he couldn’t tell the difference anymore. Sex with Brendon was about as close to a religious experience as Ryan was ever going to get – it could not adequately be put into words, but it was some spiritual, something that felt he reached a higher consciousness after each orgasm and Ryan had never experienced anything like it before in his life.

He talked to Gabe a couple of days ago, deciding to take the plunge and call his friend for the first time in over a month. Gabe talked about himself for the first twenty minutes of the phone call – his most recent vacation, his wonderful girlfriend, the parties he recently attended and the celebrities he’d been rubbing shoulders with. Gabe eventually paused long enough for Ryan to invite him for dinner and they arranged a double date.

It was to take place at the Ross family residence that night – Gabe and Erin, Ryan and Brendon – two normal couples getting to know each other over dinner. *What could be more down to earth than that?* It was going to be a nice, relaxing evening with friends – at least, that’s what Ryan was trying to convince his less than enthusiastic boyfriend.

Brendon was reluctant to spend the evening conversing with Gabe Saporta and his girlfriend over a five course, catered dinner but after more than a month without contact, Ryan thought he should at least *try* and make some sort of effort with the guy. Sure, Gabe was egotistic and self-absorbed but he was also Ryan’s friend and he and Brendon were going to have to be introduced to each other eventually, whether Brendon wanted that to happen or not.

“Just be yourself and Gabe will like you. I only met his girlfriend a couple of times and both times I did, I was high as fuck, but she seems like a real sweetheart – possibly *too* good for Gabe actually,” Ryan mused.

Brendon groaned and put his head in his hands. “That’s what everyone’s going to say about me and you – that you’re too good for me and you deserve better.”

Ryan felt himself smile. He heard all Brendon’s fears about what people would think about their relationship numerous times before, whispered into his ear late at night or joked about over breakfast in a way that suggested Brendon was actually totally serious.

“*He’ll* probably ask me what I do for a living and I don’t know how to lie to people when I’m being myself. He’s rich and he’s famous – we got absolutely *nothing* in common.”

Ryan laughed. “I’m rich and famous too and that didn’t seem to bother you when we first met. In fact, it pissed me off how unfazed you seemed to be by me.”

“That’s different. You were my *client* when we first met, Ryan. I had my game face on. Plus, in case you forgot, you forced me to do lines of coke that night which kind of gave me a bit of faux-confidence…” Brendon rolled his eyes.

Ryan blushed at the memory of his actions when he and Brendon first started seeing each other, how ridiculously out of control he’d been at that point in his life and how much of an asshole he’d been to Brendon on occasions. He learned from his mistakes since then, but he was still ashamed of the person he once was.

*Drugs, man,* Ryan thought to himself with a shake of his head. *Never again. Not even once.*

If he was being honest, he was beginning to dread this dinner date himself. He was worried what Gabe’s reaction to Brendon would be, whether he’d follow in Jacob’s footsteps and start asking him...
all sorts of inappropriate and insensitive comments about his life before they met or if he’d just be happy. Ryan was clean and sober and in love. Gabe Saporta was hardly the most refined of men, he was loud and obnoxious and he didn’t give a shit what people thought about him, so Ryan assumed he’d have no qualms telling him what he thought of his new relationship. Ryan was just trying to play it cool so he didn’t stress Brendon out.

Gabe and Erin showed up a little after seven. The first thing Ryan noticed was the expensive bottle of Dom Pérignon Brut champagne Gabe was carrying under his arm — a bottle that size would’ve set the guy back a couple thousand bucks at least, which was only something Ryan started taking notice of after he started dating Brendon. The second thing he noticed was the sparkling diamond on the ring finger of Erin’s left hand.

He kept quiet about both and welcomed the couple into the house as Brendon hung back in the hallway. Gabe was impeccably dressed and Erin looked flawless, as always. After a few introductions and niceties, they entered the dining room and Gabe was quick to pop the cork off his bottle of champagne.

He was obviously eager to get something off his chest and Ryan was going to take a shot in the dark and say it had something to do with the ring on his girlfriend’s finger. Only after he poured a glass of champagne for himself and Erin did Gabe seem to remember where he was.

He turned to Ryan. “Are you still sober, brother?” he asked with a quizzical cock of his eyebrow.

Ryan gave a nod. “Over three months now and no desire to undo all my hard work for one drink just yet.” He tried to make a joke of it; he tried to keep the mood light. He didn’t want to be a party-pooper, but his friend’s complete disregard for his situation upset him. Staying sober was a daily struggle — sure, he had Brendon around to support him and the man had been a tremendous help since he left rehab but he was still an addict. Ryan was always going to fight against his desires, no matter how long he refrained from them.

The way Gabe seemed so indifferent towards Ryan’s battle with sobriety was disappointing, but Dr. Stump warned him something like this might happen once he returned to his normal life — the inability to relate to his old party friends.

“How about you, Brendon? Ryan mentioned you met in NA or AA or some shit — how wonderfully romantic… So, can you handle your booze or no?”

Ryan looked out the window and cursed himself for putting Brendon in this situation. He could tell Gabe was giving his boyfriend the once over, looking him up and down, judging him, trying to make an assessment of the man based on first impressions. He just wanted everyone to get along, it wasn’t much to ask — but then, Gabe had always been an elitist and he rarely had time for people who didn’t have money in the bank.

“Um…” Brendon scratched his head. “No, I’m good with water. Was never much of a big champagne fan anyway.”

Gabe scoffed. “Whatever. Suit yourself,” he said under his breath. Ryan knew exactly what Gabe was thinking — poor, uneducated boy, the fool has absolutely no idea what he’s talking about. How could Ryan date someone so ignorant?

Ryan appreciated the show of solidarity on Brendon’s part and he could surely make it through an evening while his friends enjoyed a drink without him, right? The last thing he wanted was to turn into one of those holier-than-thou ex-addicts who constantly preached the dangers of drink and drugs. He had to remember that some people were capable of enjoying a glass of champagne without...
ending the evening coked out of their minds and unable to sleep for three straight weeks…

Gabe held his glass aloft and then, after much showboating, announced that two days earlier he asked Erin to marry him.

“And of course,” he paused for dramatic affect, pushing Erin’s hand under Ryan’s nose where the huge diamond engagement ring sparkled in the light. “She said ‘yes.’”

Ryan was genuinely happy for the couple. Gabe was always going to be Gabe, but he was settling down and getting married to a beautiful woman who made him happy. Six months ago, Ryan would have been devastated to lose his partner in crime to someone else, but things changed for both of them in recent months and that was okay. Ryan gave them his sincere congratulations and gave them both a hug.

The proposal took place on a recent trip to Paris. Gabe chartered a private jet and presented the tickets to Erin as a surprise – Paris was her favorite city in the world – and they left New York for a weekend getaway. He’d been planning on asking Erin to marry him for months, Gabe claimed, and everything went off without a hitch – during an evening helicopter ride over the city, he popped the question and Erin laughed and claimed his weird behavior throughout the trip alerted her to what might be in store, but nothing could’ve prepared her for the romance and thought put into the actual proposal.

Erin was a classy lady, she deserved a classy proposal, Gabe informed them - and after she accepted the ring and they finished off their helicopter ride over the City of Lights, he whisked her off to the most expensive restaurant in Paris, the Restaurant Le Meurice, where Gabe reserved the entire dining room and booked the London Symphony Orchestra, who he had flown in specially to play during dinner.

Ryan watched Brendon as Gabe retold the events of that night and smiled to himself – the boy looked utterly shell-shocked by the sheer extravagance of the whole thing. Well, Gabe set the mark pretty high when it came to marriage proposals…

Gabe’s crowning moment of the evening seemed to be when Erin excused herself to use the bathroom and he was able to drop a heavy hint that her ring cost upwards of three and a half million dollars. Not even Gabe’s sky-high ego blocked out the disbelieving huff that came out of Brendon’s mouth following that admission.

“So, I was hoping you’d do me the honor of being my best man,” Gabe grinned, taking a sip of champagne.

Oh man. Ryan felt a little jolt of pride rush through his body that was soon shot down by fear. “Does that mean I have to organize a bachelor party?”

He didn’t know whether Gabe cut down on his own drug usage since meeting Erin, but they talked about this in the past, when they were both irresponsible, single men – planning each other’s bachelor parties with drugs, booze and strippers as major features. Oh, how his priorities changed since finding love.

Erin piped up. “Six months ago, I would have been dead set on not allowing you anywhere near Gabe’s bachelor party,” she laughed. “Perhaps now it’ll be a more sophisticated affair, hmm? Can I suggest a weekend of golf and Swedish massages?”

The conversation flowed easily after that. They spent the next half an hour talking wedding plans. Gabe and Erin already decided on a venue in Barbados. Erin was going to design her own wedding dress and it was going to be a reasonably intimate affair – family and close friends only. They didn’t want to sell the rights to their wedding photos or do an OK! exclusive – that was trashy, Erin claimed. It was going to be romantic and elegant - a display of their true love for one another.

Brendon remained quiet for much of the dinner, only speaking when spoken to and seemingly a little out of his depth with some of the topics of conversation. He was lucky Gabe was so fond of the sound of his own voice, because the man hardly spoke to Brendon at all – in fact, over the course of the evening, it became more and more obvious that Gabe was outright ignoring Brendon’s presence. He settled the bottle of champagne in an ice bucket to his side and proceeded to polish off the entire thing by himself, minus the one glass Erin enjoyed at the start of the evening.

By the time the caterers brought out the main course, Gabe was drunk and making a start on an expensive bottle of red that belonged to Pamela. Ryan didn’t stop him; Gabe was allowed to enjoy himself and get smashed if he wanted to - even if Ryan wasn’t. The man was making a show about how much money he spent proposing to Erin and how many millions their wedding was going to cost. Erin looked embarrassed, she kept telling her fiancé to slow down on the wine and Brendon looked totally bored. The drunker Gabe got, the more obnoxious he became – and then, after ignoring him for most of the evening, Gabe turned his attention toward Brendon and started asking him questions. Here we go again, Ryan thought silently.

“So, tell me… Where are you from, Brendon?”

“I was brought up in Las Vegas. I moved to New York when I was eighteen.”

“Interesting… and what promoted the move?”

Brendon shrugged. “Homophobic parents, the fact Vegas is a real shitty place to live – a lot of things really. I felt I needed a change of pace.”

Gabe hummed indifferently – he was obviously just making small talk before getting to the real questions. “And what was it that made you fall for my friend, Ryan Ross?” Gabe rubbed his fingers and thumb together implying it was the money. Of course. What else?

Brendon paused before answering, but Ryan could see the silent anger flicker behind his eyes. “Ryan was very supportive – emotionally, when I didn’t really have much support from anyone else. He’s a good guy. He makes me happy and for a long time before I met Ryan, I wasn’t very happy at all. You can’t fake love, no matter how much money is involved. Right?” He cast his dark eyes between Gabe and Erin and Gabe looked suitably put in his place.

Ryan couldn’t help but feel so proud of the man sat beside him – he was right, you couldn’t fake love. All these people concerning themselves with their relationship, pretending like they were looking out for Ryan’s well-being, when all they really wanted to do was rain on his happiness. He also couldn’t wipe the smug grin from his face or control the blush in his cheeks, because whenever Brendon showed his true feelings, especially in front of other people, it felt like the world stopped spinning.

Brendon excused himself to the bathroom just before dessert and as soon as he was out of earshot, Ryan couldn’t help himself from leaning forward and excitedly asking his friend what he thought of Brendon so far – he wanted to hear that Brendon was so awesome and so handsome and Ryan really had struck gold with that one… He wanted Gabe to show as much enthusiasm for his new relationship as he had for his best friend’s impending marriage.
“Well, in the immortal words of Sir Kanye West…” Gabe paused for dramatic effect and then broke into a wide grin. “I ain’t saying he a gold digger, but he ain’t messing with no broke-

“Gabriel!!” Erin smacked her fiancé’s arm and glared at him, but Gabe cracked up, taking a haphazard sip of red wine from his champagne glass.

“You don’t even know him.” Ryan sighed. “He’s a good guy, I wish you wouldn’t just write him off like that. I really like him. I’m in love with him, Gabe. Why is everyone so against that notion? I had the same bullshit from my brother and Shane – even William’s been all funny since Brendon and I got together.”

Gabe put his chin in his hand and smiled drunkenly. “How is William?”

“Ignore my idiot fiancé,” Erin said, rubbing at Gabe’s back. “Brendon seems like a very nice guy, Ryan and he’s incredibly handsome too. You seem really happy.”

“Thank you. At least someone’s happy for me,” Ryan bit, directing his words towards Gabe. He couldn’t keep his mouth closed though, he put up with people badmouthing Brendon for way too long. “I’ve not seen you in a month and then when we eventually get together, you come over here, insult my boyfriend, and get drunk when you know how difficult it’s been-

“Oh, don’t bitch at me for having a drink after I announce my engagement to you – coming from you, coke-fiend Ryan Ross, the guy who couldn’t even face his own father without getting off his face no less than three months ago - that’s a fucking joke.”

Brendon returned at that point and the room fell into an uncomfortable silence.

Maybe Gabe had always been this way – rude and outspoken - maybe it was just Ryan was always too high to notice it before. Either way, his best friend was becoming tiresome and what was worse was the fact he thought Ryan was dating a gold digger. It was such an ugly word and Ryan didn’t know who should be more insulted by it. It made Brendon sound shallow and heartless, but it implied Ryan was a love blind idiot who was only worth being with for the money in his father’s bank account – and to think he just agreed to be this dude’s best man...

Ryan looked over the table at his friend with a sigh and realized the battle of trying to convince people his relationship with Brendon was real wasn’t over yet. It had only just begun.

* * *

Brendon didn’t like Gabe Saporta. He wasn’t an idiot; he noticed the way the man had been looking at him all evening, probably judging him for not being obscenely rich and enjoying ridiculously overpriced champagne - all that shallow bullshit. He was under no false pretenses he could fool wealthy men into thinking he was one of them – he didn’t have the education or the confidence for that. When he was working, his rich clients seemed to take a certain glee in the fact he was poor – a desperate little hooker who’d do anything for a couple hundred bucks. Now, things haven’t changed – he was still the same guy, just with an affluent boyfriend - and he suspected Gabe Saporta could see straight through him.

Brendon really wanted to give the dude the benefit of the doubt – even Ryan had been a bit of an ass when they first met - he didn’t want to make up his mind that he didn’t like the guy before spending some time with him. That would be hypocritical. It wasn’t like he was desperate to please Ryan’s friends, but he wanted them to at least give him a chance to prove himself. Gabe Saporta, however, seemed like a complete jerk and Brendon’s dislike of the man didn’t seem like it’d be much skin off Gabe’s back anyway. At least George liked him. That was the main thing.
He realized he was going to have to get used to this kind of judgment. This was only just the beginning of it. As soon as news of their relationship went public – which it no doubt would, very soon, Brendon could feel it – it wasn’t just Ryan’s family and friends who’d be calling him a gold-digger, leech and user; it’d be total strangers too, journalists, news reporters and his parents – oh god, his parents…

Sometimes, at night, Brendon would lay awake long after Ryan had fallen asleep and he wondered what made this new relationship worth that entire trauma – the sex was fantastic and Ryan, as Brendon got to know him, was incredible. With Ryan, he felt something he never experienced with either Jon or Dallon – like he was truly being himself, like he had everything he could ever need, like he’d long for nothing so long as he was with Ryan. Ryan fulfilled all his emotional and psychological needs.

*Yeah, Ryan was pretty damn perfect.* Waking up next to him, the thought of sharing his life with someone who understood him and respected him… *that* made the whole scary notion of their relationship going public seem worth it. Brendon realized long ago that he wouldn’t change it for the world.

After he returned to the dining room, there seemed to be tension between Ryan and Gabe, everyone was quiet and the conversation seemed to have tapered off. He didn’t know what had been said when he went to the bathroom, but Brendon was going to take a wild guess that it was something to do with him.

The last thing he wanted was to create conflict between Ryan and his best friend – even if Gabe did seem a little full of himself. More than anything, he just wanted to be accepted, to not be seen as the exploitative new boyfriend who was not to be trusted. He loved Ryan, he knew he didn’t deserve someone like him, but they were in *love*. Why were so many people making that their business?

They were halfway through dessert when Brendon felt his phone buzz in the pocket of his pants. It was unusual that he received any kind of calls or texts, so he wondered who it could be. The only person he used his phone to contact was Ryan and they were in each other’s company so often that since receiving his new cellphone, Brendon’s call log remained mostly empty. He ignored it, it’d be rude to answer it at dinner, Gabe would probably complain about his etiquette – besides, it was probably just some cold caller trying to get him to switch cable companies or sign up for community college.

A few minutes later, the phone started vibrating again. Erin and Ryan were deep into some conversation about the best restaurants in New York City, talking pretentiously about food Brendon never even heard of, much less had the opportunity to try - he zoned out a while ago. Gabe was staring miserably at the vanilla parfait they’d just been served, squishing it around his bowl with the back of his spoon.

He lifted his hip and pulled his phone out his pocket. He felt his heart stop at the name displayed on the screen – *Jon*.

He stared, his heart sinking into his guts as his thumb hovered over the answer button. He hadn’t spoken to Jon since the day he met Ryan’s parents for the first time, the day Ryan ended up telling his father about Marc Willis, the day Marc mentioned Jon’s name before George Ross beat the crap out of him…

At various points during the month that followed, Jon certainly crossed Brendon’s mind, but after he found out that motherfucker, Marc Willis, disappeared to Dubai, his concerns had been put at ease. At one point, Ryan even suggested Brendon should get in touch with his ex, but he hadn’t taken him up on his offer. He was with someone else now, embarking on a brand new relationship – after all,
Ryan was right; Jon wasn’t his responsibility anymore. Brendon already told him to watch his back and be wary of Marc Willis. What else could he do? He took a breath, placed his phone facedown on the tablecloth and waited for it to stop vibrating.

“Everything okay?” Ryan asked suspiciously, throwing Brendon a look.

“Yeah,” he nodded. His mouth was dry, his cheeks were flush – *what the fuck was Jon doing calling him out of the blue like that?*

“What do you need to take that phone call?”

Brendon shook his head and took another mouthful of the vanilla parfait in front of him. “No. No one who can’t wait.” He attempted a smile, but he felt sick. When his phone started ringing for the third time in as many minutes, Brendon snatched it up. He couldn’t ignore it anymore, he already let the worry creep into his brain – Jon, desperate and alone, strung out on heroin, in danger, in the hospital, all the images flooded his head. He pushed his seat back and excused himself.

“Actually, I should probably take this,” he mumbled quickly, making his way to the hallway.

Ryan looked back over his shoulder at him. “Is something wrong?” he called.

“No,” he lied. “Everything’s fine. I should just take this call, that’s all. I’ll be right back.” He flashed what he hoped was a charming smile and walked far enough into the hallway where no one would be able to eavesdrop on his conversation.

Brendon brought his cellphone to his ear. He kept quiet for the first few seconds and then took a breath. “Hello?”

A voice drowned out by background noise sounded in his ear. The words were muffled through a bad line and hardly audible. “Brendon? You there? Hello?”

“Jon?” He looked at the signal bars on his cellphone – he had full service, the problem was on the other end. “Can you hear me?”


Brendon’s stomach dropped like a rock. *This was it, the phone call he’d always been dreading…* Jon was dead. He knew it without even being told. He felt stunned tears spill out over his eyes, the sudden wave of emotion taking him by surprise. *Why else would Joe be calling from Jon’s cellphone?*

“Joe… Why are you calling? Is everything okay?”

On the other end of the phone, Joe paused. “Yeah. Well… *No*, not really.”

“Is Jon okay?” he choked. *Oh god, he didn’t know if he could deal with this news…*

“No. I mean, he’s *fine* – he’s alive, if that’s what you’re asking but… we’re struggling. Dude, I’m sorry. I didn’t know who else I could call.”

Relief swept over him like a tidal wave and his tears quickly retreated. *Holy shit,* he’d been given such a scare – a million terrible scenarios rushed through his head in the few short seconds since he answered his phone. *Jon was alive! Thank the Lord.*

Brendon’s relief, however, was short lived. Things must be pretty bad in the Walker/Trohman
household if Joe was calling him for help. “What’s wrong?” he asked. Silence flooded his cellphone. “Joe, what’s up?”

“Look, I wouldn’t call you unless we were desperate. Jon would actually be pretty pissed if he knew I contacted you, but I don’t know what else to do anymore… Things have all fallen to shit, man. Jon’s in a really bad way – I mean, really bad – he’s depressed, almost suicidal. He hardly gets out of bed, he never leaves the room and he’s not eating… I’m scared to leave him alone. I quit my job so I could look after him and we fell behind on rent and then the landlord kicked us out of the apartment… We’re living in this disgusting motel and I’m scared for our lives most nights. We’re about three days away from being homeless. We’re in debt with so many different people. I’m on the run from Pete, we got no money and it’s so mortifying having to make this phone call to you but… I don’t know who else I can ask, dude. I’m at my absolute wit’s end.” Joe’s desperate voice trailed off into a frustrated sigh.

Brendon put his head in his hand. Shit. “Is Jon still clean?” he asked with his eyes closed.

“Yeah, but I don’t know how he’s managing it. He’s so sad, Brendon and I can’t stand to see him like this. I think he finally lost it – he’s paranoid, he thinks I’m going to leave him. I’m worried he’s going to kill himself when I’m not around; I’m not a fucking doctor, dude. I don’t know how to deal with something like this…”

“Fuck,” Brendon cursed under his breath - his life was never drama-free for long.

“I’m so worried about him, Brendon. I know you don’t owe me shit, I know I acted like an asshole before you left for Vegas and I tried so hard not to fall in love with him before you two broke up, but… I know you and Jon - I know you’ve been through a lot together – you’ve got this weird connection and you care about each other. He needs your help, dude. Maybe if you can lend us some money? A couple hundred bucks – we need to get back to Chicago or something. I can’t stay in New York much longer.”

“Oh, fuck…” he breathed. He felt his eyes watering and wiped away his tears. Brendon couldn’t help but feel guilty, like Jon’s depression had something to do with him. “Yeah. I’ll umm- I’ll see what I can do. Where are you guys living?”

“Some shitty motel in Hunts Point. I started selling again, man – hard stuff this time, but since losing contact with Pete, I don’t have a regular supplier and basically, I’m relying on old acquaintances to help me out and kick me some of whatever they got to get rid of, but then I got to give them a percent of my profit and the shit’s becoming too expensive, man. I’m just about breaking even – and this area of town is overrun by people who’d rather shoot me than see me on their turf.

“The other day, Jon said he should go back to hustling. He said it’s the only way we’re guaranteed to keep a roof over our heads, but I can’t let him do that. I know what it’ll do to him. I can’t just sit back and agree to let that happen. I love him,” Joe’s voice cracked. “And it’s like I’m watching him die in front of my very eyes. I’m sorry, Brendon. I know I’m not your favorite person in the world, but if you can help us out, just with a little bit of money, something, then I’d be so, so grateful. Please.”

Brendon ran his hand over his face and sniffed. “Okay. Listen, I’ve got to talk to my boyfriend, but I’m sure we’ll be able to sort you out with something. We’ll get you some money, alright? Don’t worry.”

“Jesus. Thanks, man,” Joe sighed. “We’ll get it back to you whenever we get back on our feet.”

“It’s not a problem.”
“Seriously. You’re the best. Yeah, Jon told me you were seeing someone. How’s it going?”

“It’s going alright. Pretty good.” He didn’t want to boast after Joe spent the last ten minutes talking about how serious Jon’s depression got and how hard-up they were right now – he was at a mansion in the fucking Hamptons, having dinner with Gabe Saporta and his fiancée.

“Well, I don’t want to cause any problems between the two of you,” Joe continued. “I don’t want to put you out if you guys are like, strapped for cash or something, but a couple hundo would help us out like you wouldn’t believe – just so we can get out of this fucking city. I’m not in my parents’ good books as it is and Jon hates the idea, but maybe a move back to Chicago would do us both some good. Thanks for helping us out, man.”

“As I said, it’s not a problem. I gotta go,” he sighed - he needed a minute to get his head in order before returning to the dining room. “I’ll call you back as soon as possible.”

Brendon’s mind was spinning. He now felt even angrier with Ryan’s dinner guests than before – that privileged jerk, Gabe Saporta jetting off to Paris, spending millions and millions of dollars on a damn engagement ring, boasting about how rich he was and how much money he spent while less than two hours drive away, the man Brendon had called his best friend and partner for six years suffered because he couldn’t pay his bills, because he was too depressed by his past to go out and get a real job. Sure, Jon Walker had his faults – as did Joe Trohman – but he wanted them to be happy. Jon was the one guy Brendon knew who truly deserved it.

Before hanging up, Joe passed on his own number. “It’s probably best you don’t tell Jon I called you like this, he’ll be embarrassed – I’ll talk to him when I think the time’s right.”

Brendon was left in the hallway with a gaping dose of reality. While he’d been cozying up to Ryan in his parents’ beautiful, multi-million dollar mansion, his ex-boyfriend’s life was totally falling apart.

He knew what it was like to have nothing, to wonder how he was going to make it through the week and it wasn’t a good feeling – he already experienced living in a crappy motel with absolutely no one around to support him through the storm and he felt he owed Jon this much. He’d been so lucky to get out of the game when he did and meet Ryan… the two of them mutually falling in love was still something like a fairytale – but Jon’s nightmare continued and Brendon felt he had a part to play in that.

He bit his lip and wondered what would be the best way to broach the subject with Ryan. It wouldn’t be completely unsurprising if Ryan wanted nothing to do with Brendon’s ex-boyfriend and just shut him down, refusing to help out – after all, what did Ryan owe Jon? But Ryan surprised Brendon with his generosity numerous times before now – he hadn’t thought twice about forking over five, ten, fifty thousand dollars for Brendon to spend a weekend with him before they got serious.

Ryan was compassionate; Ryan cared and Brendon was fairly certain the guy would offer to help out if he knew how much it meant to him. He didn’t need fancy new gadgets and material displays of Ryan’s affection, but he did want to help Jon and Joe when they were in need of it – get the fuck out of the city and back on their feet. A couple hundred bucks was what Joe asked for – that was nothing to Ryan Ross.

He closed his eyes to gather his thoughts, took a deep breath and exhaled on the count of ten. When he reentered the dining room, both Ryan and Erin looked at him expectedly. Gabe was now slumped over the table with his hand around the stem of his empty champagne glass. How embarrassing, Brendon thought. Don’t try and act better than me, Saporta – at least I’ve never got so drunk I couldn’t make it through dinner…
“You alright?” Ryan asked, looking concerned. “You look a little… shaken.”

Brendon attempted a bright smile. “I’m fine. It’s okay. Everything’s great,” he said through a smile that was way too wide. Ryan gave him a suspicious look that indicated he definitely didn’t believe him. “Is he okay?” Brendon asked, nodding at Gabe’s drunken form, trying to change the subject and take the spotlight off of himself.

“Mixing champagne and red wine is never a good combination.” Erin rolled her eyes and then stood from her seat. “I kind of feel like leaving him here for the night, but I wouldn’t dump that responsibility on the two of you.” Erin was alright. Brendon liked Erin. At least the mood seemed to have lightened a bit in the dining room since Gabe passed out. “Thanks for dinner, Ryan, it was wonderful – and it was good meeting you, Brendon. Hopefully we’ll see you again soon.” She pulled her fiancé to his feet and dragged him across the dining room.

They went through the exhausting process of saying goodbye to someone who’s had a bit too much to drink. Brendon’s mind was preoccupied, but Gabe gave Ryan numerous drunken hugs, loudly informing the man how much he loved him and how much of a brother he’d been over the years. Ryan rolled his eyes over Gabe’s shoulder, but Brendon noticed the look on his face – forgiveness and flattery.

“Brendon – he’s a good dude, man. And he’s good-looking,” Brendon overheard Gabe telling Ryan. Ryan’s cheeks were clutched between Gabe’s hands, their foreheads pressed together as Gabe slurred his words. “Better looking than you, anyway – you make a really handsome couple and I’m happy for you, bro. I just don’t want you getting your heart broken. That’s all, man.”

“Alright,” Ryan said, holding Gabe’s wrists and pulling his hands away from his face. “I get it. Hey, congratulations on your engagement. I hope your hangover’s not too bad tomorrow.”

“I’m not even drunk, dude. I love you. You’re my brother, Ryan and I love you.”

“Come on, Gabriel,” Erin smiled, pulling Gabe away by his arm. He stumbled down the hallway after her and almost as soon as they left, Ryan yawned, stretched and suggested they go to bed. The two of them climbed the stairs towards the bedroom. Once inside, they dimmed the lights, undressed and climbed under the covers.

Ryan started kissing him, trailing soft, gentle pecks down Brendon’s chest – maybe he should wait until morning to mention the Jon-thing? Ryan did seem to be in a reasonably good mood. Brendon tried to distract himself, he tried to concentrate on the touch of Ryan’s mouth on his skin, the way his fingers scratched over his ribs and hips and thighs…

Brendon sighed – they had some fantastic sex since they’d been in the Hamptons; Ryan was so good at making him come. Over the course of four weeks they made love a lot – slow, sensual and passionate, sometimes lasting for hours. Brendon loved it and taking it slow was a new experience for him – feeling that emotionally connected to someone was such a turn on, but earlier that evening, an hour before Gabe and Erin’s arrival, while the caterers clattered around in the kitchen, Ryan grabbed him, bent him over the dining room table, pulled his pants down and fucked him so hard it took them both less than two minutes to reach climax.

He recalled how sexy it had been to have Ryan hold his hips still and just fucking pound him – Brendon enjoyed slow, sensual and passionate, but he also craved the quick, hard fuck that had seemingly been forgotten since he and Ryan admitted they were in love. Just because he wasn’t hustling anymore didn’t mean he didn’t desire the way he felt when Ryan fucked him like he was still a whore. He’d forgotten how good Ryan was at it.
But even memories of their hot session earlier that evening couldn’t distract from the phone call he just received. His erection flagged in Ryan’s hand and he could feel the tension in his muscles. He couldn’t get into it, not after what Joe told him.

“You seem tense,” Ryan told him, pulling back and watching Brendon closely. “Are you okay?”

“Not really,” he admitted with a wrinkle of his nose.

“Does this have something to do with that phone call earlier?” Ryan lay next to him, propping his elbow on the mattress and putting his chin in his hand. Brendon nodded and shivered when he felt Ryan’s fingertips trace circles against his skin. “Who was it?”

“It was Joe – Jon’s boyfriend.”

Ryan was quiet for a second. The fingertips against his stomach stopped moving and the room was silent. Brendon didn’t look over at the man next to him. He wondered if Ryan hated hearing about Jon as much as Brendon always hated hearing about Pete… “Is everything okay?”

“No, not really,” Brendon sighed. “Jon’s in a pretty bad way. Joe quit his job to look after him and they got kicked out of their apartment, so they’re living in a motel in a shitty area – they don’t have any money and Joe’s worried Jon’s dealing with some pretty severe depression because he won’t leave the room or get out of bed.” Brendon shook his head. “I don’t get it – a month ago, I saw him and he seemed okay – he seemed healthy. I thought he was happy with Joe…”

Ryan laid his head on the pillow and kissed Brendon’s shoulder. “Depression doesn’t just go away, baby. It lingers. One day, everything’s fine, you feel good, on top of the world even – the next, absolutely nothing or no one can make you happy. People don’t have control over it. It’s chemical. It’s not just feeling sad…” He wrapped his arm across Brendon’s chest and pulled their bodies closer together. “Do they need help, baby?” Ryan asked softly.

Brendon turned in towards him and buried his face in the man’s chest – hearing that Jon wasn’t doing so well left this unexplainable sense of sorrow inside his chest. “I think so,” he sniffed. “I’m not in love with Jon anymore, I swear…”

Ryan kissed the top of Brendon’s head. “I know you don’t still love him, silly,” he smiled, ruffling his hair.

“I just hate to think he’s suffering like that.”

“Then we can help him. Call him tomorrow and we can sort something out – whatever he needs - rehab, a shrink, a place to live… I’ll make sure he has the means to get through this. I know how much he means to you and no one deserves to live like that… Hey, the only reason I made it out of my addictions alive is because my dad’s rich and he paid for my treatment – and you, of course. You helped a lot.” Brendon relaxed as Ryan’s hands rubbed at his back. “Fuck, if I was in Jon’s situation, I’d have probably given up a long time ago.”

Christ, Ryan was too good to him. Brendon pulled back and looked into the man’s eyes. “I don’t deserve someone like you,” he smiled sadly.

“Shut up. We both deserve this. We make each other happy. We’re good together.”

“I’m worried that one day you’re going to wake up and start listening to all those people around you who say I’m no good for you.” It was a legitimate fear Brendon had – if he and Ryan broke up, what the hell would become of him? He’d be no better off than Jon and Joe.
Ryan laughed. “Since when have I ever listened to anyone?” he grinned, leaning forward to kiss Brendon’s lips. Their mouths moved together, the kiss quickly becoming hot, heavy and desperate – knowing Ryan was going to go out of his way to help out Jon made him love the guy even more - it put Brendon’s worries at ease and before long, his erection pressed hard into Ryan’s thigh as they grinded against each other.

Ryan pulled away and Brendon gasped at the sudden loss of friction. “Call him,” he said, slapping Brendon’s ass. “We can meet them back in Manhattan. Fuck, I’ve got all this money and hardly anyone to share it with – what good is it to me anymore? I guess since leaving rehab I realized that money doesn’t mean shit unless you use it for good. Helping others - that’s what it’s there for, that’s the only time when money truly does buy happiness.”

Brendon settled in the crook of Ryan’s arm. “Thank you. You’re the best boyfriend I’ve ever had,” he smiled. Ryan’s cock was still hard; Brendon grazed his fingertips down the length of it under the sheets.

“That’s not a hard accomplishment,” Ryan laughed as he turned Brendon’s face up to meet his and kissed him again. “If I’m the best boyfriend you’ve ever had, prove it,” he grinned. “Suck my cock, Brendon. I want you to say that again when you got a mouth full of my come.”

Holy fuck. There it was again – that twist in his stomach he got when Ryan talked dirty to him. His breathing got shallow. His heart rate picked up. It was so thrilling to hear those words on Ryan’s lips and Brendon felt so good when he saw the pleasure on Ryan’s face after he gladly obliged.

Ryan repaid the favor, confidently jerking Brendon’s cock under the sheets as he made out with him. It didn’t take him long – Brendon was already halfway to orgasm after sucking Ryan’s dick.

Brendon was happy. He knew his past was unavoidable, he knew that one day he was going to have to face all his demons and admit to things he swore he’d never tell anyone, but he was so fucking happy in his relationship that none of it mattered. Ryan was there at night to ease his fears and the man always seemed to have the right words to say.

That night, Brendon felt Ryan’s embrace loosen around his shoulders as the man fell asleep behind him. He still felt a little shaken up after being told about Jon and Joe’s situation, but he knew he could deal with that tomorrow. Tomorrow... just deal with it tomorrow – that seemed to be the most common mantra flowing through Brendon’s head before he fell asleep nowadays. He could call it delaying the inevitable, but the truth was, even the darkest of storms seemed more tolerable when he knew Ryan was right beside him to protect him from the rain.
Chapter 59

The day after Joe’s phone call, Brendon arranged to meet him and Jon at the Four Seasons in Manhattan. Meeting at the Four Seasons in Manhattan was not Brendon’s idea and it was something he wasn’t at all comfortable with – he made that pretty damn clear – but Ryan didn’t want the boy going off on his own to some shady part of town to meet up with his ex and his drug-dealing boyfriend. If Ryan was agreeing to help those guys out, then he wanted it to be on his terms.

Ryan wanted to meet the two of them. After finding out Jon had a rather dark history with Marc Willis as well, he felt somewhat guilty. He couldn’t help thinking his silence at fifteen caused numerous other men pain. In the deepest parts of his heart, he knew it was all bullshit – he couldn’t be held responsible for Marc’s actions, but he wanted to do something in way of apology, even if it was just for himself. A clean conscience wasn’t the only, or even the main reason Ryan agreed to help out Jon, but he felt better knowing he was going to make a difference in somebody’s life.

He always had everything he ever needed handed to him on a plate, but he realized some people weren’t that lucky. Even if all the help Ryan could offer was in the form of writing a check and directing Jon to the best psychiatrist he knew, at least it was something. What Jon and Joe did with the money was up to them, but at least Ryan could sleep at night knowing he’d done the right thing.

Brendon was worried that meeting up at one of the most exclusive hotels in New York City wasn’t a good idea. He claimed it would only cause unnecessary stress, which was something Jon probably didn’t need right now.

“Well, I for one am not staying at a fucking Hampton Inn,” Ryan scoffed. Brendon didn’t look all that amused. “They’re going to find out about us eventually. Surely, it’s better they find out from us than via a newspaper – at least that way you can talk to them face-to-face and explain.”

Brendon sighed, but he eventually agreed – as long as Ryan didn’t book the best suite in the hotel because that, he claimed, would take a lot of explaining. Jon wasn’t showy and he wouldn’t be impressed.

Ryan had booked the best suite in the hotel, but not to piss Brendon off, simply because he couldn’t stand the thought of not staying in the nicest room the Four Seasons had to offer. The Ty Warner Penthouse was heralded as the swankiest hotel room in New York City – and at forty-five thousand bucks a night, Ryan always got his money’s worth.

“Are you trying to keep me your dirty little secret?” Ryan teased, poking at Brendon’s ribs. Brendon squirmed away from him – he obviously wasn’t in the mood for jokes, so Ryan tried to act serious. “I want to meet them. I offered to help them out and I’m not going to fork over money without talking to them first.”

“Joe said they only need a couple hundred bucks…”

“Baby, my dad is one of the richest men in the world – you think I would let them get away with giving them a couple hundred bucks? No. Listen, getting back on your feet while dealing with addiction and depression is fucking tough – trust me, I know this – and it takes more than a couple hundred bucks. If you want me to help them out, that’s no problem – but part of that deal is you tell them about us. Why are you so against the idea?”

Something about the way Brendon reacted to the news made Ryan think that he really didn’t want people finding out about their relationship – and all jokes aside, that concerned him.
“I’m not against the idea,” Brendon sighed, looking up at him. “I’m just worried what their reactions will be – especially Jon. I mean, if you think about it, it’s pretty unbelievable you and I got together in the first place. I was a whore, Ryan. You were my client-”

“Thanks for the reminder,” Ryan mumbled.

“-There were so many reasons why we shouldn’t have fallen in love…”

“But we did,” Ryan reminded him.

“I know and I don’t regret that.” Brendon looked down at his hands and picked at his nails. “I just don’t want people – especially people I know – to jump to the wrong conclusion about our relationship. I don’t want them to say anything bad about you. I don’t want to have to convince them that what I feel for you is real…”

Ryan pulled Brendon in for a hug and kissed the top of his head. “You don’t have to do any of that.”

“I’m just nervous, that’s all,” Brendon concluded with a sigh.

That was understandable. Ryan guessed talking to anyone about their relationship must have been a pretty daunting task for Brendon – it was one step closer to being exposed to the public, to being written off as a gold-digger. Brendon already made his thoughts on going public pretty clear – he didn’t want to deal with it, he didn’t know if he could deal with it. In fact, he was so against it that Ryan began to wonder if Brendon would up and leave him as soon as the world found out about their relationship. He questioned him about it a few days ago.

“I am not going to leave you – but I can’t lead the lifestyle you used to before you went to rehab. I can’t be in the papers every day, having strangers writing lies about me – or writing truths, which would probably be worse. I want something simple out of life, Ryan – something quiet. I don’t give a shit about being a celebrity.”

Ryan couldn’t help but laugh. He tried his best to convince Brendon that everything would be okay. “I don’t want to be that guy anymore either – that guy didn’t care about anything… or anyone. Things changed for me – for both of us. I want that quiet life too, baby. I promise you, as soon as we finish up business in Manhattan, we can go back to Tahoe - or anywhere else in the world you want me to take you. We can begin our life together. I love you, Brendon. Whenever this news does break, I’m going to look after you and I’ll literally fight anyone who says anything bad about you.”

Brendon managed a satisfied smile and the day moved on as normal. They hadn’t talked about it since; they’d just been enjoying their time together before returning to Manhattan because later that afternoon, William and Shane were scheduled to pick them up and drive them back to the city.

It was mid-morning and Ryan was currently watching Brendon do backflips off the diving board and into the swimming pool. He was showing off, but Ryan didn’t care – he was showing off for him and that’s all that mattered.

He looked absolutely drop-dead gorgeous. Ryan mentioned in passing a few weeks ago how much he’d enjoy seeing Brendon parade around in a tight pair of Speedos, all slicked up with tanning oil and the man most certainly delivered, because that’s what Ryan was staring at right now – his boyfriend, oiled up and beaded with water droplets, in nothing but a pair of white Speedos that left very little to the imagination; they were so tight and wet, they were almost see-through. He was so hot, Ryan could barely contain his excitement.

“I’m getting a boner looking at you!” Ryan called from his sun lounger as Brendon pulled himself
out of the pool, water rolling off of him. Brendon knew he was sexy and that’s what Ryan loved about him. The man started to walk towards him, the light shining off his slick body.

When Brendon reached the sun lounger, he straddled him, his wet hair dripping in Ryan’s face. “You know what I miss?” he smiled. Ryan shook his head. “I miss the way you used to fuck me when we first met. I love all the slow sex we’ve been having recently, don’t get me wrong - but what I’ve been thinking about a lot recently,” he whispered, leaning forward to bite at Ryan’s ear, “is the way you used to hold me down and fuck me like it was the last thing you were ever going to do. Fuck, Ryan,” Brendon groaned, sitting up and letting his head fall back, eyes closed, mouth open. He rolled his hips forward and Ryan could clearly see the man’s hard dick inside his Speedos. “That gets me so fucking hot.”

The man looked like a wet dream come true and underneath his ass, Ryan could feel his own erection starting to grow. “I was worried you weren’t really into that,” he admitted, because damn – if he didn’t miss the rough, desperate sex they once shared as well. “I didn’t want you to think-”

Brendon cut him off by pressing his finger to Ryan’s lips. “That first night we spent together, Ryan – I never felt anything like it before. No one had ever understood my body as well as you did and we only just met.” Brendon leaned forward to suck at Ryan’s neck; he let his lips leave a wet trail along his collarbone. “I lost myself that evening – it didn’t even feel like work.”

His lips slipped lower, stopping to bite gently at Ryan’s nipples. “It scared me how much I enjoyed it. I want that again, Ryan,” Brendon told him, locking their eyes. “There’s a time and a place for making love. I want you to fuck me senseless again – I wanna be talking in tongues.” The man flashed him a smile so filthy it made Ryan want to flip the boy over and pound him until he couldn’t breathe. “You know how well I can handle rough. I want to not be able to sit down for a week after you’re done with me.”

Ryan’s dick was already hard and leaking inside his trunks at Brendon’s words. He missed it too – so much. “That’s what you want? A nice rough, hard fuck before we leave for Manhattan?”

“Yes please,” the boy smiled. “I might not be a literal whore anymore, but I am a dirty slut and I want to be treated like one.”

*Holy fuck.* Ryan let his head drop back onto the cushion of the sun lounger and groaned. He pushed Brendon’s head down in line with his cock and felt his trunks being pulled down. “Start by sucking me off,” he ordered. Brendon quickly obliged, his hot mouth closing around the head of his dick, his hand wrapping firmly around the base. He needed a few seconds to get his thoughts in order, even if it was exceedingly difficult to concentrate when Brendon was blowing him.

Ryan always thought drugs had played a big part in the way he used to have sex. Before he got clean and when he was high, it was easy to fuck for hours. He always managed to pick partners who were so eager to please him – even when he didn’t pay them. His lovers rarely said no to him, they never asked him to slow down or be gentle - they were all just as filthy and desperate to get off as he was.

He didn’t favor the kind of men or women he’d be proud to introduce to his family. Quite the opposite in fact – he chose chicks who wore short skirts and no panties, porn stars and girls who’d beg to do a line of coke off his dick. He liked boys who acted like Brendon - men who weren’t afraid to get fucked until their eyes watered. He guessed that hadn’t changed.

However, since settling down, he thought he ought to show Brendon a certain amount of respect – plus, his priorities changed. He wasn’t just some coke-hungry, emotional mess anymore; he discovered the beauty of making love to someone he trusted and cared about.
Brendon was right though – there was a time and a place for making love, but every now and then, their animalistic urges were bound to surface and why should either of them deny themselves that? Brendon obviously wanted it and Ryan craved it too. Sometimes, the boy would catch his eye and he’d look so good that all Ryan wanted to do was pull his pants down where he stood, bend him over the nearest piece of furniture and fuck him senseless – but there was always something at the back of his mind that told him to have a little more consideration for the guy.

Brendon spent his entire adult life being used by other men - nothing more than two holes and a dick - and he always seemed so into it when Ryan took it slow. He never considered Brendon might want it just as much as he did… Why had it taken them this long to say anything?

“All the way down your throat, baby. I wanna hear you choke,” Ryan mumbled, his hand pushing gently at the back of Brendon’s head until his dick disappeared between the boy’s pink lips – but he didn’t gag. Of course not – his boyfriend was a fucking expert. Ryan thrust his hips up and held Brendon’s head in place – there it was… The boy gagged and pulled away, wiping his mouth.

“I love you,” Brendon mouthed, smiling up at him.

Ryan felt his heart race as he pushed Brendon’s mouth back down onto his cock. “I love you too, Brendon,” he managed to sigh.

Brendon sucked him off like the pro he was, bobbing his head up and down, deep throating the shaft, licking and sucking at his balls and asshole until Ryan felt like he was about to explode. Twenty minutes he was down there – twenty minutes! – and the boy didn’t even make a murmur that his jaw was beginning to ache.

Ryan pulled the boy up to kiss him when he was almost certain he couldn’t stand another second of Brendon’s tongue on him without coming. His lips were wet and their mouths worked together as Brendon thrust against him, rolling his hips, his hard-on almost bursting out of the tight confines of his swimming trunks.

“How d’you want me to fuck you?” Ryan asked once Brendon pulled away.

“Damn, Ryan - I don’t want you to give me a choice.”

So that’s how Brendon wanted to do this, was it? Ryan was totally down with that. He gathered up the necessities – a beach towel, a pillow, the baby oil Brendon slathered himself with earlier that morning - and pulled the boy to his feet. He led him by the hand to the lawn just beyond the swimming pool and spread the towel out on the grass.

“On your hands and knees,” Ryan told him, pushing Brendon to the ground. “Head down, ass up.”

Brendon assumed the position and Ryan moved behind him, running his hands down his back and over his ass. He pulled Brendon’s swimwear even tighter, up between his cheeks so his white ass was exposed either side of the material. Ryan leaned forward and bit the fleshy skin, sinking his teeth deeper until Brendon hissed and pulled away. Ryan left several teeth marks and hickeys on Brendon’s ass and the tender skin at the top of his thighs before he pulled those tight trunks down and off around Brendon’s ankles. Ryan sat back and admired his handiwork. He was perfect and holy fuck, an eager little tease… Brendon reached back on his own accord and pulled his ass cheeks apart, exposing his tight, pink and freshly shaved hole.

“Talk dirty to me, Ryan. Just go with your natural instincts.”

“You’re going to tell me how to fuck now, huh?” Ryan leaned forward and tightened his fingers in
Brendon’s hair, pulling his head back so his back arched beautifully. “You are very demanding. I bet you can’t wait for that beautiful, tight little hole of yours to be stretched out by my big, hard cock, huh? Eager little slut, aren’t you?” he derided, giving Brendon’s ass a firm slap.

“Yes, that’s exactly what I am,” Brendon groaned in response. His mouth hung open and Ryan saw the opportunity and took it, slipping his fingers between the boy’s lips.

“Better get them nice and wet, baby…” Brendon pulled back and spat onto Ryan’s fingers while holding eye contact, saliva coated his digits and Ryan felt himself getting harder at the sight. It was so sinful and so fucking sexy to watch Brendon suck at his fingers – two and then three, all the way down Brendon’s throat, until his eyes slipped closed in pleasure.

Ryan pulled his fingers from the wetness of Brendon’s mouth and brought them back to press against his asshole. One slipped in easily – two was a bit more of a struggle, but Brendon took it without any vocal resistance. He fucked the boy like that for a few moments, reaching around to jerk Brendon’s cock at the same time.

By the time Ryan attempted to fit a third finger inside him, Brendon was groaning and cursing in front of him, writhing around on his fingers. Ryan’s dick leaked precome at the sight and Brendon reached blindly around him for the bottle of baby oil Ryan had grabbed – he threw it back at Ryan and looked back over his shoulder at him.

“More,” he groaned. “I can take it.”

Ryan popped the cap and dribbled the oil between Brendon’s cheeks and all over his firm, round ass. He massaged it in, until the boy in front of him was slick and shiny – he added a third finger and slowly resumed fucking him.

“I want to film this one day,” Ryan told him, watching his fingers slip in and out, watching Brendon’s ass tense and flex under his touch. “This is hotter than any porno I’ve ever seen…”

“A sex tape, huh?” Brendon gave a breathless laugh. “If I ever needed another reason to piss my parents off.”

Ryan smiled and leaned forward to whisper in Brendon’s ear. “For our eyes only. I want you to see how hot you look from where I’m sitting…” He tucked his thumb in between his three fingers and pushed forward. Brendon cried out in surprise and his hole stretched wider to accommodate Ryan’s digits. It was a delightful reaction and the boy moaned and whimpered like he was already on the edge of orgasm. Ryan fucked him, three fingers and his thumb, knuckled deep, until Brendon was literally begging for more.

“Fuck me, Ryan. Fuck me as hard as you can.”

“Damn, you’re dying for my dick today, aren’t you?” he chuckled, pulling his fingers from Brendon’s ass and wiping them on the towel. Brendon gave a desperate nod. “Ask me nicely. What do you say?”

“Please.”

“Please what?” Ryan pushed his middle finger back inside his boyfriend and quickly located Brendon’s prostate, rubbing the tip of his finger against it until Brendon collapsed on top of the towel, his body spasming. “I could torture you like this all day,” he smiled.

“Ryan, please stop and just fuck me, goddamn it.” As soon as Ryan removed his finger, Brendon’s body turned slack. “Please fuck me,” he whispered, climbing into Ryan’s lap, clutching his face
between his hands. “I want you.” They kissed roughly. “I want you to dominate me.”

**Jesus Christ,** Ryan honestly couldn’t have landed a better boyfriend if he tried. He struck gold with Brendon Urie.

He pushed the boy from his lap and back onto his hands and knees on the towel. Ryan pushed Brendon’s head into the pillow. “Arch your back and pull your ass cheeks apart. Let me see how nice that hole looks after I spent so much time stretching it out.” Brendon did so without hesitation and Ryan couldn’t help but sit back and admire him. He dribbled more oil down Brendon’s ass crack and over his dick, slicking himself up and delivered another hard slap to Brendon’s ass.

“Are you ready, gorgeous? I’m going to fuck you now,” he said, lining his cock up with Brendon’s hole. “Hard. Just how a dirty boy like you deserves to be fucked.”

“Shit,” Brendon groaned. “I’m ready.” He pushed back on the head of Ryan’s cock and Ryan stilled his hips, watching in awe as Brendon slowly began to fuck himself. It took him a few attempts to impale himself all the way, but it was all Brendon – Ryan just watched and listened to the boy’s cautious whimpers until he was all the way inside.

Ryan started to move his hips, showing mercy for the first few strokes until Brendon loosened up all the way - and then they truly started to fuck. Ryan fist his hands through the boy’s hair and pulled. He pounded his ass, relishing the sounds he made and the way Brendon groaned his name – a few hard slaps to the ass and Brendon was almost wailing, fist his hands in the towel below them.

Ryan was sweating by the time they changed positions – Brendon on his back, his legs wrapped around Ryan’s shoulders and his head thrown back in ecstasy. **Damn** – they hadn’t had sex like this in ages… He could already feel himself peaking.

“Don’t stop,” the boy breathed before his eyes slipped closed. “Please don’t stop. That’s it – right there. Oh, baby, you’re getting it so right.”

Ryan let Brendon’s encouragement spur him on – he continued to fuck and Brendon continued to moan. A few minutes later, they both cried out as Ryan spilled his load inside Brendon’s ass at almost the exact same time Brendon jerked his own orgasm all over his stomach. Ryan collapsed on top of him and tried to catch his breath – that was intense and fucking exhausting. He was sweating all over with the effort he’d just put in.

“**That’s what I missed,**” Brendon whispered into his ear. Ryan laughed and waited a second before pulling out. He peered between Brendon’s legs and watched his come drip out of his ass. It was one of his favorite parts about bareback sex – the way Brendon would keep his legs spread wide and push Ryan’s load out of him at the end.

They lay together a while, exchanging slow, lazy kisses and Ryan could’ve laid there all day with Brendon in his arms, except for the fact that his stomach started growling. It was already lunchtime so they wandered into the kitchen together and finding salad and leftover chicken, they constructed themselves a quick lunch.

They ate naked, out on the patio, Brendon with a cushion under his ass, talking about nothing in particular. Ryan enjoyed how domestic they’d become since his parents left, how natural their relationship seemed to come to both of them. He was never much one for playing house - in fact, Ryan never thought he’d settle down. On his good days, he thought he’d spend the rest of his life as a sad and lonely bachelor, chasing uninterested youngsters when he was well past his prime. On his bad days, Ryan imagined a much darker fate – dead before he reached thirty from a drug overdose. ‘Accidental’, the press would call it, but Ryan’s family and friends would all know better.
Now, a fate like that seemed inconceivable to him. He had a zest for life he never experienced before and he had someone who loved him. He felt lighter than he had in years and it didn’t take an effort to smile anymore - so if people wanted to deride his happiness then that was their problem, not his. There was something to be said about a person who couldn’t even pretend to be happy for someone else – not that Ryan was naming names, but Gabe, William, Shane…

“We got about an hour and a half before our ride arrives,” he informed Brendon, getting up from his seat and walking over to Brendon. He hooked his finger under the boy’s chin and pulled his face up to look at him. “You think you can go again between now and then?”

“You want to fuck me again? Jesus. Can’t you wait until we get back to the city? I’m sore.”

Brendon shifted his ass slightly on his cushion.

Ryan shook his head. “I want you to fuck me. It’s been a while – over a week – and every time I fuck you and watch you have one of your crazy-strong orgasms, I get kinda… Well, I get kinda jealous,” he smiled.

Brendon smiled, gave a nod of understanding and without many more words between the two of them, they returned to the sun lounger and began to make out. Brendon was still slick and greasy from the oil they used earlier and he stunk like sex. Ryan straddled his hips and they both grew hard – he was definitely not as versatile as Brendon, they usually ended up taking it slow when Ryan bottomed but he was growing to like getting fucked almost as much as he enjoyed fucking.

One of his favorite parts when Brendon topped was how passionately the man would eat his ass. Ryan loved getting rimmed and Brendon would go at it for ages without complaint. He always felt so desirable when he was kneeling face down, ass up, with Brendon’s tongue inside his asshole…

It took them a little while, but not as long as it usually did – Ryan was almost getting used to the feeling of Brendon’s dick inside him by now and he knew it always hurt for the first few minutes, but the fact that the pain always drained away to reveal such pleasure was enough to make him want to battle through it. Brendon prepped him gently. They used a whole heap of baby oil and within fifteen minutes, Ryan was able to slowly lower himself all the way down on Brendon’s dick and slowly start fucking himself.

Sure enough, a few minutes later, Ryan could feel nothing but that beautiful burn of pleasure right up inside him. He threw his head back and rode Brendon’s cock with a groan.

“No, this is what I want to film. A nice POV shot of how good you look when I fuck you.”

Brendon made a screen with his hands, framing Ryan between his fingers like he was looking at him through a camera. “Yeah, that’d go viral.”

Ryan laughed and leaned forward, holding both of Brendon’s wrists above his head. He moved his hips and Brendon moaned. They locked eyes. “The best day of my life was the day I met you. I can’t imagine where I’d be without you, Brendon. I love you – more than anything else in this entire world.” He pressed his palm against Brendon’s cheek and moved in to kiss him.

“Same,” Brendon breathed against his lips. His hands slid down around Ryan’s ass and pulled him closer, they moved together, their bodies pressed flush as the sun lounger creaked beneath them.

This session was a lot lazier than their previous one – they were gentle and slow and Brendon kept whispering sweet nothings into his ear – but it didn’t make it any less intense. They both became totally lost in each other, the breeze moved around them and the movement of the lake lapped at the shore in the distance, but neither of them noticed it. They kissed and held one another, caressing each other’s skin until Ryan was almost whining, too lazy to prolong his orgasm any longer.
“I’m almost there…” he warned, lifting his head slightly to catch Brendon’s eye.

Brendon’s fingernails dug into his ass cheeks. “Come for me, baby,” he whispered back, one hand wrapping gently around Ryan’s cock. He picked up speed and Ryan concentrated hard on the warmth flowing through his dick and in his ass - and then a voice…

“Oh, Jesus! *Fuck*, Ryan…”

It was a voice that hadn’t come from Brendon.

He felt his head shoot up quickly, his mouth agape as his eyes settled on the two men stood at the patio doors. *William and Shane were early.*

“Jesus fuck- what the hell are you *doing* here?” Ryan barked.

Shane had already turned away back into the lounge in disgust, mumbling to himself, but William stood, staring at him with wide eyes, obviously unsure where to look. “Really, Ryan?” his PA said. “You knew we were coming.”

“Yeah, and I was going to be coming too before you two showed up. *Fuck off.*” Flustered, William slapped his hand over his eyes and followed Shane back into the house.

Ryan pulled himself roughly from Brendon’s now softening dick. “Neither of you two dumb fucks thought it would be a good idea to call before letting yourself in like that? *Fuck!*”

Brendon and Ryan were left alone on the patio – first, his dad walking in on him giving Brendon a rim job, now William and Shane? He sat on the edge of the sun lounger next to Brendon’s feet and sighed. He was so pissed off and so frustrated right now. He looked down at Brendon for some kind of comfort, but his boyfriend couldn’t keep that ridiculous amused grin off his face.

“It’s not funny,” Ryan moped.

“It’s actually pretty funny. Did you see Shane’s face? He did *not* look impressed.”

An embarrassed smile pulled at Ryan’s lips. “They ruined my orgasm – I was so close…”

Brendon sat up and slid his hand down Ryan’s bare thigh. “You want to finish off in my mouth?”

*Dumb question – of course he did but…* “They’ll see,” he said, nodding his head towards the lounge. “Or at the very least, they’ll hear. I can never really keep quiet when your mouth is around my dick.”

Brendon already moved onto his knees in front of him, pulling Ryan’s half-hard erection back to life. “So what? Let ’em see - let ’em hear too. We’re *boyfriends* now, remember? If they arrive at your house without calling first and then wander around looking for us, then they deserve to get an eyeful.” Brendon gave a cautious glance back at the patio doors and then licked the head of Ryan’s cock. “I’m sure they caught you doing worse things,” he smiled.

Ryan leaned back on his hands as he felt Brendon’s mouth begin to suck him and sighed. “What about you? You need me to-”

“Nah,” Brendon shrugged, pulling back. “I’ll take a shower and jerk off then. I came super hard when you fucked me earlier anyway. I doubt I would’ve had much to show for a second orgasm. Come on,” he prompted. “Jerk off in my mouth. I wanna taste you.”

Brendon knelt there naked on the patio with his mouth open and tongue out, looking up at him with
those damn wide eyes as Ryan stood above him and jerked off, one eye on the patio doors, watching
to see if William or Shane would be stupid enough to return.

It didn’t take him long – thirty or forty seconds before Ryan was aiming his come into Brendon’s
waiting mouth. The boy closed his lips around the head of his dick and sucked and sucked until
Ryan was too sensitive to take any more. Brendon happily swallowed every drop and then shimmied
back into those ridiculous Speedos as Ryan tried to recover.

“How do I look?”

“How,” Ryan answered with a tired smile, struggling to pull his trunks back on. Brendon looked
exactly as he should - like he just had one hell of a sex session. His hair was a mess, his lips red and
swollen from sucking cock and when he turned around, Ryan noticed the hickeys he left on the
tender skin just below Brendon’s ass cheeks. Goddamn, he thought to himself – my filthy, sweet, sex
god of a boyfriend… How the hell did I get so lucky?

“Hot enough to give your straight, homophobe of a driver a boner he’ll feel both confused and guilty
about?”

“Oh, no doubt,” Ryan laughed, pulling his t-shirt over his head. “Go shower. I’ll be up in a minute.”

Brendon walked into the lounge with his head held high. Ryan followed close behind him and tried
to nonchalantly ignore the two pairs of eyes that settled on him as soon as Brendon was out of view.

He hadn’t seen William or Shane in almost a month, he at least expected a few friendly inquiries
about how he was and what he’d been up to, but his driver and his PA remained quiet. He stared at
both of them, looking like two kids who just walked in on their mom and dad fucking.

“What?” he bit.

William looked like he expected some kind of apology and Shane sulked in the corner like a moody
teenager. Ryan wasn’t going to apologize for the fact they walked in on him making love to his
boyfriend. No way.

“You telling me no one ever walked in on either of you having sex before?” Ryan pretended to busy
himself with his cellphone. When the room remained in stony silence, he looked back up at them.
“Oh, get over it. Both of you.

“To be totally honest with you, man, I never took you for the bitch in that relationship. I thought if
you were gonna be gay, you’d at least be a man about it.”

“Shane,” William protested weakly in the background. “Please don’t.”

Ryan offered Shane a disparaging look and then stared back down at his phone. “There’s nothing
more manly than taking a cock up your ass, Shane.”

“Gross,” his driver muttered – and then, a little louder and with genuine curiosity in his voice, he
asked, “Do you seriously enjoy that?”

Ryan turned to him. He was irritated – Shane had been aware of his relationship with Brendon for
months at this point. He thought he’d be over his ridiculous homophobia by now. “Yeah. I do - I
love it. I love it when he fucks me and I love sucking his dick and feeling him grow hard in my
mouth. I love when he rims me and gets his tongue so deep I get stubble-burn on my taint and I
love-“
“Alright! That’s enough – I need to go wash my eyes out after walking in on that,” Shane bit.

“You need a girlfriend is what you need,” Ryan told him with a roll of his eyes.

William decided now was the right time to speak up about time schedules. “Traffic in and out of Manhattan is a nightmare, by the way so if you want to get to the Four Seasons by five, I suggest we leave within the next thirty minutes,” he said, looking at his watch.

Ryan nodded, barely listening. “Sure - Brendon’s in the shower. I’ll go let him know he needs to get a move on.”

Just as he was about to leave the lounge, Shane piped up from behind him. “So, does your dad know you’re banging a whore yet?”

He stopped in his tracks and felt the anger roll through his body. Turning around and taking a few more steps back into the lounge, Ryan glared at Shane. “What the fuck did you just say?”

Shane smirked but he avoided Ryan’s eyes. “I was just joking with you, Ryan. I’m giving you a hard time, man.” He spread his hands and gave a hapless shrug.

“If you wanna give me a hard time then go ahead, but leave Brendon the fuck out of it. Take back what you said. Right now.”

His driver shook his head and sucked at his teeth. “Nah, bro. I ain’t taking it back – dude’s a literal hooker and if you can’t see that he’s using you for your money then you’re more of an idiot than even I first thought.”

“Get out,” Ryan said as calmly as possible.

“What?”

“Get the fuck out of my house. Right now. Get in the car and drive away.”

Shane suddenly started, looking towards William for support. In the background, William looked down at his feet. “I’m meant to be driving you back to Manhattan, dude. You can’t just-”

“William can use one of my dad’s cars and he can drive us, but I don’t want to be anywhere near you. You’re a disgusting little homophobe and how dare you talk about my boyfriend like that. What the fuck does my private life have to do with you anyway? What makes you think you have the right to comment on it?”

“I… Dude! Come on, bro…” Shane looked at Ryan like he was completely out of his mind – how did that prick think he could get away with being so tirelessly hateful? Shane wasn’t his friend; he was his father’s employee – and homophobia in the workplace was a definite no-no. Ryan wasn’t going to stand for it any longer.

“I’m sick of everyone constantly feeling they have a right to dictate what I do with my life. I may not have made the greatest decisions in my past - I am more than willing to admit that – but Brendon’s the only thing that’s ever made any sense to me and then you sit there talking shit about him like you have my best interests at heart? It’s bullshit, Shane – and you know it is. I don’t want to be around you anymore.” Ryan covered his eyes with his hand and tried to keep his voice as calm as possible. “So please, do yourself a favor and get the fuck away from me.”

He wasn’t going to have a tantrum over this, but there was no way in hell he was getting into the car with Shane and suffering an awkward, two hour long drive back to Manhattan. Shane stood there in
the middle of the lounge, not moving, just staring at him like he was waiting for Ryan to change his mind.

“I’m serious, Shane. Leave – right now – before I lose my actual shit. You think you can come here, talk shit about my boyfriend – a man you’ve hardly said more than two words to – and belittle me?” Ryan could just about handle his driver making fun of him but what he couldn’t ignore was the amount of venom in the man’s voice when he talked about Brendon. “You work for me and you’re obviously too stupid to keep your mouth closed long enough and just do your goddamn job, so get the fuck out of here and if you’re not out of that door in sixty seconds, I’ll call the cops and have them come and deal with you.”

Shane started towards him with a scowl on his face. “You can’t fire me, fucker. I quit – and after all I did for you… I am done, through – I’m fucking finished.” Shane dusted his hands off dramatically in Ryan’s face and then held them up in the air. “See ya! Nice knowing you, Bill – we should hang out sometime.” Shane gave William’s back a rough slap as he passed him and before he left the room, turned back and caught Ryan’s eye. “I hope you and your queer, money-grubbing little boyfriend are very happy together. Don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

With that, Shane Morris marched out of the living room and slammed the front door. Ryan listened to the spin of tires on the gravel driveway as he drove away.

Ryan looked over at his PA. “Are you really going to hang out with Shane if he calls you up?”

“Nah.” William shook his head and wiped at his brow, still watching the doorway from which Shane had just taken his final exit. “Dude’s a dick.” He turned towards Ryan with a big, fake smile and panic flickering in his eyes. “So,” he beamed. “How’ve you been?”
Chapter 60

The suite at the Four Seasons was predictably ostentatious – probably one of the flashiest places they’d stayed together so far. There was a stocked library with a grand piano and a spa with unlimited massage treatments – actually, after the way Ryan fucked him earlier, Brendon was thinking of taking advantage of that… They had access to a chauffeur-driven Rolls Royce and the most beautiful views of Manhattan Brendon had ever seen, but it all seemed a little… unnecessary.

By no means was the Ty Warner penthouse suite the setting Brendon had in mind when he imagined meeting up with Jon and Joe again. It seemed a little vulgar to invite them into such a place after Joe called him and explained their dire situation - staying in a shady motel in a rough area, only a few days away from being officially homeless… Joe claimed he was scared for his life most nights, yet here Brendon was, standing in North America’s most expensive hotel room, all the caviar and champagne he could eat and drink only a phone call away, looking down on the city he spent his former years hustling.

Brendon attempted to make Ryan understand why it’d be a good idea for them to remain modest – even if only for a few hours while Jon and Joe were around – but Ryan was oblivious to it and it was kind of irritating. Ryan had his rich person blinders on, he simply didn’t understand that it was crass to invite Brendon’s ex-boyfriend up to their penthouse and expect him to be totally chill with it. He kept turning it around on Brendon, accusing him of wanting to keep their relationship a secret, accusing him of being ashamed.

It wasn’t like that. Brendon was prepared to tell Jon about Ryan - over the last day or two he geared himself up for it, but he wanted to do it on his terms. He knew Jon – he knew what his reaction would be and he knew it wouldn’t go over too well, but Ryan still refused to budge on the room.

“This place cost a non-refundable forty-five grand a night, Brendon,” he almost snapped at him. “We’re here now, I’m not giving it up.”

This was where they differed, times like these were when their vastly different upbringings made themselves known. Brendon thought it was fucking ridiculous to spend that much money on one night in a hotel – Ryan’s apartment was only five blocks away! When Brendon thought about all the things he’d rather do with almost fifty thousand dollars spending that much money on a night in a hotel boggled his mind - but money didn’t mean the same to him as it did to Ryan. That much was evident.

He felt like a dick for sulking about it because a quieter part of him loved the luxury – there was an infinity tub, a waterfall shower and a bed that cost sixty-five grand – but he knew he was going to have one hell of time trying to explain it all to Jon and Joe without either of them freaking out.

Brendon loved Ryan and he loved him for so much more than his money - Ryan knew that - but he was aware of the assumption most people would jump to when they learned of their relationship with each other. Brendon didn’t care about the opinions of strangers, but Jon Walker was one of the only people from his past that he still cared about. At the very least, Brendon wanted Jon to understand that he wasn’t a total piece of shit - a kept man banging a billionaire so he’d get to live a life of luxury, nothing more than Ryan Ross’ little boy toy who may have stopped hustling the streets but was basically still whoring himself out…

It was just a matter of fate, that’s all. Destiny pulled him and Ryan together time and time again and if Brendon hadn’t taken all those opportunities the universe presented to him, then his situation would likely be very different. He thought about it briefly, whether he would’ve let Dallon drag him
to California or if he’d still be in Las Vegas addicted to drugs and drinking too much, fucking for cash so he could keep a roof over his head. Brendon shuddered – he’d be no better off than Jon was right now and that was the simple fact of the matter. He didn’t deserve this ridiculous, lavish lifestyle Ryan could offer him; that’s all there was to it - and Jon, more than anyone else, knew that.

Ryan was in the library with the door closed, talking to his dad. He was pissed off about Shane and he’d been moody since William and his driver arrived up in the Hamptons earlier. He’d already been in there for fifteen minutes, informing his father about Shane’s unwarranted homophobia and his inappropriate comments regarding their relationship. Every few minutes, Ryan’s voice would be loud enough that Brendon would catch snippets of his conversation – irate demands like ‘fire him’ and ‘don’t you dare let him get away with this.’

Brendon didn’t want to get involved; he’d been called worse names than a queer before – and by his own parents, no less – and although he appreciated the way Ryan spoke up against the cynics, Brendon thought Ryan was going to have to choose his battles wisely in the coming months, because some ignorant assholes simply weren’t worth the trouble.

During the car ride back to Manhattan, Ryan sat beside him in stony silence. It was such a change from how things had been between them before William and Shane turned up at the house that Brendon started to worry if he’d done something wrong - or whether Ryan was having second thoughts about helping Jon.

“It’s not that,” Ryan assured him with an apologetic look. “I’m just pissed that stupid prick thinks comments like that are in any way okay.”

Ryan had taken Shane’s insults to heart, even though Brendon heard it all before. In the past, clients paid money to hate-fuck him while calling him all the worst possible names, and his own family - even Dallon - had all been perpetrators of homophobia towards him, for simply existing – and maybe sleeping with his sister’s husband, but that was beside the point…

When he was with Jon, Brendon lost count of the times the man would return home bruised and bloody after some scumbag trick lured him to a quiet area and then beat him up halfway through sex because they suddenly remembered that they’d been told their whole life being gay was something dirty and shameful and wrong.

He thought back to the graffiti he’d seen scrawled across the side of Dallon’s car outside that motel room in Vegas - repent faggot – a cruel threat from an anonymous scribe who apparently had God on his side.

Maybe Ryan was living in a bit of a fantasy world, Brendon thought. Maybe he grossly underestimated the ignorance and loathing seemingly good people were capable of once they discovered a man’s true colors?

“Well, you can’t fix stupid,” Brendon told Ryan in the car back to Manhattan that afternoon. “Don’t worry too much about what Shane says. Trust me, he’s not worth it.”

Ryan huffed and shrugged, but they held hands across the back seat, even though the rest of the journey was completed mostly in silence – a silence that only made Brendon feel more nervous about what lay in wait for him. He needed reassurance that everything would be okay - he needed someone to lean on – but the tension levels were high and Ryan seemed almost completely removed to the situation at hand. Brendon didn’t know if the imminent arrival of his ex-boyfriend also had something to do with that.

Jon and Joe were due to arrive any minute now and Brendon was pacing the floor nervously. His
palms were clammy and his mouth was dry; he couldn’t stop himself from imagining everything he worked so hard for blowing up in his face. He was so nervous he wanted to puke. *This is a bad idea… this is a terrible idea,* he told himself over and over again. *This could be the thing that pushes Jon over the edge. How the fuck am I going to explain it all?*

In the time Brendon spent in the room on his own, he asked himself why he cared so much. Jon *cheated* on him – literally right behind his back. He told Joe he wasn’t in love with him before he plucked up the courage to tell Brendon himself. The man effectively broke his heart, so *why* was he so determined to stay on the right side of him?

Because Brendon felt inherently connected to the guy, that’s why. He had no romantic feelings towards Jon anymore. He didn’t want the man to break down and admit he made a mistake hooking up with Joe, that Brendon was his one and only and always had been. He didn’t even expect an apology, but they’d been through a lot together and Brendon couldn’t just write that off.

Even at one of his lowest points - when he walked away from Jon before returning to Las Vegas - Brendon still had a hard time accepting that was the end; that he would never see or contact Jon ever again. There was still something that existed between them, something that connected them and despite being blissfully happy in his new relationship with Ryan, Brendon couldn’t ignore the camaraderie he and Jon once shared.

At one point in his life, Jon was Brendon’s entire world and just because their relationship hadn’t worked out, didn’t mean he regretted ever falling for him in the first place. Since their break-up, Brendon had done a lot of soul-searching and in the process, found a man who was *perfect* for him. They both found someone new, someone who could offer each of them more than they’d ever been able to offer each other.

Jon and Brendon were always better friends than lovers, anyway. The lines were pretty blurred most of the time – Brendon often couldn’t determine where his genuine affection for the guy ended and his own need to feel desirable, regardless of Jon’s feelings, took over.

And their relationship wasn’t all heartache. At the start, for the first few years, it was fun. Jon made him happy. Jon made him laugh. Jon was the one who was always there for him, despite their difficulties but that was before Jon let the men of Manhattan fuck his soul down to nothing, before drugs became his crutch and Brendon’s jealousy started to chip away at his sanity. Their relationship was toxic but the only antidote, Brendon realized, was forgiveness – because Jon was a good man, who deserved more than the life he currently had.

When his phone rang ten minutes later and displayed Joe’s number, Brendon mumbled a silent litany to himself before answering. They were downstairs in the lobby and Brendon said he’d meet them down there. He didn’t tell Ryan before leaving the room, Ryan would only want to call William to do the job and Brendon could only imagine how confusing *that* would be for the two men waiting for him downstairs.

When he arrived in the lobby, he spotted the couple before they saw him. Jon looked old. He looked tired and despondent to everything going on around them. Joe told him that the man was keeping clean, but Brendon didn’t know if he’d been telling the truth – Jon had lost weight again; that hollow, vacant look had returned to his face and Brendon’s heart *ached* for him.

He always felt so terrible at the fact that *he* wasn’t the one who could make Jon happy. He blamed himself - he thought he was missing some vital trait Jon needed but could never figure out what it was. Depression wasn’t easy to cure – Jon had a new relationship and a more understanding partner, but it didn’t mean shit. Ryan was right – depression is chemical, it doesn’t just disappear.
He stared across the lobby at the two men and tried to gather his thoughts. *This is it,* he said to himself. *Within five minutes, Jon and Joe will figure out the truth* – and Brendon had no idea how they’d react. Joe was the first to spot him, squeezing Jon’s shoulder and pointing Brendon out as he walked across the lobby towards them. Jon looked in his general direction, but if he saw him or not, Brendon couldn’t tell, because Jon didn’t react.

“Hi,” Brendon said when he reached them, offering an awkward wave. Even when he stood a few feet in front of him, Jon didn’t look up at him - he just stared down at the floor and let go a shaky breath. “How you both doing?”

“We’re okay,” Joe answered, casting a cautious glance back at Jon. He dropped his voice a bit lower and took a couple of steps closer to Brendon. “Hey, thanks for meeting with us like this. I half expected you to tell me to fuck off when I called you the other night and well… we’re struggling,” Joe mouthed. He shook his head and suddenly looked like he was trying hard to hold back tears. “I don’t know what to do, man. He needs help. These last few weeks have been hell.”

“Well, that’s what we’re here for today,” Brendon told him.

Jon piped up from behind Joe. “I know you’re talking about me. I should also point out I had no idea about any of this.” He gave his boyfriend a look that indicated it probably caused an argument between the two of them and he certainly wasn’t happy about being dragged halfway across town to ask Brendon for money. Jon turned towards Brendon for the first time. “And how do you afford to stay at the Four Seasons, dude? I thought it was a joke when Joe told me.”

“Yeah, man - this is a fancy-ass hotel,” Joe nodded in agreement, looking around the all-marble lobby. “I wasn’t sure you meant the Four Seasons – I thought it must have been some ironically named motel or something, y’know? I mean, no offense or nothing, but I thought I heard you wrong when you gave me the address.”

“What can I say? My boyfriend surprised me,” Brendon shrugged, trying to laugh it off. *Why the hell did he let Ryan pressure him into this? Why didn’t he put his foot down?*

Jon folded his arms across his chest. “You mean the trick? Rich, is he?”

Brendon blushed and looked around to see if anyone was eavesdropping on their conversation. “Let’s not get into this here, shall we? I know you’ll never understand it, but there are a few things I feel you should know about my new relationship. Would you like to come upstairs and talk this through?”

Jon looked like it was the very last thing he wanted to do, but he trailed behind Joe and followed Brendon to the elevators all the same. Joe talked their ears off about nothing in particular – commenting on the décor and their hour-long bus ride into the city. Joe usually seemed so unflappable, but today, Brendon could tell that he was nervous.

“I don’t even want to be here, man,” Jon informed them with a loud sigh in the elevator up to the top floor. “This is so unbelievably humiliating…”

“Jon…” Joe warned quietly. In the mirrored paneling of the elevator walls, Brendon saw the man’s fingers link with Jon’s and watched his thumb rub over his knuckles. Joe leaned his mouth in towards Jon’s ear and whispered to him – something that sounded like, “Come on now – you’ll be okay. I’m here.”

The scene made Brendon’s heart tighten inside his chest. They were good together, he realized – or at least, Joe was a good man for Jon to be around. Joe understood things about him that Brendon
never had.

Penthouses in hotels, Brendon had come to realize, all followed pretty much the same layout - they all had their own private elevator, which was accessible only by special code or keycard. When the three of them arrived at said private elevator and the doors opened, Joe was the one to peer apprehensively inside and ask, “Uhh… are you sure we should be up here? Where the hell’s your room?”

Brendon’s façade finally cracked. “My boyfriend’s rich, okay?” he gabbled. “I asked him not to do this, but he booked the penthouse suite. I’m sorry – oh god, I’m sorry. This is so embarrassing…” Brendon pinched the bridge of his nose between his fingers and screwed his eyes closed. He wanted the ground to swallow him up. He felt awful.

Joe simply laughed at him and knocked his shoulder with his fist. “Yo, dude – chill. We figured you were dating someone with money when you told us to come to the Four Seasons - and whether or not I’m showing myself up here or not, I don’t know, but I never stayed in a place fancier than a two-star motel, so I am stoked to see what the penthouse at one of the nicest hotels in Manhattan has to offer. Come on!” he enthused, sounding slightly too desperate. “Let’s check it out.”

Joe was trying very hard to keep things ticking smoothly. He seemed more than a bit anxious about the situation himself, but he pulled Jon into the elevator beside him and they completed the ride up to the room in tense silence.

Brendon remembered the first time he followed William up to Ryan’s penthouse at the Ross Hotel in Las Vegas and how utterly stunned he’d been that some people actually lived like that – being thrust into a world where people had that much money was both thrilling and contemptible and as they arrived at the Ty Warner suite that day, he briefly wondered if Jon and Joe were feeling the same way.

Brendon held the door open for the two of them to enter. Joe walked right in, staring around the room in stunned silence. Jon glared at him in the threshold of the doorway. “Is this a joke?” he bit. “Do you want to tell me exactly what the fuck is going on?”

Jon followed Brendon into the room, but he didn’t stare around in the same awe Joe had. Jon kept his eyes glued to Brendon – they were hard and distrusting. The two of them always had a problem communicating with each other and this time wasn’t any different. Why did he always feel the need to protect Jon from the truth?

Brendon took a deep breath – he felt it shake through him with nerves. “Well, I just told you what the fuck is going on,” he huffed, walking further into the room – Ryan was nowhere to be seen, probably still whining to his father about that idiot, Shane. He couldn’t decide if it was a good or a bad thing he was deciding to stay locked away in the other room. “My boyfriend is pretty well-off. He likes expensive hotel rooms, what can I tell you?”

Jon stared at him blankly. Maybe the whole defensive attitude Brendon was taking on wasn’t going to work out for him so well. He slowed his voice and tried to speak as calmly as possible. “He said he’d help you out. He’s a good guy – he wants to make sure you two are doing okay.”

“Do you have any idea how embarrassing it is to crawl back to you and admit I’m a failure when you’re staying in a place like this?” Jon looked around the vast room for the first time and then dragged his hands down his face. “I feel like this is some nightmare I can’t wake up from,” he sighed, staring up at the ceiling.

“Jon, I know this is difficult but… I’m concerned and Joe’s worried about you – he says you’re
depressed – that’s why he called me. He didn’t know of my… situation, but I care about what happens to you and I hate to see you like this.”

“You didn’t seem to care about me much when we were together – all you did was accuse me of cheating and pick fights with me. I don’t understand why you’re taking such a sudden interest now,” Jon mumbled at him.

Brendon tried to keep his composure – and he bit his tongue to stop himself pointing out the fact that Jon, in fact, had cheated on him. It was the depression talking. Jon didn’t mean it. “Come and sit down,” he suggested gently. “We can talk this over.”

“I need to go to the bathroom first, I’m feeling a little nauseous.” Jon looked just about ready to pass out.

Brendon pointed him in the right direction and as soon as Jon disappeared and closed the bathroom door behind him, Joe looked at him desperately. “That’s the meds. He gets sick a lot these days. I wouldn’t take anything he says too personally - he hardly talks to me these days either.”

“He’s on medication?” Brendon asked, staring at the bathroom door.

“Well,” Joe shrugged, a shifty look in his eyes, “I know a guy who knows a guy who managed to get me like, a month’s worth of Lexapro, but I paid out the ass for them and we can’t afford it again – and Jon just complains they make him feel sick and give him headaches anyway.”

“Are you sure that’s a good idea? Is it safe - you know, just getting medicine off some dude you know?”

“Dude! It’s either that or the poor guy’s going to start shooting heroin – and I know which one will kill him first. Fuck! Smack sure is cheaper.” Brendon flashed the man a displeased look, but Joe ignored him.

“Listen. I am trying my best here, but I am not a trained professional and there’s only so much I can do. After that cunt attacked him, after you left for Vegas, Jon didn’t leave the house for almost a month – it really fucked him up - and he started getting paranoid, he stopped sleeping… Now, on these meds, he does nothing but sleep. It’s like living with an old man, dude. I almost have to force him to eat these days and he’s just not himself anymore… It’s like he’s not even there half the time. I hardly sleep. I spend all night half-awake, listening to see if he gets out of bed because I’m terrified he’s going to do something to hurt himself. Fuck!” Joe barked, he dragged his hands down his face and sighed. “I want nothing more than for him to be happy. I just want him to stop hurting.”

Brendon spoke up after a pause to collect his thoughts. He gave Joe’s arm an awkward, but what he hoped was a reassuring squeeze. “Well, you did the right thing by calling me. We can get Jon the help he needs – both of you, because obviously, this situation isn’t healthy for you, either.”

“Talking about me again, huh?” Jon asked, exiting the bathroom quietly, but this time, his voice was less accusatory. He sounded less angry and more nervous. Desperate. Maybe even a little embarrassed. Brendon wondered how much of that conversation he heard.

Joe sniffed up his emotions. “I was just telling Brendon how difficult it’s been for us these last few months – and about the crappy side effects of your meds,” he said, rubbing Jon’s back tenderly. “Since getting kicked out the apartment, it’s been hard, huh?”

Brendon looked over at Jon with a silent sigh. Joe was right – it was as if the man wasn’t even fully present, like he didn’t hear the words being spoken to him and if he did, like he didn’t have the
energy to reply to them.

When they sat down in the lounge, Jon looked exceedingly uncomfortable – he stared out the window at the darkening sky over Central Park with a tense jaw, his knee jiggling up and down. Joe reached out and touched his leg to try and keep him still, but it seemed a futile attempt at reassurance.

“So… why don’t you fill me in on the last month or so?”

“Well,” Joe started, “as you know we got evicted from the apartment two weeks ago – we’re staying at a motel in Hunts Point for the time being, which is a far cry from this place, let me tell you.” The man took another long gaze around the hotel room. “It’s just been pretty miserable – I quit my job, so we got no solid income. I’m slinging whatever I can get a hold of – acid, Molly, crank - but it’s nothing that’s making us any real money. Jon’s uh… Jon’s still clean though, aren’t you, buddy?” Joe nudged Jon’s arm but Jon didn’t react. “It’s been very difficult. We got no place to stay after tonight and uh, I feel like…I feel kind of hopeless to tell you the truth,” Joe admitted, looking down at his hands.

“And then, a couple weeks ago, my parents found out I was out here doing drugs, because Pete got a hold of them and asked my dad where I was and told him I owed him for a bunch of heroin, which just isn’t true. It’s all part of his grand scheme to get back at me for being with Jon.”

Brendon felt his eyes glaze over at the mention of Pete’s name. That guy was such a piece of shit – still hurting over Jon leaving him almost seven years ago, as if he had some sort of claim to the guy. It made Brendon feel sick. He forgot how much he hated that prick. He’d also forgotten how much Joe could talk…

“I mean, I’ve done my fair share of drugs in the past but now, all I do is smoke a bit of weed and maybe have a few beers here and there - but my parents think I’m a fucking junkie and my dad’s a doctor, so he’s not too happy with me right now, even though I told them it’s all bullshit. They told me I’m a big disappointment and they’re not going to send me any money unless I go home and live with them and agree to go to rehab, which is something I don’t need to do. Although, it’d be worse if they knew I was selling; they’d totally disown me if they knew that was the case… It’s probably best we get out of Manhattan – we owe too many people money and this city sucks anyway. We need out of this urban jungle, don’t we Jon?”

“I wanted out of this urban jungle years ago,” Jon mumbled. “Manhattan is nothing but bad memories to me anymore.”

Brendon wondered if he fell into that category too – just another bad memory Jon would rather erase. “So, how are you feeling, Jon?” he asked.

Jon turned towards him with a strained smile. “I’ve been better, Brendon. When I make it through one more miserable day without shooting heroin, it’s a small victory. When I manage to drag myself out of bed and across town to sit in a hotel suite with my ex-boyfriend and make small talk about ‘how I’m feeling’, it’s a fucking miracle. Seems like you’re doing okay for yourself though – this nice hotel room and some rich trick you call your boyfriend paying your way…”

“It’s not like that,” Brendon told him quietly. “You wouldn’t understand. It’s different - he’s different.”

Jon gave a bitter laugh. “It’s funny, considering you spent so much of our relationship accusing me of enjoying it when my clients fucked me and getting jealous of men who did nothing but hurt me and made me hate myself, I’m surprised you’re asking me to be cool with this, Brendon.”
“Jon. Come on now,” Joe tried to interject. “Brendon agreed to help us out.”

“No,” Jon snapped. “Let me finish. If you want to be with a man who gets off on paying you for it, then that’s your call, Brendon. I just hope he doesn’t disappoint you and I hope to god he doesn’t start bringing up your past as a way to manipulate you or control you.” Jon paused. Brendon didn’t know if that was a sly dig at his actions during their relationship or not. “But don’t bother trying to convince me that he’s any different from all those scumbags before him. They’re all the same,” Jon told him. “Each and every one of them.”

Brendon swallowed the lump in his throat. When he spoke again, his voice was hoarse. “He offered to help you out, Jon. Ryan – my boyfriend – he’s actually a recovering addict as well. He understands what you’re going through—”

“Yeah, I’m not sure he really does,” Joe mumbled, head lowered, eyes scanning the hotel suite dubiously. Brendon guessed it was a pretty dumb thing to say to a couple who were one night away from sleeping on the streets. Jon just stared at him blankly. He wondered when that man lost every single emotion, apart from anger and hate.

“Come on,” Brendon attempted to cajole nervously. “Once we get you some money, you’ll be able to leave New York and things will get better for the two of you. That’s what you always wanted, right? It’ll be a fresh start.”

Jon put his head in his hands and let out a frustrated sigh. “Brendon, I am trying really fucking hard to keep my shit together right now and you are testing my patience to the absolute limit. You are so hypocritical!” he fumed, locking eyes with him. “You spent our entire relationship driving yourself insane with jealousy, worried that I was enjoying it, constantly accusing me of things I’m not even capable of anymore… Do you remember not long after we first met? I had that guy who would pick me up a couple of times a month and take me out to dinner and I quite liked him - he was actually nice to me, Brendon. He treated me like a human being. Do you remember?”

Brendon’s cheeks flushed red – he’d forgotten about that, but he sure remembered now that Jon was bringing it to his attention – the jealousy, the anger and insecurity he would experience whenever Jon talked about that particular trick.

The man was a regular client of Jon’s and they had apparently known each other since Jon moved to New York – so, since the guy was sixteen, which was the first reason Brendon took a dislike to him. He was a successful and attractive divorcee - he had kids who were older than Jon, but for some reason the two of them got on. There was some connection there, some element of trust and respect – and knowing that drove twenty year-old Brendon crazy.

Every time they saw each other, this man would tell Jon he was getting too skinny and needed to eat – so, he would buy him dinner before taking him back to a clean and reasonably priced motel room to fuck him. After sex, they drank beer and smoked weed together and sometimes, they would hang out for hours, just talking or watching a movie. He paid exceptionally well and Brendon could always tell the nights they saw each other, because his boyfriend would return home in a good mood, pockets full of cash and several freebie joints.

Over the course of several months, Brendon convinced himself that Jon was going to leave him for this nameless client. He truly believed that he was better than him in every conceivable way – this trick was richer, more successful, funnier, kinder, better at turning Jon on… Brendon was certain that he was going to lose yet another love to someone who could offer more - and that was Dallon’s fault - he never did get over the fact Dallon chose his sister over him and because of that, he expected Jon to leave in the exact same way.
Dallon left him with trust issues Brendon had taken too long to acknowledge, feeling worthless and insecure. The route of his jealousy was because it had all happened once before and the insecurities his brother-in-law left him with when he chose her over him stayed with him, a painful reminder of the man who once called him his angel.

“You asked me to stop seeing that guy – and when I asked you why, can you remember what you said?” Brendon did remember what he said – all too well, but he let the silence hang between them. “You said you were afraid I was enjoying it too much – and all that said to me was you’d rather see me hate it, than actually sleep with someone who respected me.”

Jon’s words remained suspended between them, heavy and raw. Brendon wanted to defend himself, tell Jon he had it all wrong but what was the point now? The damage was done and the wounds still bled and he was the hypocrite all along.

“I stopped seeing that guy because I cared about you and I didn’t want to make you uncomfortable – even though the dude bugged me for months to meet up with him again and he offered me obscene amounts of money... But I made you a promise and I thought what we had was worth making that compromise. I know I never said it, but I knew even then that you were a better man than Pete ever was to me and I guess somewhere at the back of my mind, at one point, I started to think that all those people in my life who told me I wasn’t worthy of real respect or love were right – my mom, my dad, my teachers and the people I hung out with, Pete, all those guys I was stupid enough to sleep with... They all made me feel like I meant nothing to them - but every once in a blue moon, someone would come along and they would actually treat me right and I’m sorry I got swept up in that,” Jon said, not looking all that sorry at all. “You told me he was a pervert and a creep and the only reason he was nice to me was because he got a kick out of paying me and having power over me... You told me that with such conviction I just believed you. So, what makes your guy any different, Brendon? I’m really dying to know…”

Brendon let his eyes wander guiltily around the room. Joe sat beside Jon quietly, chewing at his lip and unfortunately for Brendon, he caught the man’s eye and Joe evidently felt the need to speak up. “Look, why don’t we all just chill out, maybe smoke a bowl and Brendon, you can just be honest about what’s going on here because we’re not stupid and it’s obvious there’s something more to this that you’re not telling us.”

Good old Joe Trohman, ever the peacekeeper, the mediator who always seemed to be able to calm a situation down. He removed a little Ziploc of weed from the front pocket of his jeans, followed by a glass pipe and hummed to himself as he opened the bag and broke off a bud – the smell hit Brendon almost immediately and he knew he should put a stop to their impromptu smoke session, if only for Ryan’s sake, but he was distracted and the words still seemed so difficult to get out.

How was he expected to just sit there and inform his ex-boyfriend and new partner that he’d fallen in love with Ryan Ross? Ryan didn’t have the world’s best reputation as it was – to strangers who read the newspapers, he was an insufferable brat, a spoiled little boy with a glamorous drug-addiction. There was no way Jon would be happy for him and accept his new relationship...

“Look,” Brendon started. “Hold off on that for a second.” Joe’s hands stilled and he looked up at him expectantly. “I know that this is all a ridiculous display of bullshit and I know how it looks to both of you - it’s crass, I know it is. I probably should have told you all this last time I saw you, but I had to keep quiet for a number of reasons and I didn’t want to rock the boat, especially when the two of you seemed happy…” He was interrupted by the sound of Ryan exiting the library.

Finally! Brendon didn’t know whether to jump up and hug him in relief or push him back behind closed doors. Ryan sighed loudly in frustration at the phone call he just completed with his father and
was about to launch into a tirade when he spotted Jon and Joe on the couch with their backs to him.

Ryan stopped in his tracks and flashed Brendon a desperate look – he looked like a rabbit caught in headlights but took a second to gather himself up, wiped the palm of his hand off on his pants and approached slowly, until the two men on the couch looked up at him. Brendon chewed furiously at his thumbnail, just waiting to see how this scene would unfold.

“Hi,” he breathed nervously. “I’m Ryan. Brendon’s told me a lot about you. It’s good to finally meet you both.” Brendon had never seen the man look more flustered or uncomfortable in the entire time they’d known each other.

Joe’s mouth fell agape; he stared at Ryan in total disbelief as if he couldn’t quite comprehend the man who stood in front of him. Jon’s expression didn’t seem to change much – in fact, it seemed like it took him a few seconds to put it all together. When it finally clicked, he tore his eyes away from Ryan and turned them on Brendon. They were filled with an emotion he couldn’t quite pinpoint – humiliation, disbelief, anger…

“Is this a fucking joke?” he spat, his voice wavering. Brendon wasn’t able to do much more than shake his head. Jon pulled at his hair in frustration and rocked back on the couch. “You’ve really outdone yourself this time, Brendon. Please tell me this is some kind of joke, because I don’t think I can deal with this.”

“Listen, Jon - I can explain everything…”

Jon ignored him and turned an accusing finger towards Joe. “Did you know anything about this?”

Joe sat there, with his mouth open in shock. “No! Why the hell do you think I knew anything about this?”

“Well, you know - seeing as you just love talking to Brendon behind my back, I thought maybe you might know something more than you let on… Everyone keep this a secret from Jon, just in case he has a mental breakdown over it.”

Joe shook his head, unable to tear his eyes away from Ryan. “Jon, I had no idea about any of this,” he said slowly.

Jon stood up from the couch quickly and shook his hands in front of his face. His face was red and his eyes were watering - he looked almost on the verge of a panic attack. “I got to get out of here. I can’t deal with this… I need a joint – a fucking sedative or something. I need to get out of this fucking hotel room. I need to get my head in order.”

Joe stood up and reached out for Jon’s wrist as he pushed past him towards the door. “Stay,” he pleaded. “We need to talk about this. Let’s just calm down, shall we?”

“Calm down? You expect me to stay calm when I’m sat in a room with-” Jon turned his attention towards Ryan and looked at him with disgust in his eyes, “with this fucking dude – and I’m meant to be cool with it? Does no one else realize how fucked up this is?” He stared at them all for a second, looking like he expected an answer before turning around towards the door. “I’m leaving, I can’t do this anymore.” He looked back at Joe, “And don’t follow me. You arranged this, you stay and sort it out.”

With that, he was gone – out of the room as stormily as he entered it, as the heavy door clicked to a quiet close behind him.
The three men remained in uncomfortable silence for a few seconds, before Brendon got shakily to his feet. “Maybe I should go after him?” he said, looking to Joe for permission. “I can probably explain all this to him better if it’s just the two of us.”

“Yeah,” Joe replied, sucking at his teeth. “Maybe you should go do that.”

Brendon followed Jon, leaving Ryan perched nervously on the arm of the couch to face Joe alone. He probably wouldn’t be happy about it, but Ryan was a big boy – he could surely make idle chitchat with the guy for ten minutes, or at least until Brendon convinced Jon to return to the hotel room and talk things through. Besides, Ryan had been the one to pressure him into this situation, despite all of Brendon’s protests – and it had gone exactly as he expected it would. Ryan owed him.

When he approached Jon at the end of the hallway, he was jabbing furiously at the elevator buttons, blinking back frustrated tears. “How the fuck do I get this thing to open? I want to leave,” the man choked.

Jon had every right to push him away and tell him he never wanted to see him again, so Brendon spoke softly and tugged gently as his elbow. “Hey,” he said. “Come on now, stop that.” He pulled the man around to face him, but he wouldn’t meet his gaze. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you about all this sooner.”

A pause and then a weighted sigh. “I can’t do this anymore.” Jon’s voice trembled out of him – he looked absolutely beat, fed-up and on the verge of collapse. “I’m having a mental breakdown, Brendon. I can’t deal with it anymore.” He covered his mouth with a shaking hand and looked off to the side. Brendon watched silent tears leak from the man’s eyes. “I can’t get out of bed most days, I can’t even pretend to be happy anymore.”

Brendon felt his throat tighten as he pulled Jon against him; the man resisted for only a few moments before he gave in and pressed his head against Brendon’s shoulder. “I’m falling apart,” Jon sniffed. “I hate myself so much. I have nothing left to live for. I just want to end it all…”

Brendon wound the man into a hug and then Jon started to cry, big shuddering sobs from deep inside his chest – something that sounded like it had been repressed for a long time. Jon’s fingers clutched desperately at Brendon’s shirt.

“You’re not alone in this. Joe and I – we want to help you,” he said, letting his hand reach up to stroke through the back of Jon’s hair. He turned his head to press a soft peck against Jon’s ear. “Let it all out. Take a breath, count to ten – breathe.”
Well, this is awkward, Ryan thought to himself. The palms of his hands were clammy and his heart was beating out of time. He looked around the room, concentrating on everything but the face of the stranger in front of him and desperately tried to think of something to say.

He wondered why the hell Brendon hadn’t come to tell him Jon and his boyfriend arrived so they could face the couple together because as of now, he was none the wiser as to what had been said before he walked into the room. He’d certainly been thrown into the deep end and he felt like a fucking idiot – what was he meant to say? What was he meant to do in a situation like this? In the past, whenever Ryan felt outside of his comfort zone, he always had drugs to mellow out the intensity, but this time, there was nothing to hide behind – not even Brendon.

“So…” he started, huffing out a breath. He caught the eye of the man he assumed to be Joe for the first time, before quickly looking away and losing all confidence. He muttered under his breath, “This is so awkward.”

“You’re telling me,” the man sniffed, still looking around the room with a furrowed brow. “I can’t believe this is for real. This is actually happening right now… I’m not tripping; you’re Ryan Ross, right?”

Unfortunately, yes I am.

Ryan gave a nod and cleared his throat. “And you must be Joe? Brendon talks about you a lot – well, Jon mostly. He’s concerned.”

Joe gave him a tight-lipped smile and a slow nod and Ryan felt the desperate need to defend his boyfriend. “Doing it this way was all my idea, by the way – and probably not the most subtle of approaches. Brendon’s been nervous about coming clean about our relationship for months.”

“Well, I can see why. This is… uh.” Joe looked like he was searching for the right words, but eventually, he gave up and dragged his hands down his face. “This is fucking crazy, man. I don’t even know what to say right now - it’s not often I’m speechless, but damn…”

Ryan twisted his fingers anxiously. “I guess it’s a lot to take in, huh?”

“Yeah, no shit.” Joe looked right at him and laughed in disbelief. “This is a fuckin’ trip – not what I was expecting at all.”

In the past few months, Ryan had almost forgotten he was famous. After spending six weeks in rehab and making the decision to lay low after he left, there wasn’t much the press could write about him. Of course, articles still popped up now and then, written by some desperate journalist intent on desecrating his name but his time away from Manhattan, out of the spotlight, meant he’d been able to live a reasonably private life for the first time in his recollection, but sitting in front of this dude, Joe, gave Ryan a sudden, harsh dose of reality. Life wasn’t going to remain as rosy as it had been during the past few weeks; he and Brendon couldn’t stay wrapped in their perfect little world forever and this seemed like the very first step back to reality.

He swallowed loudly and tried to think of something to say – his father didn’t spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on his education for him to get tongue-tied in front of strangers. “So, Brendon told me you’ve fallen on some hard times recently. He wants to help you guys out.”

Joe nodded and scratched at his stubble-rough jaw. “It’s been a hard few months, I’m not gonna lie.
Calling Brendon was my very last resort and I had no idea he was, y’know… dating you. I’d have called him weeks ago if I’d known,” the man laughed, quickly adding, “I’m kidding.” His face turned serious again. “I hate having to beg for money, but I’m doing this for Jon – he deserves to be happy and I know, unless we get out of Manhattan and I’m able to get him the help he needs, that’s not going to happen. I had no one else I could call. I’m very grateful Brendon even gave me the time of day.”

Joe looked out of the window with a sigh and Ryan took in the details of his face. The guy was handsome; not really Ryan’s type because he preferred the more well-groomed, dark haired, dark eyed, clean-shaven pretty boys – Brendon, basically, his ideal man was Brendon Urie - but he could certainly understand why Brendon had once seemed so bitter about Jon spending all his time with this Joe character. He sat in front of Ryan with his arms folded high across his chest, chewing at his lip, his eyes unwilling to leave the lights of the city that shone below them.

Joe was broad-shouldered with a strong jaw and bright blue eyes that were perhaps slightly too big for his face. The rolled-up sleeves of his shirt revealed that both his arms were covered in brightly colored tattoos and his hair framed his face in messy brown curls. Put it this way, if Joe started hitting on his boyfriend, he’d be jealous too. Ryan grew more and more uncomfortable with each passing second of silence.

He thought about Brendon being outside alone with Jon. Was he jealous? He couldn’t decide. Brendon sure hadn’t hesitated in running after him, and even though he’d been told time and time again that there were no feelings left between the two of them, Ryan still imagined it: Brendon falling into Jon’s arms after months apart, consummating a relationship that never blossomed while they were together… The two men had history and what if Ryan couldn’t match up to that? His knee started to bounce up and down and his mouth became dry – each second dragged slowly by and the room filled with tension.

It was ridiculous to get so wound up over a fear that only existed in the darkest corners of his mind, he scolded himself, but he was fucking nervous – his boyfriend had gone chasing after his ex without a even a moment’s hesitation and he didn’t know what the hell to say to this Joe dude. He just wanted Brendon to come back and smooth things over – Brendon would probably have the right words for this situation.

He decided to test the waters and try to start another conversation, even though what came out of his mouth made him sound like a moron – an insecure, jealous moron at that. “Exes, huh?” he laughed a little too frantically. “I never had to deal with one of them before… You think they’re okay out there? Maybe we should go check up on them or something, see what they’re getting up to?”

Joe shook his head. “Do you really want to go out there and get in the middle of those two right now? Because I certainly don’t. Give ‘em some space, dude - that’s my advice.”

Ryan nodded in understanding and kept quiet. Joe was right; they needed space. Brendon needed time to explain himself without Ryan there making things worse.

Maybe it wasn’t a good idea to do this his way, after all? Ryan had taken the lead in their relationship so far; he’d been the one to call all the shots and suddenly, he felt guilty about it. He pressured Brendon into meeting his family and having dinner with Gabe and Erin - he constantly overrode the man’s desire to keep life simple. For him, it was all about the best hotel suites, private jets and lavish gifts and Brendon mostly just went with the flow but Ryan found it so hard to just sit back and let the guy make his own decisions. He always had to have his own way – he guessed it had to do with nobody ever saying no to him when he was growing up and maybe the fact Brendon was so used to putting other people before himself – but this time, Ryan’s desire for control put them in a sticky
situation and now, he was forced to deal with the consequences like a big boy, unable to back out like he usually would.

He noticed Joe was fiddling with a glass pipe and Ryan couldn’t help thinking how easy it would be to smoke weed again, it would probably break the ice and make conversation a little easier or at least, less important if they were both baked. The man must’ve seen him eyeing his weed though, because he tucked it into his palm and slipped the pipe back into his pocket. “Sorry,” Joe muttered. “Didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable.”

There was something endearing in the way Joe apologized, something authentic that Ryan failed to experience from Gabe during the times they met after his stint in rehab. Maybe it was the man’s experience of living with an addict that helped him understand how easy it was for someone like Ryan to slip back into bad habits, or maybe the guy was just genuinely courteous of those around him? Ryan spent so much of his life surrounded by people who only ever thought about themselves, this small gesture struck him as truly sincere.

He waved it off as if it didn’t bother him and made another attempt to make polite conversation until Brendon decided to return and save his sorry ass… He tried to keep his voice light, but the words felt heavy coming from his mouth. “How long have you been living in New York then?”

“Long enough,” Joe told him with a sigh. “I never really liked being in one place for too long but I’ve been living here for a little over a year now. For the last seven or eight years or so I’ve been back and forth between here and Chicago – which is where I’m originally from.”

“Did you know Jon from back in Chicago?” Ryan asked. He was pretty certain Chicago was the city Jon was raised in.

“Yeah – we knew each other from around, but…” Joe shrugged, “…we were teenagers and he was involved with this other guy, Pete, for a long time – Pete rents an apartment in the Bronx these days. I think you’re familiar with it.”

Ryan’s memory immediately flew back to that night he ended up ODing at that weirdo Pete’s place. He’d almost forgotten about him – the man that all four of them had in common. Ryan wondered briefly if Joe knew something; whether Pete blabbed about that day to try and impress people, but the man continued without much of a pause and Ryan chalked it up as a mere observation.

“Jon was always into stuff I really wasn’t at that age… I never really felt like I fit in with the people Jon hung out with anyway and then he left Chicago at a pretty young age and we lost contact. My plan was to go to medical school and become a doctor, because that’s what my mom and dad wanted me to do. I was smart - I got the grades and shit - I was always at the top of the class but I dropped out after my second year because I was playing in some crappy, Chicago punk band and seriously thought we were going to hit the big time and I could make more money as a musician.” Joe laughed as if it was a stupid dream to have ever had in the first place. “I kinda fucked that one up, I guess. My mom and dad weren’t too happy with me – overbearing Jewish parents though, they were never satisfied. I don’t know what I expected, to be honest.”

“So, what did you do after you quit school?” Ryan asked. He kind of already knew the answer; he just wanted to hear how a med school dropout with good grades and parents who were evidently hell bent on their son’s success ended up making his living as a drug-dealer in Manhattan.

“A bunch of things – crappy jobs, manual labor, a bunch of bullshit. No matter what I did though, I always made more money slinging weed and pills,” Joe joked. “But weed ain’t worth shit now and no one’s doing pills these days, it’s all powders and I lost my hook-up since I’ve been with Jon – plus, it’s not really a viable career now that I’m fucking thirty. Dealing’s a young man’s game,” he
sighed and Ryan nodded in earnest because who was the *real* loser here; the unapologetic drug-dealer, or him, the addict?

“Would you ever go back to med school?”

“For Jon, I would. He’s so amazing on his good days – not that I don’t love him on his bad days too - but I think to myself: *I would do anything for you, absolutely anything.* He’s not really mentally capable of going out and getting a legit job himself, so I feel I have to support him. I mean, I *want* to, of course, but right now, with things as they are, it’s just *impossible.* We can’t catch a fucking break, man.”

Ryan felt weird getting emotional over a couple he didn’t even know. He should’ve automatically hated Joe, simply for the fact that he made Brendon miserable, but the man talked with such sincerity and blunt honesty that he couldn’t help feeling Joe was one of the good guys. Ryan guessed what he was feeling was some fucked-up kind of thankful – because without Joe around to steal his boyfriend, perhaps Brendon would’ve never come looking for him?

Joe blew out a breath and changed the subject. “So, how long have you and Brendon been seeing each other?”

“A few months?” Ryan replied. “We met up in Vegas when I left rehab and we’ve hardly been apart since. I know what you must be thinking,” he added quickly, “that this is some fucked-up, fake relationship, that I’m paying him to be with me or that he’s using me or that I’m a bad person based on what you might’ve read on the Internet, but… I really love Brendon. We love each other. I know he’s genuine and I never felt like this about anyone before.”

Joe and Jon were the only people who now knew the whole truth about their relationship; they met when Brendon was a hooker and Ryan *paid* to fuck him. He spent the last month denying accusations from nosy family and friends that Brendon wasn’t a gold-digger but none of them knew the real truth. Pamela and his father seemed to like Brendon, but he often questioned if their opinions would change as soon as they found out what the man used to do for a living – and now, sat in front of Joe, he wondered whether the guy was silently judging him as some warped kind of pervert who could only get off if he *paid* someone to do whatever he said…

Joe just gave a laidback shrug though. “Hey, to each their own, dude, that’s what I always say. Your relationship, your business, right? *Fuck,* I’ve been single most of my life and every time I would go back home, my mom, dad, all my aunts and uncles and cousins and shit would all ask me why I hadn’t settled down yet – *then,* they started asking what was *wrong* with me... I was like ‘there’s *nothing wrong with me and mind your own damn business, assholes. Stop concerning yourself with my life and start concentrating on yours.*’ Just live and let live, right? How hard is that? If you and Brendon make each other happy then the rest of it is really none of my – or anyone else’s - concern.”

Damn. Ryan wished everyone could be as easygoing as Joe about his relationship with Brendon. It sure would make his life a whole hell of a lot easier. Shane was a fucking homophobe who didn’t have the decency to keep his backwards opinions to himself and even William, who Ryan always considered a supportive friend, gave Brendon disproving glances when he thought Ryan wasn’t looking. He understood people were concerned that he was being taken advantage of, but *fuck – how long were they going to keep up that charade?* Would he still have to defend Brendon’s character six months, a year, *five* years down the line?

“I got to admit though,” Joe continued, “this is a shock. It’s the very last thing I expected. I mean, I guessed Brendon was maybe dating someone rich when he asked us to show up *here* – at the Four
Seasons of all places - but you never even crossed my mind. Hey, dude – can I ask you something?”

Ryan nodded for him to continue. “Why do you want to help Jon and me out? I mean, he’s Brendon’s ex-boyfriend and I know I’m not Brendon’s favorite person in the world, so what’s up with that?”

Ryan looked down at his hands and took a moment to think about his answer – what was up with that? In his head, he knew the exact reasons, but it was going to take an effort to articulate his words in the right way.

“Brendon told me a lot about his past with Jon – we’re pretty open with each other and I hope you don’t think I’m speaking out of turn here, but his struggle with addiction and depression just struck a chord with me. I feel like on some scale, I know what that feels like – I struggle with my addictions every single day and I know I probably will for the rest of my life. It’s hard work staying clean and I’m not comparing my struggle to Jon’s or saying I have it as bad as him, because I know I’m very privileged but… I sympathize; and I want to give you the help I had - not just because it means a lot to Brendon, but because I know how hard it is to live a sober life and confront your demons, and without professional help, all that must be almost impossible.” He looked up at Joe. “So, I guess I want to make life just a tiny, little bit easier for you and whether or not you want to accept that, is down to you, but there’s no hidden motive. I just want to help you out. That’s all.”

Joe raised his eyebrows in quiet surprise and gave a nod. “Fair enough. I have no issues accepting your help, but Jon might.” He laughed, “He’s a stubborn dude. I think he thinks there’s something shameful in admitting he’s not coping too well right now. I never dealt with depression myself, and I never understood addiction. Whenever I took drugs, no matter how hard the shit I was taking was, I never had a problem stopping, but I know it’s not quite that easy for everyone and it really hurts seeing someone you love dealing with that.”

Ryan felt like he could be frank with this guy – they met each other no more than fifteen minutes ago, but already, Ryan had been more honest with him than he had with some of his lifelong friends. It didn’t seem forced or even particularly uncomfortable; he simply felt some weird desire to be himself, to remove that mask he so often wore in front of strangers.

“When you’re addicted to something, anything – drugs, booze, whatever – it’s hard because all you’re trying to do is fill a void. It helps for a little while; you can have a few lines or get blackout drunk and it works – you feel better - but then it gets to the point where no matter what you do, what you take or how much you try and anesthetize yourself, you can still feel that void until you can’t ignore it anymore…” Ryan took a breath. “So, I’d like to help you guys out with a rehab facility, if that’s what you feel Jon needs and a psychiatrist who I have personally dealt with and trust – he really helped me deal with a lot of my issues - and housing, of course. We can find you somewhere nice to live, out of the city, out of state, wherever you’d like – and after that, if you want to go back to med school or need help getting a job, then I can help you out with that too. I want to make sure you two get back on your feet.”

“We don’t expect all that,” Joe said, but Ryan could tell the man was a little blown away by his offer. He hadn’t even discussed it with Brendon yet, but from the moment his boyfriend asked if he could help Jon and Joe out, Ryan planned on really helping them out. He had the money - more than he knew what to do with - so what was the big deal? “I don’t really want to accept more than we can pay back.”

Ryan rolled his eyes and felt an amused smile pull at his lips. “Come on now – how much of an asshole would I be if I made you pay me back? I don’t need the money and if it’s going to help you, I want you to take it.”
The man in front of him forced an awkward smile of his own. “I guess,” he shrugged. “Thank you. I honestly expected Brendon to tell me to get fucked when I called him the other night. I thought he’d hang up as soon as he realized it was me. I don’t know how much he told you, but I sure as hell don’t deserve his help – or your help,” Joe corrected himself quickly.

All Ryan knew was that Jon cheated on Brendon and Joe was the kind of person who made moves on a man who was still in a relationship, but he heard all that from Brendon’s biased point of view. Joe seemed to truly love Jon.

He glanced towards the door of the hotel room and let out a sigh – they were still out there together...

“Yeah, Brendon’s pretty selfless – he thinks of everyone else before he thinks of himself and whether we like it or not, he and Jon obviously still share something.”

He was jealous – he couldn’t help it. What was taking them so long?

“You know they’re not in love with each other anymore though, don’t you? Brendon and Jon are not right for each other in any way, shape or form.”

“Sometimes, I think Brendon still seems so concerned with him though,” Ryan interrupted quietly. He turned to the man on the opposite couch and asked the question that had been bugging him since Brendon chased Jon outside. “Do you ever get jealous?”

Joe gave him a puzzled look, as if he couldn’t quite figure out why Ryan blurted out such a question. He shook his head slowly. “No – because Jon’s with me now and when he tells me he loves me, I believe him. It’s all about trust, dude,” Joe said, splaying his hands, “it’ll kill a relationship if you don’t have trust.”

Ryan hummed and considered Joe’s statement for a second - he thought it was highly ironic that the man who’d been the cause of Jon’s infidelity, sat there claiming trust was one of the most important fundamentals of a relationship. What about when you broke Brendon’s trust by hooking up with his boyfriend right behind his back, he wanted to ask, but he bit his tongue, because as Joe said – their relationship, their business. It had nothing at all to do with Ryan. But he couldn’t stop himself from saying something for too long.

“So, you trust Jon?”

“Well. Why wouldn’t I?” For the first time, Ryan could sense the hostility in Joe’s voice.

_Or, I don’t know. Maybe because, once a cheat always a cheat._ Ryan just shrugged.

“Jon barely moves from the bed most days, so I doubt he has time to conduct some kind of affair behind my back - if that’s what you’re implying.” Joe shook his head in irritation. “I don’t know how things are between you and Brendon, but Jon’s been a victim of prostitution since he was fifteen and I think for some people, when they’ve spent almost half their life dealing with that kind of sexual exploitation, they kind of stop taking pleasure from it – but that was something Brendon could never understand. I never intended to come between them, y’know-“

“But you did,” Ryan interjected.

Joe looked down at his hands and picked at a loose hangnail. “I did,” he nodded, “but I think it was best for all concerned. You benefitted from it,” the man told him.

And that’s what it came down to. Deep down, despite Brendon’s heartbreak, Ryan was grateful Joe encroached on his man. If he hadn’t, maybe Brendon would still be blindly in love with his ex and
Ryan would’ve been forgotten as easily as all his other clients, nothing more than a notch on his bedpost.

“I’m ashamed of how it happened – I never wanted to be that guy,” Joe told him, “but I fell so hard for Jon and things were confusing for both of us at the time. He was only about a month clean and I never felt that way about anyone before. Jon and I are different in a lot of ways, but I love him and I just want to help him get better. He’s the most important person in my life and if anything happened to him…” Joe shook his head and sighed – Ryan often felt the same way about Brendon. He’d be totally lost without him.

“I’d never even been in a relationship before Jon and I got together. I always felt like sex was a big part of relationships – at least with most of the people I met in the past – and, well…” Joe said, scratching the back of his head. “I’m asexual, so I’ve never been interested in that kind of thing.”

Ryan blinked at the new revelation. He was shocked, he didn’t know shit about asexuality and if asked to describe it, he’d say it was a disinterest in both sexes – it wasn’t even something he heard anyone talk about before. Ryan guessed he was pretty ignorant in his understanding of it, because he imagined only a socially awkward misfit who couldn’t get laid would claim to be asexual, but Joe was a good-looking guy who seemed confident enough with who he was.

Ryan started to panic, worried that he’d say something wrong or insensitive. In his haste to fill the silence, he did just that. “Wow. You don’t strike me as an asexual.” He cringed inwardly and Joe gave him a tired look.

“Well, we’re not a bunch of soulless freaks – erasure is a big deal; no one talks about it, no one even acknowledges it. It’s just sex,” Joe shrugged, “and because I don’t want it, everyone acts like it’s the weirdest thing they ever heard of. Jon’s the only person I ever met who truly understands, who respects it as something real, who doesn’t see me as some kind of challenge to get into bed. Everyone else has been telling me since I was eighteen: ‘You’re going through a phase; ‘It’ll change when you meet the right person’ – and the worst: ‘Were you sexually abused as a kid?’ It’s frustrating.”

Ryan was curious. He never met anyone who openly identified as asexual before – all his friends were highly promiscuous people who engaged in meaningless flings with strangers without a second thought. In the past, Ryan would probably class himself as someone similar; sex was a way to pass the time, it was a way to connect with someone he was physically attracted to. An orgasm could cure all of life’s woes - he loved sex, he craved it daily and thought it was vital to a relationship, but evidently, not everyone felt the same way.

“So, you never…” Ryan trailed off. “Not once?” Perhaps the veiled question about whether Joe was a virgin was too personal, but the man answered him anyway.

“Nope. Not once – and when I tell people that, they usually say, ‘How do you know if you’ve never done it before?’” Joe mocked in a nasally voice. “Like, how do straight dudes know they’re straight if they never fucked another guy before, you know what I’m saying? I just know – this is how I am. I might have a complete disinterest in sex, but I always wanted a partner – and there’s a lot of different ways to be intimate with someone without having sex with them, y’know? People tend to forget that.”

Ryan could agree with that – although he loved having sex with Brendon, it wasn’t just physical intimacy he craved from the man anymore. It was those tender moments before they both properly woke up in the morning, reaching out across the mattress in search of each other’s warmth. It was sitting close while watching a movie, laughing against each other and the comfort that came with being in a steady relationship. Joe’s relationship with Jon was strictly nonsexual, but they loved each
other and cared for one another. Joe obviously had Jon’s best interests at heart and ultimately, that was the most important part of any relationship - good sex was just an added bonus for those people who wanted to engage in it.

Over the course of the past few months, and even more so during his conversation with Joe, Ryan realized true love wasn’t a burning, impetuous passion – it wasn’t a raging fire. On the contrary, it was like water - calm, and deep, and quiet and unassuming. Fires can be extinguished, each one burns out eventually, leaving nothing but destruction in its wake - but still waters? They last forever.
Almost as quickly as Jon’s tears started, they stopped. Thirty seconds of release of all his pent-up frustration and sadness was all it took, before he pulled back from Brendon’s embrace, wiped his eyes and sniffed up his emotions.

“I’m sorry,” he mumbled, looking down at the floor. “I knew coming out here was a bad idea.” Jon fixed Brendon with a glare and furrowed his brows, the anger obvious in his voice. “I knew there was something going on…” he spat. “That’s your trick? Ryan Ross?”

The cat was finally out of the bag and Jon reacted in the exact way Brendon suspected he would. He averted his eyes and took a breath – the vindictive tone in Jon’s voice didn’t sit well with him. Brendon hated being reminded that at one point, that’s all Ryan was to him: a trick, his client - a good lay, sure, but not boyfriend material by any stretch of the imagination. “I wanted to tell you sooner; I just didn’t know how.” It came out as almost a squeak.

“Jesus, Brendon - you’re gonna give me a fucking heart attack. This is so much more than I can deal with right now.” Jon moved away from him and sat down heavily on a marble bench in the middle of the hallway with his head in his hands. Brendon floundered awkwardly by the elevator before deciding to sit down next to him.

They spent the next few minutes in silence; Brendon wondered if he should say something, but every time he thought about speaking, the words died on his tongue. The sound of soft jazz could be heard coming from the speakers overhead, filling the awkward silence. Brendon tried to concentrate on the music, but after a while it reminded him of all nights he spent in hotel lobbies, waiting for rich clients to come and fuck him. It was a suitably depressing soundtrack.

Brendon eventually decided to speak up. “Joe’s worried about you,” he said, cautiously reaching out to rub Jon’s back, but after a few seconds of contact, he pulled away – he felt Jon’s muscles tighten under his palm and quickly returned his hand to his lap. Nothing’s changed.

He sighed heavily and picked at his nails.“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you about Ryan and I – we hardly told anyone apart from his family. I was scared because I knew you wouldn’t agree with it; I knew what your reaction would be… I know I should’ve said something, I just didn’t know how to tell you.”

“You already told me the worst part – you’re dating a fucking client – I’m not sure it makes much of a difference who that client is, but a heads-up would’ve been nice.” The man looked at him and shook his head slowly. “What the fuck, man? Did you meet him before or after we broke up?”

“Before,” Brendon admitted. He was well aware of the fact that he was one hypocritical son of a bitch – when they were together, he couldn’t stop himself from imagining Jon taking pleasure from getting fucked by his clients and he was jealous of the men who paid his boyfriend. He continued to stress about that, even after he let himself be drawn in by Ryan’s allure - but there was no need for any more lies now. Their relationship was already over, there was nothing left that Brendon could try and salvage - there was nothing left that he wanted to salvage.

Jon suddenly took a deep interest in the rough skin around the edges of his nails. His voice was quiet. “Why didn’t you tell me about him?”

“Things were already rocky between us. I guess I just wanted to keep the peace,” Brendon confessed with a sigh.
“So, it wasn’t because you felt something for him you felt guilty about? He’s a good-looking guy, Brendon – and he’s rich as hell – I guess I can sort of understand why you’d want to be with someone like that – even if he is a trick.” Jon didn’t sound too convinced.

“It doesn’t have anything to do with the money,” Brendon told him. Jon gave him an unconvinced look that said: yeah, right, looked away and pursed his lips. He evidently didn’t believe that there was more to Ryan than his trust fund and the extravagant lifestyle he provided. “He’s a good guy – he’s thoughtful and generous and he wants to help you out.”

Jon gave a sad laugh. “He wants to help me out or he wants to grease my palm? Because it’s not going to look good when you get famous for being his new boyfriend or whatever, and people discover your past, is it? Are you sure him offering to help me out isn’t just some bribe so I don’t out him as a man who likes to pay for sex?”

Brendon could see how Jon would come to that conclusion – after all, what did Ryan owe Jon? He was Brendon’s ex-boyfriend and the end of their relationship was hardly a cordial one. Brendon knew Ryan was jealous; he couldn’t ignore the glazed look that appeared on Ryan’s face every time he mentioned Jon’s name in conversation, but after Brendon explained their situation to him the other night, Ryan’s concern seemed genuine and he gave Brendon no reason to doubt his motives. He simply wanted to help. Besides, Brendon never thought Jon would be the one to sell him out to the press; despite everything, he assumed they still had a reasonable amount of respect for each other.

Yeah, if anyone from his past were callous enough to go to the press about him, it’d be Dallon, his sister, or his parents... Their revenge for how he destroyed their picture-perfect family.

“Would you out him as that?” Brendon asked cautiously. It’d be an easy buck for Jon and right when he needed it most too – go to the press and sell his story; tell everyone what a lame, neglectful boyfriend Brendon had always been and how the notorious Ryan Ross had come between them with his money and his fame and torn them apart.

Jon shrugged as if he really didn’t care, but then sighed in tired resignation. “No – you know I wouldn’t do that, but he doesn’t. I just don’t understand why he’d want anything to do with me – I sure as hell don’t want anything to do with him, the fucking pervert.”

Brendon gave a heavy sigh and bit his tongue – he didn’t expect his ex-boyfriend to accept their relationship, but he at least thought Jon would be prepared to hear him out. “He’s actually been through a lot of the same things you have, y’know?” he pointed out tartly. “You don’t have to call him names – you don’t even know him.”

“But it’s okay for you to pass judgment on my relationship? It’s totally fine for you to call Joe this and that and tell me what kind of man he is without you getting to know him, huh? You know what your problem is, Brendon? You’re so fucking hypocritical. Do as I say, not as I do – that’s you to a tee. You spent our entire relationship only thinking about yourself and your needs, making me feel like shit because I couldn’t give you what you needed and now you need me on your side, so you’re tiptoeing around me, trying to front like you have my best interests at heart.”

“Umm - Joe called me, remember? It wasn’t the other way around.”

Jon folded his arms across his chest and squared his jaw. “Why are you even with someone like that?” he mumbled. “Apart from the very, very obvious?”

“But because I love him,” Brendon answered – and that’s all there was to it. Brendon and Ryan were in love and it hurt to know no one was ever going to see the truth in that.
“You love him?” Jon repeated scathingly. “Did you do too much coke with him or something? Did you lose some brain cells in Las Vegas? He’s famous for being a huge asshole - he paid you, Brendon. In what world does that equal love? You used to bitch at me because you thought I enjoyed sex with my tricks and now you’re claiming you’re in love with one of yours!”

Brendon sat back, offended at Jon’s audacity. “Well, at least I waited until we’d broken up to get involved with him – unlike you. You couldn’t even wait ‘til I was out of the apartment to make your moves on Joe – all the while telling me how much you hated sex. You jerked him off when I was lying right next to you, you asshole,” he hissed.

Jon rolled his eyes. “Jesus. This again? Can’t you just give it a rest?”

Brendon couldn’t help but pout. Jon had been callous to invite Joe to come live with them without first breaking up with Brendon and what was worse, he must’ve thought Brendon was an idiot to so blatantly fall for the guy right in front of him. The night he heard Jon admit he didn’t love him anymore, the night he listened to Jon kiss another man in the bed they shared for six years, was one of the worst nights of his life. It still hurt to remember it.

“Don’t try and deny you cheated on me with him, Jon, that there wasn’t some kind of overlap in our relationships. I’m not fucking stupid. We’re not even together anymore,” he seethed, “so you may as well just come clean.”

“Just fucking admit it,” Brendon mumbled, folding his arms, “you fucked him behind my back.”

Jon covered his face with his hands. “That’s the one thing that bothers you most, isn’t it? Well, you know what? You got money now – a nice hotel room, a rich boyfriend, so why don’t you pay me? Hire me as your whore, Brendon. Two hundred bucks - we can slip off to the bathroom and I’ll give you a blowjob; you can come in my mouth or on my face, whatever gets you off - you can fuck me if it means that much to you. I’ll even pretend I’m enjoying it,” the man finished with a shout, glaring at him with hard eyes. Brendon had never seen him look so furious.

“You are _fucked up_, Brendon,” he spat. “And if you must know, we _don’t_ fuck. Joe’s asexual – that means he’s not even interested in me in that way – and I find it insulting that even though you claim to know me so well, you still don’t understand the first thing about me and you know even less about my relationship with Joe. So fuck your stupid misconceptions and fuck _you_ for not believing me when I told you I _can’t_ fuck anymore. I _hate_ it.” Jon took a deep gulp for air and his breath shuddered out of him, almost as if he was on the verge of a panic attack.

Brendon swallowed hard in surprise and blinked at the man in front of him. “Asexual? But… I heard you jerk him off. You _kissed_ him - that’s not something I dreamed up, Jon, that actually happened.”

He didn’t understand – Joe’s attraction toward Jon always seemed so obvious to Brendon. He’d driven himself crazy imagining the two of them together, imagining Jon giving Joe the one thing he’d never given him – physical intimacy and affection. He walked in on the two of them sleeping in bed together and on numerous occasions, caught them in what he deemed to be compromising positions. Now, Jon was trying to tell him that Joe was _asexual?_ Whatever the fuck that meant.

“We kiss sometimes – not often, but it’s one of the only things we’re both comfortable with,” Jon explained. “And that whole night you keep reminding me of? I was going through a lot and I didn’t know at the time that’s how Joe identified. I was really confused about a lot of things – my feelings for you, my feelings for Joe, I was coming off _heroin_, for fuck’s sake… I acted in the only way I
thought would keep him around and I gravely misjudged the situation. We talked a lot about it afterwards. Now, I understand Joe’s situation and he understands mine and once again, I’m sorry.”

Brendon looked around the hallway, still in shock, as he tried to accept this new revelation. “Why didn’t you tell me this sooner?”

“Maybe the same reason you didn’t tell me about Ryan Ross sooner – and because it was none of your business,” Jon told him with another irritated roll of his eyes. Brendon begged to differ – it was his business when Jon invited Joe into their bed that night and propositioned him. *They were still together at the time! How could that not be his business?* “Besides, I hinted at it a few times, but you only ever heard what you wanted to hear. I felt like a broken record half the time, telling you the same thing over and over again.”

Brendon watched Jon’s bottom lip tremble and noticed his eyes blink a little faster, trying to keep the tears in. “I get panic attacks when I think about what I used to do with other men, what I used to let them do to me. Joe says it’s PTSD – he said it’s pretty common for people who’ve been involved in sex work, so it’s really hard when you just disregard that.” Jon took a breath and steadied his voice. “You wanna know when I realized our relationship was truly over?”

Did it even matter anymore? “When?”

“The day you came home after staying out all night with no phone call… Joe was there at the apartment and we were chilling, smoking weed. You immediately went off, bitching at me for something you thought I’d done wrong - about Pete or some other shit, I can’t even remember – but what I do remember, way too clearly, is that morning you laid down next to me on the bed and you dry-humped yourself against me until you came in your pants… Brendon,” Jon sighed, looking over at him. Brendon couldn’t even meet his eyes anymore. “That morning was the first time I truly resented you.”

Brendon looked down at his feet in remorse and suddenly remembered that morning all too well. He’d woken up warm and sexually satisfied in Ryan’s bed for the first time, after being fucked all night. The previous evening he giddily claimed he wanted to be Ryan’s fucking whore and Jon hadn’t even crossed his mind once – at least, not until he woke up.

“I told you over and over and over again, *I can’t do that with you. It doesn’t feel good. I respect you too much…’* and you didn’t listen, you reduced my words to *nothing*. You made me feel guilty and disgusting and cheap. You felt like a *client* to me, Brendon - and yet, I was still the bad guy.”

Brendon felt terrible. He forced Jon to endure something he knew he hated because he thought *his* needs should come first. There was no excuse for what he did and sorry would never be enough for how he behaved that day - he’d been confused and frustrated; Ryan made Brendon feel things he hadn’t felt in *years*, the man had shown him true pleasure and Brendon guessed he was desperate enough to want to feel the same kind of thing from Jon that his own desire took over. As a result, he both hurt the man he loved and cheapened their relationship to nothing more than an awkward, one-sided orgasm.

“I’m sorry,” Brendon choked. “I didn’t mean to hurt you - I *loved* you.”

Jon shook his head slowly. “You didn’t love me.”

“Yes, I did!” Brendon retorted desperately - but it didn’t even matter anymore. If his past actions were anything to go by, then he didn’t blame Jon for doubting his love for him - but he *had* loved Jon. He was crazy about the guy at one point.
“You didn’t love me for who I was – you constantly wanted to change me. You wanted me to be someone I wasn’t and give you something I couldn’t. You didn’t trust me; you didn’t support me – half the time you acted like you didn’t even like me. We fought constantly and I’m glad we’re apart, because we were no good together, Brendon. Keep telling yourself that we were, but we both know, it’s bullshit.” Jon let his words hang in the air for a couple of seconds – Brendon didn’t have a comeback, because Jon was right. Since being with Ryan, he realized he and Jon weren’t any good together - they wore each other down, they wanted different things. Joe offered Jon something Brendon never could, just like Ryan offered Brendon something Jon never could. With Ryan, Brendon had what he always wanted, something he never got from either Dallon or Jon – a boyfriend who was on the same level as him, someone who could satisfy him and didn’t make him feel guilty for his desires. Someone who could take care of him.

Jon continued. “You obviously had a lot of your own secrets when we were together, things you felt too guilty to tell me and yet you were always accusing me of shit, you were always on my back about Pete, about Joe, about that dude Zack from the club - about literally any guy you got wind of me having anything to do with.”

*God, he hated being reminded of that asshole Pete Wentz* – even more so now he knew the guy also sucked Ryan’s dick. Even hearing his name made Brendon’s stomach twist in jealous knots. “I don’t know why you wasted so much of your time on that prick, Pete,” Brendon spat, folding his arms, unable to keep his distaste for the man under wraps.

Jon sighed. “Because Pete gave me attention when I was totally starved of it. I didn’t have any friends in school, my mom already killed herself and unless my hopeless, asshole of a father wanted to beat me, he hardly even acknowledged my existence.”

So, there it was – the real reason Jon stayed with Pete so long. Despite their six years together, Brendon didn’t know all that much about Jon’s past – for the most part, he kept quiet about it and Brendon never asked. He was aware of Jon’s mother’s suicide, he understood the guy always had a rocky relationship with his father and he knew a few choice facts about Jon’s relationship with Pete, but in all honestly, during their time together, Brendon remained willfully blind. He always thought Pete was a manipulative creep for hooking up with Jon when he was still so young and impressionable and of course, he was jealous that no matter what he did, he could never seem to match up to Jon’s first love.

“I know you hated him. I felt like a lot of the issues in our relationship existed because of the way Pete treated me when I was with him – but you always shut down when I so much as mentioned his name, so I gave up trying to tell you after a while.”

Brendon looked guiltily down at his feet and hummed. “I guess communication was never one of our strong points.”

Jon laughed sadly in agreement. “I was really lonely as a kid – I was an only child and both my parents drank too much. I grew up watching my dad beat my mom and after she died, he started on me. I knew it wasn’t normal, I knew other families didn’t behave like mine, but it was all I ever knew. I was very angry about a lot of things. I was verging on suicidal, even at thirteen or fourteen. I just didn’t think life was worth it,” Jon explained with a sigh. “I was very cynical and after my mom killed herself, I became a nervous wreck.”

“When I met Pete, he talked to me like I was actually interesting; he used to ask me about my day and compliment me whenever he saw me… I lied about my age. I always looked older than I was and I was taller than Pete, even at fifteen. When we first met, I told him I was a couple weeks shy of my eighteenth birthday - whether he believed me or not is another story, but I kept that lie going for
Brendon knotted his brows – this was certainly a new development and a secret Jon never divulged until now. “Why did you lie about your age?” he asked, perplexed that this had never been brought up before.

Jon rolled his eyes and looked at Brendon like he was stupid. “Why do you think? I wanted him to fuck me. I was young, I was desperate for attention in any way I could get it and Pete offered me that. I knew I was gay from the age of eleven but I never acted on it - Pete was the first guy I ever met who paid an interest in me. Until he came along, I’d never been shown love or affection, so I wanted to hold onto that for as long as possible.” Jon looked down at his hands, twisted his fingers together and sniffed.

“I guess the reason I always tried to defend him was because if I admitted, even to myself, what he was really like, I would’ve felt even more of a chump for staying with him as long as I did. I used to tell myself that the things he did to me weren’t really that bad, that he didn’t mean them, that I deserved it – but blaming yourself for staying in a relationship like that gets utterly wearing after a certain amount of time,” Jon admitted sadly. “Joe made me realize that.”

Brendon placed his hand gently on Jon’s back and rubbed over his shoulder blades – this time, much to Brendon’s relief, he didn’t tense up. Plus, he looked like he needed the physical comfort. “Talk to me,” he coaxed, shifting a fraction closer to Jon – the guy seemed close to tears again.

After a pause, Jon spoke up again. “I just resent the fact it took so long for me to realize that I was blindly in love with a man who never gave two shits about me. Pete used me and I was the one stupid enough to believe I meant something to him. Pete was so manipulative and very controlling – I was an unwanted kid from a bad family, I didn’t know any better. I feel like so many of my serious issues stem from how he treated me and the shit he got me involved in when I was still just a fucking kid, man…” Jon sniffed hard and wiped at his eyes.

“You never told me any of this,” Brendon said softly.

“You never wanted to hear it,” Jon shrugged.

“Well, why don’t you talk to me about it? Maybe get some stuff off your chest? I’m no psychiatrist, but it might make you feel better to talk about it…”

Jon shook his head – they were close now, arms and knees touching on the cold, marble bench in the middle of the corridor. “You don’t wanna hear about my messed up relationship with Pete.”

“Try me,” Brendon smiled, brushing Jon’s hair behind his ear. “Joe called me because he’s concerned about you and I agreed to help you out. I can’t give you much money myself, but I’m prepared to listen, if that’s what you feel you need.”

Brendon had never been interested before; the sound of Pete’s name always set his teeth on edge and even without explicitly being told, he always thought Pete was the man responsible for all of Jon’s problems - it was just so frustrating when Jon wouldn’t admit it to himself. Now, it seemed like a part of Jon’s past he needed to talk about and for the first time, Brendon was prepared to listen. So, Jon started up in that slow monotone and told Brendon the story of his relationship with Pete.

Not long after his mom died, the family home Jon grew up in as a child was repossessed by debt collectors. With no family around and very few friends willing to help his aggressive, lowlife father out for longer than a couple of weeks, Jon and his dad were forced to move into a small, rundown apartment in Lawndale, the west side of Chicago.
Lawndale was a rough area and Jon found it hard to make friends. His mother’s death left him filled with anxiety and grief that were never once acknowledged by his alcoholic father who spent most days, and the vast majority of his unemployment check, drinking himself into a stupor at the local neighborhood bar.

Jon passed much of his time alone locked in his bedroom, listening to songs about broken hearts, misery and rejection. Some nights, his father managed to stumble home sober enough to start an argument. He would bitch at his son for the state of the apartment or lack of dinner on the table – sometimes, he’d blame him for things Jon had no control over like the weather, the government, or the rising cost of cigarettes while slumped drunkenly over the dining table, pointing an accusing finger at Jon as he dribbled whiskey and pissed his pants.

The grievances Jon had grown up hearing shouted at his mother were now directed solely at him and Jon could never win an argument his dad started – he learned to accept that fact pretty quickly. No matter what Jon did to stay in his father’s good books, the man would still spit out hateful slurs and smack him for being disrespectful.

In school he blended into the background, always on the very outskirts of certain friendship groups. He missed his mom, he hated his dad and most of the time he felt utterly hopeless and completely alone.

While Jon struggled to accept his sexuality in a highly homophobic household, he dreamed of the day he’d be old enough to get out from under his father’s feet for good - move away and never, ever have to deal with the bastard again.

About a year after they moved to Lawndale, Pete Wentz began renting the apartment directly above Jon and his father. Pete was more charming, cooler and better looking than anyone Jon had ever met before in his life and he developed a crush on the guy pretty quickly. When Pete stopped Jon in the hallway to make friendly conversation, Jon would get tongue-tied and the blush would rise on his cheeks. When Pete asked him questions and actually listened to his answers, Jon felt this incredible surge of happiness roll through his belly. Pete was quick to pick up on the young boy’s attraction towards him and somehow, despite the fact Jon knew the man was quite a few years older than him, they started hanging out.

“My dad didn’t care,” Jon said. “He was always too drunk to notice when I was coming and going. I think he was just happy I wasn’t around.”

Once invited into the sanctuary of Pete’s apartment, Jon involved himself in all the drugs and underage drinking the man bestowed to him - he was suddenly accepted and liked by someone. The drugs helped him escape, the drinks made him forget and when Pete flirted with him, when the man brushed up against him after a few beers or a couple of joints, Jon loved it – no one had ever given him that sort of attention before and he was desperate to hold onto this new, exciting friendship, which was why Jon started lying about his age. Jon swore up and down he was almost eighteen - he figured Pete wouldn’t be interested in him if he knew the truth.

Sure enough, they started sleeping together a few weeks after they started hanging out. At first, it happened only when they were both stoned or drunk and able to laugh it off the next morning but soon, sex with each other became their main priority. They’d disappear to Pete’s bedroom as soon as Jon walked through the front door and they fucked loudly for hours, no matter who else was in the apartment at the time, getting high and listening in. Pete would tell Jon how awesome he was, how cool he was and how much he liked him and Jon fell for it hook, line and sinker.

Brendon was having trouble imagining Jon as the boy he described in his story - young and
impressionable, a horny kid with an innate desire to please his older lover, simply someone who enjoyed sex. It made him sad knowing what went wrong in the following years that led to Jon’s aversion to even the most innocent physical contact.

“He used to write me these long, poetic love letters,” Jon continued. “At first, the way Pete treated me was straight out of some romantic movie – he was a gentleman. I couldn’t believe I actually found someone like him. He would buy me things and take me out to dinner. I’d cut classes and we’d drive out to the lake and just sit in the car together, getting high and talking for hours. He really wooed me.”

More like he groomed you, Brendon thought to himself, still staring down at his feet. Brendon wondered if he ever meant as much to Jon as Pete had at one point. “So, did he ever find out you were younger than you said you were?”

Jon gave a grim nod. “Yeah. We’d been sleeping together a few months. My dad did get suspicious eventually, and one day he raided my bedroom and found all Pete’s love letters and a bunch of gay porn mags I had hidden under my mattress. He was livid. When I got home from school that day, he was really drunk and confronted me. I was caught so off-guard, I couldn’t even deny it. I got the worst beating of my life that night – well, until a few months ago when that Wall Street dude fucked me up…”

The day Jon’s father found out his son was gay, he told Jon that he was the reason his mother killed herself and it was his fault she was dead. “I never wanted you in the first place,” he shouted. “Should’ve forced that bitch mom of yours into that abortion – now I got a faggot son who enjoys jerking it to other dudes. Fuck! You’re disgusting,” Jon’s dad spat at him. “You better believe I’ma beat the queer outta you myself.”

That afternoon, his father beat Jon so severely that he fractured his nose and broke his wrist, leaving Jon heaving in pain as he downed shot after shot of nasty, cheap vodka. After, it didn’t take long for the man to figure out who the scribe of all those soppy love letters was – “that queer from upstairs? You been fucking him, you little bastard? Does he know you’re only fourteen?”

“I’m fifteen, dickhead,” Jon muttered, wiping the blood from his nose.

His father was furious at the insult and dragged his bruised and bloody son up to Pete’s front door and hammered at it, yelling on the cold, concrete landing. Pervert, pedophile, cocksucker – the slurs Jon’s father called Pete were heard by all the neighbors as Pete tried to defend himself. A physical fight broke out between the two men and Jon watched in terrified silence as Pete’s fist connected with his dad’s mouth and his lip split open. His father quickly backed down after that, but not before he told Jon he was no longer welcome back in the apartment and disowned him. He threw all his son’s belongings out into the hallway and changed the locks.

With nowhere else to go and no other family he could turn to, Jon ended up moving into Pete’s place and stayed the night on the man’s grubby, cigarette-burned couch.

Pete was pissed Jon lied about his age. “You’re fifteen? Jesus Christ, do you have any idea how much trouble this could get me in?” he shouted at Jon after his father left that day. “I could end up in jail and have to register as a sex offender all because you lied to me? Didn’t you think of the consequences?”

“I was fifteen - of course I never thought of any legal consequences… I knew it was wrong to lie, I guess I just hoped he’d never find out,” Jon shrugged as Brendon listened in silence.

Soon after Jon’s father disowned his son, he moved – kicked out by the landlord for not paying rent
and numerous complaints from the neighbors for disturbing the peace every time he saw his son or Pete in the hallway. Jon never saw his dad again.

“I don’t even know if he’s still alive,” the man shrugged.

Pete wouldn’t allow Jon into his bed for the following three months – he became cold and distant, but didn’t have the heart to throw the kid out onto the streets in the middle of a subzero Chicago winter. Their warm flirtations, however, were long gone – there were no more love letters, dinners or thoughtful gifts. Pete quickly stopped paying attention to Jon and they talked no more than strictly necessary – that is until the evening Pete took some other guy out on a date to one of Jon’s favorite restaurants.

The man almost delighted in telling Jon about his new squeeze, primping himself in front of the mirror while Jon watched and stewed in silent envy of the guy Pete was taking out to dinner. He showed Jon all the dirty texts his date sent him - making filthy promises to suck Pete’s cock, lick his ass and take his big dick without protest. Jon rolled his eyes and tried to push him away, but Pete took a huge amount of joy in indulging Jon all the details of what he was going to do to this guy as soon as he got him home - and imagining it made Jon feel sick with jealousy.

Pete left that night with a big wink and a smug ‘don’t wait up’ and Jon cursed his name as soon as the door closed behind him - he was in love with Pete and he hated feeling so jealous. Jon got high and drunk on his own that night – rolling joint after badly rolled joint and pinching Pete’s Blue Moons from the refrigerator until he passed out on the couch a little after midnight. When Pete returned home about an hour later, he was drunk and laid down on top of Jon on the couch - his cock hard and breath stinking of whiskey.

“Pete fucked me that night, rougher than he ever had previously, with much less prep but I didn’t care. I had what I wanted - his attention. He told me his date was a little cock-tease – flirting all night without putting out. He called me his easiest lay yet, and I was stupid enough to think he meant it as a compliment.”

The sex that night lasted a long time, almost to the point where it was uncomfortable, but in his haste to remain in Pete’s good books, Jon promised the man he’d do anything to please him and that he loved him deeply. A minute or two later, Pete climaxed and left the living room without another word, locking his bedroom door behind him.

The next morning, things were awkward between the two of them and looking back, Jon realized Pete was probably concerned their drunken tryst would get him into trouble, so he took Jon out for breakfast and started complimenting him again. Jon was enamored; he was smitten and he selflessly put Pete’s needs before his own from that point on. Things seemed to go back to normal between them and Jon couldn’t have been happier. He was an inexperienced fifteen-year-old - eager to find love and acceptance and no one knew that better than Pete Wentz. The sex meant something – it had to – Jon would tell himself every single night. He was so in love that he pandered to Pete’s wants and desires not only in bed, but all the time. When Pete said jump, Jon asked how high.

The first six months of their relationship passed in a blur of sex and drugs, progressing from harmless pot smoking to acid and mushrooms, then to speed and coke and eventually to heroin - all before Jon turned sixteen. He experienced serious bouts of depression, even as a teenager and the drugs kept Jon docile. They made him not give a fuck about his dead mom and estranged dad and that’s what he wanted – to feel numb.

Jon dropped out of school at the end of his sophomore year and it was around that time when Pete first suggested he should suck off certain men that came over to get high. Jon wasn’t in the least
offended – he enjoyed the attentions of older men and Pete told him he wanted him to do it, that it turned him on to imagine his boyfriend with other guys. So, whether it was the copious amount of drugs that flowed through his system at the time or the fact that he always felt so loved in the immediate minutes after he made Pete come, Jon readily agreed. Besides, Pete was always so much nicer to him when Jon did exactly what he said.

“It started off as a couple of blowjobs a month, but then he asked me if I’d let them fuck me – it was just two or three guys at first. I knew them, they weren’t strangers and I guess I enjoyed it, but soon, Pete was setting me up with several partners a week, sometimes, even multiple men a day. I had no idea at the time he was charging them.”

Brendon shuddered at the thought. Hearing the details of Jon and Pete’s relationship for the first time, it was obvious to him that Pete had taken advantage of Jon’s love blind naivety from the very first moment they met. Their relationship was abusive and based on a huge power imbalance. It didn’t take a genius to figure that out.

It was only after they moved to New York together that Jon started to suspect Pete didn’t love him quite as much as he loved Pete. Pete would flirt with other men right in front of Jon – he sometimes even disappeared to their bedroom with them and Jon would sit in the living room alone, trying to convince himself that the sounds he heard through the walls, weren’t the sounds of his boyfriend fucking some other dude.

“So, when did you realize he’d been pimping you out the whole time?” Brendon asked – and why did you stay with him, he wanted to add.

“I was seventeen. Pete got jealous of this one guy he introduced me to when we first moved to New York - someone older, he almost treated me like his boyfriend and was really kind to me… Anyway, Pete and I were both high one night and ended up having this huge argument which ended with me saying I was going to leave Pete for this guy, because he treated me better and respected me more and pleased me more in bed – I didn’t mean it, I just wanted to hurt him but that’s when he told me the truth. He said, ‘none of those men respect you. The only reason they even like you is because you’re so quick to put out and never say no to anyone.’ He told me they paid him and said I was stupid for not catching on sooner.”

Jon was hurt, embarrassed and threatened to leave - until Pete reminded him he didn’t have anywhere else to go. “Your mom’s dead, your dad doesn’t give a shit about you and you don’t have any family. I’m the only thing you’ve got - and don’t you forget it. You’d be nothing without me.”

After that, Jon tried hard to maintain a little dignity around Pete. From the very beginning of their relationship, he’d always been such a dutiful boyfriend - bending over backwards to please the guy, desperate to do everything he could to make Pete happy - but now Jon started acting out. He started staying out all night, refusing to answer his cellphone when Pete called wondering where he was. He started taking drugs on a daily basis – freebies from men he managed to sweet-talk into getting him high. Pete hated when Jon got high without him, especially around other men, and Jon would often get so doped up that his eyes rolled to the back of his head and he couldn’t move. He would silently rejoice when, nine times out of ten, he woke up in Pete’s bed, wrapped up warm with the man himself watching over him, rubbing his back.

In another attempt to piss his boyfriend off, Jon fucked most of Pete’s friends behind his back, without payment, because it drove Pete crazy with jealousy. Jon quickly earned a reputation for himself as cock-hungry and an easy lay and men would goad Pete about his young boyfriend’s precarious behavior – ‘damn, name a guy who hasn’t fucked Jon.’ they’d say. ‘He’s had more pricks in him than a secondhand dartboard.’
Jon watched Pete knock guys out for so much as looking at him before and he always felt some kind of smug satisfaction when something like that happened. Jon had an incredible ability to lead men on until they couldn’t control themselves around him, until they were groping him and whispering filth into his ear – Jon would play along until Pete’s aggression got the better of him and he smashed his fist into some poor dude’s face as a warning not to touch what belonged to him. Jon liked that too – the thought of ownership, the comforting sense that he belonged.

Pete smacked him around a few times in an attempt to maintain his power in the relationship, and Jon took each and every hit with little more than a whimper. They had rough, hard sex with each other whenever and wherever Pete demanded it and sometimes, on very rare occasions, the tender words ‘I love you, baby’ would slip from Pete’s lips - Jon felt like every painful fuck and heated argument and hateful insult was all worth it, because Pete loved him regardless. Jon lived for those moments, even if they were few and far between.

As well as being physically abusive, Pete was downright emotionally and mentally manipulative. Soon, the sweet ‘I love you’s’ stopped meaning anything to Jon and being around Pete became exhausting. They had more bad days than good ones. Jon grew tired of sex with strangers and the constant expectation Pete placed on him to just go out and do whatever it took to get money from his tricks – and the fights it caused if he didn’t. They had drug-fuelled arguments on the streets. Pete started fucking this nerdy, bespectacled kid from New Jersey who hung around the apartment and Jon retreated into his shell, using heroin to self-medicate, spending more time on the Manhattan streets or in strange flophouses with other junkies and hookers than at home with his supposed boyfriend.

After nearly five long years of knowing him, Jon attempted to leave. He made enough acquaintances in the city that he was certain he’d be able to find someone willing to let him sleep on their couch – or more than likely in their bed – until he was able to get a job that didn’t involve sucking dick and getting fucked.

Pete begged him to stay. “I’m sorry I’ve not been a good boyfriend. I’m sorry I treat you bad. I don’t mean to – it’s the drugs, my meds, they mess with my head. It’s just the drugs talking, baby. Please don’t leave me.” Jon was used to hearing this argument from Pete – it’s the drugs talking, I don’t mean it. I’m sorry. I love you. He heard it so often that he wondered when the drugs stopped talking and Pete spoke for himself. Jon stayed, Pete stopped seeing that skinny New Jersey kid and for a few months, things between them were good, but they didn’t remain that way for long.

The second time Jon tried to leave, after an argument that stemmed from nothing in particular, Pete was in no mood for pleading with him to stay. He held Jon against the wall by his neck and swore he’d find him if he walked out the door – and after he found him, he’d kill him, he said. Again, Jon ended up staying – the emotional manipulation continued and Pete chipped away at Jon’s self-confidence until he didn’t have the strength to stand up for himself anymore.

When Jon spent any time away from Pete, he began to feel like a different person. When his boyfriend wasn’t around, he felt free – he didn’t have someone who knew him too well breathing down his neck, reminding him how useless he was, belittling everything he said or did - so when Brendon came along and made him feel like a giddy teen with a crush again, Jon saw his one opportunity to leave Pete once and for all.

Brendon didn’t like the way his ex phrased that. “So, is that all I was to you? An easy escape from your asshole boyfriend?” he asked, partly joking, mostly serious.

“Fuck no. I liked you. I thought you were adorable and sweet and funny. I spent so much of my time thinking Pete loved me – I thought he truly cared about me, but towards the end, I knew he was
using me, I just didn’t want to admit it. When I met you, I realized that what Pete always told me was all bullshit because he never looked at me the way you did – I never made Pete blush or get all tongue-tied around me,” he teased, knocking his shoulder against Brendon’s. Brendon felt himself doing just that – his cheeks reddened and he felt his lips pull into a fond smile. “Remember that first night we spent together? The first time we kissed? I felt so happy that night – like I was walking on air.”

Brendon’s memory flashed back to that night with ease and clarity. It was December and it was snowing. Manhattan looked like a scene straight off of a Christmas card - covered in white, everything drenched in that beautiful orange glow from the streetlights. It was eerily quiet for New York, the echoes of the city muffled by the fresh layer of snow on the ground and Jon looked so handsome – and happy – it was one of Brendon’s favorite memories of the guy.

Brendon was cold. He remembered how numb his fingers felt pushed deep into the pockets of his jacket and how the slush from the street gutters seeped through his sneakers and socks, freezing his toes.

It was a slow night – only the most desperate of New York perverts deciding to brave the elements in return for an hour with an equally desperate hustler. Brendon didn’t even have one hundred bucks in his pocket, but he decided to call it a night. He bid farewell to Jon and turned away to start the forty-minute journey back to his apartment. Jon ran after him, almost slipping on the icy sidewalk, grabbing onto Brendon’s hand to stop himself from falling on his ass.

“Don’t go home,” he said, teasingly pulling Brendon’s hat down over his eyes. “Who’s gonna keep me company? It’s boring as fuck without you around.”

“It’s cold,” Brendon pouted, readjusting his hat. “You should go home too, Jon; you’ll freeze if you stay out here any longer.”

“Nah. I’m used to this kind of weather – besides, Pete won’t let me through the door unless I bring home at least two hundo. I gotta earn my keep.”

“That sucks,” Brendon said lamely - being around Jon made him tongue-tied.

“Yeah…” Jon’s hand suddenly settled on Brendon’s hip and he pulled their bodies together. “Hey, give me a kiss before you leave,” he mumbled, inching closer to Brendon, holding him close. Jon flirted with him before then, always playfully teasing him about one thing or another, but he never made any serious moves on him until that night.

Brendon remembered how hard his heart pumped and how his eyes fluttered shut when Jon’s lips touched his for the first time, their tongues coming together slowly. Jon has a boyfriend who would probably kill you if he knew what you’re doing right now, Brendon thought as they kissed – but he didn’t care. He quickly forgot about his numb fingers and wet socks and they kissed passionately under the streetlamp, clutching at each other desperately as the snow fell around them.


Brendon agreed without a split second pause. “Yes. I’d love that.”

He spent the entire walk home, hand in hand with Jon, assuming they were going to fuck, imagining just how good Jon would be in bed and how happy he was to finally share a kiss with the man he’d been crushing on for months. When they got back to his apartment, they both undressed down to their underwear and Brendon sat on the edge of his bed like a nervous virgin until Jon sat next to him
and started kissing him. He let himself be pushed down onto the mattress, felt Jon slip under the covers beside him and sighed as their lips pressed against each other once more.

“Do you wanna… or I can… If you want? I got condoms,” Brendon told Jon when the man eventually pulled away from him.

“I don’t wanna fuck,” Jon told him quietly, smiling fondly down at him. “I just wanna kiss you – is that okay?”

“That’s totally fine,” Brendon told the man on top of him.

So, they kissed and they held each other, keeping each other warm until they both fell asleep. Brendon didn’t care that he couldn’t have sex with Jon that night – he was just happy to share his bed with someone, to wake up to the warmth of another man sleeping beside him.

Jon woke up with a start the next morning, jumping out of bed and dressing quickly. He claimed Pete was going to kill him for staying out all night. He leaned over the bed and they kissed once more. Brendon tried hard to pull Jon back down onto the mattress with him, but the man pulled away.

“Fuck,” he breathed, pushing his hand through his hair, starting at Brendon still huddled under the covers. “I really, really like you. I am so fucked.”

Jon showed himself to the door, but returned, no more than two hours later with a black eye and busted lip and a duffle bag thrown over his shoulder. He tearfully asked if he could stay with Brendon for a couple of nights and Brendon opened his door for the man, welcoming him back into his apartment with a gentle kiss against each of his injuries. Jon told Brendon he loved him that night and Brendon said it back – and that was the start of their relationship. Sort of beautiful in the ugliest way.

“I loved you, Brendon. When I was a kid, I used to think the only way men would like me, the only way I’d ever find love was if I slept with them straight off the bat – even the guys Pete set me up with. I seriously thought they’d fall for me if I did everything they asked of me and didn’t say no to them. I hated doing some of the shit they wanted me to do, but I did it because I always loved pleasing people. There was never anyone around to tell me: you’re worth more than this; you don’t have to do that. I was constantly made to feel worthless,” Jon sniffed.

“Somewhere along the line, I realized I hated sex - every time I had to do it, I had to mentally prepare myself for it or dope myself up enough that I didn’t care. You don’t have to love someone to fuck them – you don’t even have to like them very much.” Jon shook his head slowly. “You were the first person I ever met who stopped when I said ‘no, I don’t want to do that’ and that meant something special to me. I thought hey, maybe this guy actually likes me for me, maybe this is the guy I’ve been waiting for… That’s why it upset me so much when you came home that day and rubbed one out on my leg,” Jon told him with another unamused glare. “You always respected my wishes up to that point - however grudgingly. After that, I was out. I know I wasn’t perfect though and I’m sorry our relationship came to such a shitty end, Brendon. I’m sorry we wore each other down before either of us decided enough was enough.”

Brendon sighed heavily; Jon hadn’t had it easy. It seemed like his entire life was just one hard blow after another, filled with pain and surrounded by people who never treated him right – his dad, Pete, the countless tricks, even Brendon himself was guilty of it and he felt awful watching him suffer. Now though, Jon had someone who loved him – Joe evidently thought the world of Jon and was desperate to help him, support him and make a better life for the two of them, but to do that they needed money, which was something they didn’t have.
“How do you feel about getting some professional help for all you just told me?” he asked.

“Go and see a shrink?” Jon wrinkled his nose in distaste. “And how do you suppose I afford that, Mr. Money Bags? Honestly, a couple of months with a billionaire and you seem to have forgotten that things like that cost money for all us regular folk. I don’t have a rich boyfriend, Brendon. Sorry.”

Brendon nudged him and gave his ex an unamused look, but there was no hostility left in Jon’s voice. “Ryan wants to help you out – that’s the reason you’re here, isn’t it? Joe wants this for the both of you and I know you wouldn’t have come along if you didn’t want it too. Ryan’s a good person, Jon – despite what you might’ve heard. He wants to make a change.”

“Do you love him?” Jon asked, looking over at Brendon. “I mean, for more than just his money – do you really love him?”

“Yes,” he answered simply. “I really do.”

Jon gave a slow nod of understanding and sighed. “I wish you told me about all this before we showed up here. Perhaps I would’ve worn something a bit more appropriate.” Jon raised his legs and flexed his toes in a pair of worn-out, old flip-flops.

“You and those things,” Brendon smiled, resting his head against the man’s shoulder.

They remained in comfortable silence for a few moments. Their conversation had been almost therapeutic and Brendon felt better knowing they’d each been able to get some long-overdue truths out into the open. They’d been through so much together: joy, pain, ups and downs and Brendon realized how important Jon’s happiness was to him – how important Jon was to him.

“You wanna go in there and face the music?” he asked. “Let’s go save ’em - they’re probably dying for conversation in there.” He stood up and looked back at Jon still sat on the marble bench.

“Doubtful. I don’t know if you noticed, but Joe can talk for days – to anyone, about anything. They’re probably getting along great.” The smile on Jon’s face faded quickly and he sniffed, rubbing at his nose. “He’s too good for me. I get scared sometimes that he’ll realize he deserves more than me and all my issues – that maybe he’ll get fed up of me being miserable all the time and just leave.” The tears once again returned to Jon’s eyes.

“Hey,” Brendon soothed, sitting back down, pulling the bulk of Jon’s body against his shoulder. “Joe adores you - that’s why he called me. He wants you to feel better and so do I. Please, Jon - accept the help Ryan’s offering. Come and talk to him for a bit. I know it’s a lot to take in, I know I should’ve told you about all this months ago but you’re not happy living like this, are you?”

Jon shook his head slowly, eyes downcast.

“Look, I know money’s not going to solve that, but talking to someone professional might. Maybe some anti-depressants, a new place… you always wanted to get out of Manhattan, didn’t you? You’ve come so far already by getting off drugs and staying clean. Please let us help you the rest of the way.”


Brendon felt a smile pull at his lips and he squeezed Jon’s knee – Jon agreeing to accept Ryan’s help felt like a small victory. “Come on,” he said, tipping his head in the direction of the hotel room. “Let’s go.”

“Thank you,” the man said, looking over at him. “I don’t deserve any of this.”
“You do though,” Brendon told him. “You deserve to be happy and you deserve to be loved. You
deserve to have a good life, Jon. I’m going to be here for you, no matter what.”

Jon blushed and looked down at his feet. “Same,” he said with a grin. “Don’t worry, Brendon. I got
your back.”

The two of them walked together back towards the hotel room and Brendon squeezed Jon’s shoulder
in silent reassurance as he opened the door.
Chapter 63

The next morning, Ryan woke up before Brendon. It was dark outside, which meant it was still early – the alarm clock on his bedside read it was just past 5AM. Ryan had only slept for a couple of hours, but he already felt wide awake. He lay on his back and blinked up at the ceiling - he was in his own bed, in his own Manhattan apartment and for the first time it felt like home.

Brendon slept soundly beside him, his features shrouded in darkness, his breathing soft and steady. Ryan watched him for a brief moment - he looked peaceful considering their emotional evening.

Last night, the two of them had been too drained to do anything but fall straight asleep and Ryan didn’t know whether Brendon found his closure yet regarding the whole Jon Situation, but he hoped so.

They ended up talking with Jon and Joe longer than Ryan anticipated – it was close to midnight by the time their conversation wound down and as the two men made moves to start the trek back to their motel room on the other side of the city, Ryan gingerly suggested they should just stay at the hotel and save themselves the journey. Both Brendon and Jon gave him exactly the same look - a look that screamed you’re an idiot. What the hell are you talking about?

Ryan tried to explain it simply, but he thought it was pretty obvious, really. After hearing each of their stories, he couldn’t stand there and watch Jon and Joe leave, to return to a shady, apparently dangerous motel room while he and Brendon enjoyed the comfort of a suite that cost almost fifty grand a night – especially when everyone in the room was all too aware Ryan owned an apartment only a few blocks away. It was vulgar, crass and he wasn’t a totally heartless asshole – he had compassion for the two men and he wanted to show it.

Initially, Jon refused; quietly making a point of reminding Joe they were still paid up for one more night and all their belongings were at the motel. Jon evidently didn’t want to appear as some kind of charity case – or maybe he didn’t want to accept any more help from Ryan than strictly necessary - but after a little light persuasion from his partner that it was late, that public transportation to that part of the city was unreliable at the best of times and an assurance from Ryan that he’d arrange a car to take them back there first thing in the morning to pick up their stuff, the man reluctantly agreed. Jon said thank you, but he didn’t look Ryan in the eye when he said it.

Joe seemed grateful enough though. He was full of backslaps and handshakes, thanking Ryan over and over for his generosity, commenting continually on how crazy the situation was until Jon told him to stop rambling. In the few hours since Ryan met him, Joe seemed to have a hard time keeping quiet – the guy didn’t seem to pause for breath.

On the other hand, Jon, for the majority of the evening, was silent. He answered questions Brendon or Joe directed to him monosyllabically, often zoning out as the conversation continued around him. Ryan couldn’t tell if it was an effect of the man’s depression, years of drug abuse or the fact Jon would rather be anywhere in the world than sat in a 5-star hotel suite with his ex-boyfriend and Ryan Ross.

When Jon wasn’t staring off into space, he looked at Ryan with a reasonable amount of tired disdain and he didn’t blame the guy - Jon probably thought Ryan was trying to buy his silence for whenever his relationship with Brendon went public - that throwing money at Jon was a way to keep him quiet about the fact Ryan had once taken such pleasure in paying a whore to keep him company, but that wasn’t the case anymore. He simply wanted to make life easier for two men who were struggling – and the suite was booked up under his name for the next three nights, anyway. Jon and Joe now had
somewhere nice to stay while Ryan made final arrangements for their money.

“Where are we going to go?” Brendon asked, wrapping Ryan in a hug as Joe eagerly explored the vast suite, opening and closing cupboards and drawers, trailed by Jon who dragged his feet and looked, if Ryan was being honest, like he couldn’t care less.

“Home,” Ryan sighed, fixing his eyes on Brendon’s. “We’re going home.”

So, after a few awkward goodbyes, Ryan and Brendon left Jon and Joe alone in the suite and hand-in-hand, climbed into the private car that was waiting to pick them up in the hotel’s underground parking lot. When he collapsed into his own bed, Ryan felt both physically and emotionally exhausted.

By the end of the night, Ryan was surprised at just how much sympathy and compassion he felt for Jon. He made a decision before he even met him that he didn’t like the guy, based purely off the fact he was Brendon’s ex and he was jealous, but Ryan understood the need to use drugs as a crutch in order to deal with sadness better than anyone. Taking drugs blocked out reality and made life a little less painful. He struggled with depression and knew how hopeless it often felt - an inescapable void - but when the evening came to an end, Ryan no longer saw Jon as a threat to his relationship with Brendon, but simply another human being who needed a helping hand out of the hole he was in.

Ryan was thankful he was in a position where he could help someone out enough that it could make a difference. He didn’t expect recognition or a big pat on the back because of it; simply knowing Jon and Joe could use his money to improve their situation was enough for him. That was his good deed and he felt so good about himself that within two minutes of climbing under the covers, he was asleep with Brendon spooned up against his chest, breathing softly, the warmth of each others bodies easing them both into a peaceful, dreamless slumber.

In the midst of his reflections that morning, Ryan must’ve fallen back asleep because he awoke again an hour or so later, enjoying the last few fragments of a dream he’d been having. A wet mouth was around his dick, an expert tongue licked up and down his shaft making his balls tighten… but as he awoke a little more, he realized it wasn’t a dream, it was a perfect, hot reality and Brendon was in fact, sucking his cock, slowly bobbing up and down under the covers as Ryan grew harder in his mouth.

He let out a shallow moan, throwing back the blanket and opening his eyes to watch his boyfriend suck him off. Yeah, he was one lucky son of a bitch and waking up to one of Brendon’s epic blowjobs was a pretty good way to start his morning…

“That feels good,” he sighed, snaking his hand down to stroke the back of Brendon’s hair.

Brendon pulled off for a second, replacing his mouth with his hand and pouted. “Oh. Just ‘good’, huh? You’re getting harder to please, Mr. Ross.” He held eye contact as he went down on him again, hollowing his cheeks as he slowly slid his lips down Ryan’s cock – and that was hot, he’d never get tired of that image.

Ryan thrust his hips up into Brendon’s throat and grabbed at the sheets. “Oh, Brendon, it feels incredible. Fuck! Please don’t stop, baby. You are so fucking amazing at this,” he cried in mock enthusiasm. Brendon’s lips curled into a smile around Ryan’s erection, but he didn’t miss a beat. Soon, he was giving a blowjob that was straight out of a porno – saliva coated Ryan’s cock, Brendon sucked at his balls and licked over his taint before wrapping his tongue around the head of Ryan’s dick. Ryan was in heaven – he arched his back and let his legs fall open as he felt the tip of Brendon’s finger press against his asshole. He felt his eyes flicker closed.
“I thought we could finish what Shane and William so rudely interrupted yesterday afternoon,”
Brendon suggested in a whisper, easing up Ryan’s body to kiss his neck.

“You want to fuck me?”

“Yeah, I wanna fuck you. You want it? I’ll prep you nice and good.”

Fuck, yeah, Ryan wanted it. After all, he had been left feeling a little unsatisfied after Shane and
William walked in on them at his parents’ house yesterday, so he didn’t have to consider his response
for long - he gave a nod and caught his breath as Brendon kissed down his chest, across his stomach
and back down to his cock. He’d already eased one finger in and curled it up inside him to massage
his prostate by the time his lips closed around the head of Ryan’s erection.

Ryan loved the way Brendon made him feel - like he was worthy and lovable and didn’t have to hate
who he was anymore. It sounded cliché, but when Brendon touched him, Ryan felt breathless,
weightless – like he was walking on air. His muscles jittered under his skin, his nerves burned with
desire.

Within ten minutes, Brendon worked three fingers into Ryan’s ass, alternating between sucking his
dick and balls and slowly jerking him off with his free hand. It was an incredible feeling – his ass
full, the pressure on his prostate and a warm mouth around his cock… Ryan was so wrapped up in
the arousal that when his phone started to ring on his bedside table, he cursed loudly and covered his
face with a groan.

“Answer it,” Brendon smiled, pulling off Ryan’s dick with a wet pop. Ryan reached blindly for his
phone and blinked at the caller ID. It was William – and he was calling unusually early. He took a
breath to steady his voice and brought his cell phone to his ear at the same time he felt Brendon’s
fingers wrap around him and his tongue lick at the shaft of his leaking dick.

“Hello?” he answered as Brendon started to deep throat him. Ryan bit the inside of his lip so a telltale
moan wouldn’t fall from his mouth.

William, however, didn’t bother with pleasantries. His opening words were, “Have you been online
yet?” And Ryan knew, he just knew what William was about to tell him.

Brendon’s finger pressed against his prostate but Ryan stiffened, unable to relax or even pay
attention to the boy between his legs anymore. “No, I just woke up.”

“It’s leaked about you and that Brendon boy. It’s all over the Internet – Hollywood Life, TMZ, Perez
Hilton – they got pictures of you two, Ryan. A couple of tabloids have run the story too. Brendon’s
name’s out there - I thought you might want to know.”

Ryan swore up at the ceiling. “Are you serious?”

On the other end of the line, William cleared his throat. “Since leaving rehab, Ross has been laying
low – and perhaps the reason for that is his handsome new friend, reported to be Brendon Urie,
twenty-six, from Las Vegas, Nevada, an unknown face on the celebrity circuit but who is about to
make a big impression after being spotted snuggling up to the rumored bisexual,” William read to
him. “And then there’s a couple of blurry pictures of the two of you holding hands in what I assume
is the Four Seasons parking garage last night.”

Shit. Ryan felt his gut sink. How did the press find out Brendon’s name so fast? They’d been so
careful and he made sure to only tell people he trusted…
Jon and Joe, he thought. Ryan couldn’t believe he’d been so stupid as to trust those two. He slapped his hand over his eyes and wondered when the hell this curse would end – he wanted a simple life, free of drama and gossip and it was so unfair that his famous name was always going to make that an impossibility. What did he have to do to catch a goddamn break?

Unaware, Brendon sank down between his legs again, his mouth wrapped around the head of Ryan’s cock and he frowned up at him in disappointment. Ryan was almost flaccid by now, his mind focused on other things.

“Stop,” he snapped, pulling Brendon’s hand away and struggling to sit up in bed. “It’s gone public - our relationship. Your name is all over the Internet.” Ryan watched Brendon’s face fall in slow motion, the color visibly draining from his cheeks. “Bill, I’ll call you back,” he said into his phone before hanging up. The two men just stared at each other in shock.

“It’s gone public?” Brendon repeated quietly, wiping his mouth. “They know my name? But how?”

Ryan shrugged. Oh, I don’t know. Maybe you should ask your snake of an ex-boyfriend, he thought to himself, but he didn’t say it. He felt his mouth go dry as Brendon rolled out of bed and grabbed for his cell phone. Brendon sat on the edge of the mattress, his hand covering his mouth as he stared at the screen, his face illuminated by its glow.

“Holy shit, this can’t be happening,” the man said under his breath. When he turned towards Ryan, he looked absolutely dumbfounded. “There are pictures of us leaving the hotel last night – they know my name, they know where my parents live. My mom and dad are going to see this, Ryan. What the fuck am I going to do?”

In the back of his mind, Ryan had always been terrified this situation would be make or break for their relationship. Brendon was a private guy – he wasn’t flashy, he didn’t crave fame and he had one hell of a dark past. Brendon claimed to love him but did he really think Ryan was worth weathering this shitstorm for? The press could be tremendously callous and unforgiving - and what if they found out Brendon used to fuck dirty, sad, desperate perverts for cash? It was only a matter of time – and after that, it wouldn’t be long before Ryan was outed as one of them himself – but he didn’t have the words Brendon wanted to hear, so he just shrugged.

“We kept it quiet for so long and as soon as we get back to Manhattan, it’s all over the fucking Internet… Oh god, I knew this would happen sooner or later – I just tried to ignore it and now, my name’s out there. My parents are going to freak out and everyone’s going to find out what I used to do for a living…” Brendon almost wailed, dropping the phone by his side and collapsing back onto the mattress. “How the hell do they know so much about me already?”

Ryan couldn’t keep his theory to himself and to be honest, he was surprised Brendon hadn’t jumped to the same conclusion. “Uh, you don’t think Jon had something to do with this?” The man’s name suddenly felt like a dirty word in his mouth again.

Brendon glared at him. “Jon wouldn’t do something like this.”

“No? Well, I’m just saying it’s funny how the very morning after you tell your ex-boyfriend about us, your name is in the press and details of our relationship are all over the fucking Internet. I mean, come on, Brendon – don’t tell me it didn’t immediately cross your mind too.”

“Jon’s not that kind of guy. He wouldn’t sell me out like that. You don’t even know him,” Brendon spat. His eyes narrowed and Ryan was hurt Brendon was choosing to blindly defend him – as if Jon could do no wrong, like the sun shone out of his backside...
Ryan’s mind however, was already made up – those two bastards conspired against them and called the press as soon as Ryan and Brendon left the hotel last night. He just knew it. No good deed goes unpunished, he thought to himself. That’s the last time I’ll offer to help anyone out.

Brendon picked up his phone again, scrolling frantically and his eyebrows knotted. Their secret romance was now public fodder. Brendon was set to become a household name and Ryan didn’t know whether the guy was cut out for that much attention – especially considering his shady past.

“Are you going to leave me because of this?” he asked.

Brendon looked at him sadly – he opened his mouth as if he wanted to say something, to reassure him, but nothing came out. Ryan watched Brendon’s shoulder pull up in an uncertain shrug before he spoke, but they weren’t the words Ryan wanted to hear. “Ryan, my parents are going to find out I used to be a hustler.”

“Why are you so worried about them? They disowned you, remember? They have no right to comment on how you used to live your life – they cut you out of theirs.” Even as Ryan said it, he knew it was callous; he knew what Brendon needed right now was support and empathy, but his heart was already in overdrive at the fact his boyfriend hadn’t been able to reassure him their relationship going public wouldn’t be the end for the two of them. He couldn’t help being defensive.

“God, you’re selfish on occasions,” Brendon puffed.

Ryan was offended. “Selfish?” he almost spluttered. “I just promised to give money to your ex-boyfriend – a guy I don’t owe shit to, by the way - so he can sort himself out. I hardly think that’s being selfish, do you?”

Brendon’s lips twitched and he stared down at his feet. “I think we already established how little money means to you, Ryan. Throwing money at poor people when you’re a billionaire is hardly charity. It’s like me giving a bum a quarter – it’s pity. You don’t even care about how this is going to affect me – I mean, so long as I don’t leave you, right? So long as your life stays exactly the same, it’s all good. Who cares whether Brendon’s super-religious, conservative parents find out the son they’re already ashamed of, who tore their perfect family apart, used to let other dudes fuck him for cash? You plan on paying them off too?”

“That hasn’t even gone public yet,” Ryan tried to assure him calmly. “And it might not. We might get lucky.”

Brendon glared at him and his expression said what they were both thinking: you and I both know that’s bullshit. Open your eyes; it’s only a matter of time until my dark past is plastered all over the news.

“Even if it does, it doesn’t have to be a big deal! We can go back to Tahoe or back to my mom and dad’s in the Hamptons; stay there a couple of weeks until this whole thing blows over…”

Brendon pulled at his hair. “How are you acting so nonchalant about all this? Your parents are going to find out you paid me!”

And shit, Brendon had a point - even if Ryan didn’t want to hear about it. Whenever George did find out the truth, Ryan would surely be able to think of a lie believable enough that it would smooth that whole mess over. His dad liked Brendon, he thought they were good for each other – Ryan was going to hold him to that.

He stared at Brendon, expecting him to say something more, but the guy was too involved in reading
whatever news stories that had just been published about the two of them. In irritation, he swung himself out of bed and pulled on his pants. His whole life was about to be blown apart just when he thought it was back on track. It would be a matter of days, maybe even hours, before people discovered Brendon’s past and then every stranger on the Internet would think their relationship was open for public discussion. Ryan could only imagine how big this story was going to get – him dating a lowly street hooker, a boy whose family disowned him because he fucked his own brother-in-law… Jesus Christ.

He pushed his hand through his hair and looked back at Brendon, his eyes still glued to his phone. He loved that boy so much and the thought of losing him put him on the verge of a panic attack. He couldn’t lose him; it simply wasn’t an option. “I’m scared I’m going to lose you over this, Brendon.”

“Well, excuse me for not being able to just take this in stride.” Brendon pushed up from the bed and avoided eye-contact. “I’m an ex-hooker, Ryan and when that goes public, everyone I’ve ever known is going to know I made my living fucking men for money: my family, the people I went to school with, members of my parents’ church who watched me grow up – everyone! You had your entire life to get used to this – the press, people writing stories about you, paparazzi - but I can’t tell you right now how I’m going to cope with that much attention. I’m sorry.”

Ryan felt his jaw tighten. His nose tickled as he tried to keep his emotions under wraps. “Yeah, well… maybe you should call Jon, ask him what the fuck he’s playing at.”

Brendon gave an exaggerated nod and rolled his eyes. “I was thinking more that Marc Willis might be behind all this. He’s got way more of a reason to fuck us both over than Jon does. Or, I don’t know, Shane? You did call your dad and try to get him fired yesterday, but sure, blame my ex-boyfriend instead, he’s an easy scapegoat for you, isn’t he?” With that, Brendon walked naked to the bathroom and slammed the door behind him. The sound reverberated in Ryan’s ears.

“Fuck,” he whispered to himself, rubbing his hand over his face. He fucked up. Again. He didn’t want to lose Brendon – it had only been a few short months, but he already couldn’t picture his life without the boy.

Ryan’s problem was he didn’t know how to cope with emotional turmoil – the slightest bump in the road spiraled him out of control. He said the wrong things at the wrong times; he used the wrong tone and paid attention to stupid details instead of trying to understand the bigger picture. He was selfish and if he wasn’t there to support the man he loved, then Brendon was going to leave him and Ryan would only have himself to blame.

He sat on the edge of his bed and unlocked his phone. With an unsteady finger, he clicked on the first news story after he typed his name into Google.

Ryan Ross Shock Exclusive: Death of a Bachelor?
Is the former party boy finally settling down? Heir spotted getting cozy with another man as they leave Manhattan’s Four Seasons Hotel last night.

Behind the link were half a dozen blurry pictures of the two of them as they got into their car last night – and there was no denying they were a couple. The paparazzi caught them hand-in-hand, smiling adoringly at each other. Another picture showed Ryan’s palm at the small of Brendon’s back as they climbed into the backseat together and then, captured through the back windshield a picture of their lips joined together, Ryan’s hand at the back of Brendon’s neck as they kissed…

Alone in his bedroom, Ryan read through hundreds of unfavorable comments people already posted about their relationship. Anonymous strangers calling Brendon a gold-digger and a fame whore.
They called Ryan a queer - and a string of other homophobic slurs. They claimed he was a sad, desperate little junkie who was merely fooling around with another man for the attention because daddy never loved him.

He’d seen enough for one morning. He closed the window on his phone and buried his head in the pillow. When he woke up that morning and Brendon promised to fuck him, this harsh reality couldn’t have been further from his mind. Now, he’d upset his boyfriend who was hiding alone in the en suite and Ryan felt angry, mostly with himself, for being so unsympathetic to the poor boy’s worries. However, he didn’t go knock at the bathroom door to try and comfort Brendon or apologize to him and drag him back to bed to figure out what the hell they were going to do. Ryan let him be – and not because of pride either, but the fear Brendon would break up with him if he pushed him too hard.

In need of someone to vent to, he decided to call William back. The man picked up after the first ring but instead of saying hello or offering any kind of sage advice, he answered with a smug, “Well, Ryan - I hate to say I told you so.”

Ryan was already pissed off and the last thing he needed was William being a smart-ass on top of his already shitty morning. He looked at the clock on his bedside – Jesus Christ, it wasn’t even seven thirty. “Yeah, congratulations on stating the inevitable, Beckett. We all knew this was going to happen sooner or later, you don’t get a prize for predicting this one.”

William just chuckled. “I’m genuinely surprised you two kept it quiet for so long. In all the time I’ve been working for you, you’ve never been one to avoid scandal, Ryan - and I knew it was no different when you first brought Brendon on the scene. I thought there was something fishy about him from the moment I met him. He just seemed so… shift-”

“So, I talked to Shane last night – he obviously had a lot to say about the whole situation-”

“I bet it was that stupid, homophobic bastard who went to the press about Brendon and me,” Ryan spat, suddenly incensed. Brendon was right; it was more likely to be Shane than Jon. Right? Either way, Ryan just wanted someone to blame…

“Ryan, to my knowledge, Shane’s still an employee of your father’s. He’s a mouthy little shit sometimes, but I doubt he’d risk his job by going to the press. He’s not that irresponsible. However,” the PA mused, “Shane did tell me something that rather concerned me. He said that on the night of Pamela’s birthday, you got him to drive to Hamilton Heights and pick Brendon up from outside some scummy apartment building. He said you were high as a kite and for some reason, Ryan, he’s convinced you paid Brendon for sex that night – and a couple of other occasions too, if Shane’s stories are anything to go by. Is that true?”

Ryan blinked up at the ceiling and puffed out a breath. Strictly speaking, he hadn’t paid Brendon for sex that night because he’d been way too high to perform. He couldn’t get his dick hard enough to fuck the boy and Brendon had left without his fee. Regardless, Ryan didn’t know how much longer he could keep up this charade.

“Ryan?”

“Yeah, okay? It’s true. Brendon was an escort when I met him. I paid him to sleep with me-”

“What the fuck?” William breathed in a rush down the line, obviously not expecting Ryan to admit the truth so easily. “Are you serious?”

“I’m glad I did it, because he’s the most incredible, genuine person I’ve ever met. I love him.
makes me happy and he makes me want to stay off drugs and be a better person. He’s taught me so much, Bill. He doesn’t want fame; I know he’s not just with me because I’m rich and now, it’s out about our relationship, I’m scared,” Ryan almost choked, tearing up. “I’m scared he’s going to leave me, William.”

“Jesus.” His PA sighed on the other end of the phone and Ryan could just imagine him pinching the bridge of his nose, squeezing his eyes closed as he tried to take in that new information. “And here I was hoping Shane was just trying to stir shit. Okay. Does anyone else know about this?”

“No,” Ryan sniffed, wiping his eyes – at least, not that he was aware of. “Just you - and a couple of Brendon’s friends from his past. I thought the whole ‘we met in AA’ thing was pretty believable.”

William gave a quiet laugh of disbelief. “Christ, Ryan… Did you not think things through before you, y’know… got involved with him?”

“Of course I did,” Ryan snapped. “Trust me, I thought about it a lot and I’ve been dreading this day from the moment I realized I liked Brendon in that way. I was using a lot when he and I first met - I was out of control and I wasn’t happy – but he’s changed my life, Bill. I wish things weren’t this complicated, but I can’t tell you I regret doing what I did because through all that shit, I found someone who loves me. Meeting Brendon is the best thing that ever happened to me – you’re not going to make me feel guilty for that.”

“Oh, dear. What are we going to do with you, huh?” William sounded a bit calmer, a little more understanding now that he knew the truth. “This will probably be really difficult to keep under wraps.”

“I know,” he admitted. “Brendon’s terrified about his parents finding out – they’re a couple of bigoted, anti-gay, religious nut-jobs. They disowned him when Brendon came out to them, so I doubt this news is going to settle too well.”

“Well, if that’s the case then Brendon’s going to need your support more than ever. It’s quite likely his parents and other people will contact him looking for a handout, now they know the two of you are together. It’s possible he’ll be thrown under the bus by someone that wants to make a quick buck off of him. If you two are in love, then you’re going to have to be there for him, Ryan. This is all new to Brendon and it’s going to be hard learning how to cope with the amount of attention you’re so used to getting.”

Ryan hummed. William did speak sense most of the time, but it still didn’t solve the whole his-boyfriend-used-to-be-a-hooker situation. As if reading his mind, William continued talking calmly down the phone.

“As for the whole escort thing? Maybe your best bet - if it does go public - is to just admit that Brendon, I don’t know… worked for a month or two to support a college education when he was eighteen or something? His parents disowned him, he wanted to make a better life for himself, he was studying but couldn’t afford the textbooks, so he… you know?”

“He made ends meet…”

“Precisely – and it’s just an idea, but maybe you should stick with the whole ‘we met in AA’ story because the press will eat you alive if they find out you paid him. Just deny it until you’re blue in the face – you’re pretty good at that,” William told him with a laugh. “Plus, depending on how you spin this, it could totally work in your favor. Power to the sex workers and all that - start up a charity to support young, gay men in need, spread the word. I mean, why is there so much stigma and shame surrounding prostitution anyway? Turn it into something empowering.”
William evidently thought he was onto something, the sudden excitement was clear in his voice but Ryan couldn’t help wondering how someone like Jon would react to that suggestion – after listening to that man’s life story last night and witnessing firsthand how that lifestyle sucked the life out of him, he doubted he’d agree prostitution was anything other than demeaning, highly dangerous and virtually inescapable.

“Are you at home now?” William continued. “You need me to release a statement for you or anything? I can be there in half an hour.”

“No. I need to talk to Brendon about all this first. He’s having a slight freak-out in the bathroom right now, I should probably go and check up on him, but I’ll call you a bit later on,” he said. “I think we just need a couple hours to let this all sink in. We might go back up to Tahoe - staying out of the City right now seems like our best bet.”

He imagined it for a brief moment: Brendon and himself alone in the Tahoe cabin again, tucked away from the world and the gossip and the press – acting just like a regular couple together, making memories and trying to forget the past. Ryan sighed – it sounded too good to be true right now.

“Listen,” William said after a pause. “I’m here for you, alright? I’m sorry for not being fully supportive of your relationship with this kid at first. I always thought he was shady, like he was hiding something and now I understand why – and if he loves you as much as you seem to love him then… well, I’m happy for you. You can call me if you need me, okay? And I’ll do my very best to diffuse the situation if anything comes up. We’ll figure it out, Ryan. Alright?”

“Alright. Thanks, Bill.” Ryan sighed – he was still frustrated, but nonetheless he was glad to have someone like William Beckett on his side. He was a true friend in a world where he really felt like he couldn’t trust anyone anymore.

After a few minutes and a couple more assurances from his PA that everything would be okay, the two men hung up and Ryan sat on the bed, trying to process the fact Brendon’s name was now out there and from here on out, nothing would be the same for them ever again. They’d been living in their safe, little bubble the last few weeks - it was good while it lasted.

He sat quietly, listening in on a conversation Brendon was having with, who Ryan assumed to be, Jon from the en-suite. He couldn’t decipher much, but he picked up on a few phrases – Brendon desperately trying to defend himself; no, no, no, I know you wouldn’t. I’m not accusing either of you. I trust you – both of you. It’s just…

Ryan didn’t know what to think, but as the minutes ticked by, Jon and Joe were starting to seem like a pair of unlikely culprits. It could well have been Shane Morris who spilled the beans and tipped the press off to Ryan and Brendon’s whereabouts last night. Shane was a loudmouth, not to mention a disagreeable person in general and he held that ridiculous vendetta against Brendon - but the man also seemed so certain that Brendon used to be a hustler. Why wouldn’t he leak that information to the press, too? He’d have been paid a hell of a lot more money for that dirt…

Maybe Brendon was right. Perhaps Marc Willis called the gossip columns from wherever he decided to hide out since Ryan’s father gave him the beating of his life to exact revenge on the two of them? He knew Brendon’s name; he knew where he lived… Marc would certainly have reason not to divulge Brendon’s secret, but if it was an anonymous tip-off, what difference did it make?

Or maybe it was a lot less dramatic than all that and they’d just been caught by the paparazzi, who’d somehow got wind of Ryan’s return to Manhattan. It was hardly unusual for photographers and reporters to hound Ryan outside of hotels, restaurants, even his own home. He didn’t know why this particular news story caught him so off-guard.
Shit happens, he thought sadly to himself. It was all going to come out eventually. Perhaps no one was to blame but the vultures who’d been hounding him since he was sixteen – Ryan was just shocked at how quickly all of Brendon’s personal details had been published.

The texts on Ryan’s phone were coming thick and fast by now – his dad, his brother, Gabe, other fair weather friends he’d not heard from in months. His father seemed to be the only one concerned that their relationship had been discovered after so many weeks of keeping it on the down low – but since finding out about his son’s dark past with Marc Willis, George was always acting concerned, as if he was making up for lost time he spent not playing an active role in Ryan’s childhood.

Jacob, Gabe and the handful of other friends all had their usual, snarky remarks to make – fishing for gossip and reprimanding Ryan for dating someone who was obviously not of the same social status as he was. After several of the same kind of text message, Ryan set his phone to silent and stuffed it under his pillow. They could wait – it was Brendon who needed his full attention right now.

Almost twenty minutes passed before Brendon exited the en-suite. He was fresh out the shower, water droplets covering his shoulders and chest, a fluffy, white towel wrapped low around his hips. The man completely ignored him as he crossed the room and Ryan sat, ill at ease in the silence that followed him. He cleared his throat. “I just got off the phone to Bill…”

“Yeah? Well, I talked to Jon like you asked. They were still asleep when I called and had absolutely no idea what I was talking about. Jon swore he wouldn’t fuck me over like that, so does that answer your question?” Brendon looked at him for the first time, pulling his towel from around his hips to rub at his hair. He held stony eye contact until Ryan looked away. “Are you going to automatically blame those guys for everything that gets published about us from now on? Remember, it was your idea to tell them about our relationship. I wanted to handle this on my own, but no, you had to have it your way.”

“I know. I’m sorry,” Ryan sighed – and he truly was sorry. Brendon was right once again – he always did have to do things his way and when he got an idea into his head, he found it difficult to listen to outside reasoning, no matter who it was coming from. You’re selfish, Ryan Ross, he scolded himself, unless you break this awful habit and start listening to what Brendon wants, he’s going to leave you and you’re going to be alone and miserable with nothing left to live for. He stood from the bed and walked over to the man in front of him, put his hands on Brendon’s bare shoulders and squeezed.

“How I reacted just now was out of order. It was in the heat of the moment, I wasn’t thinking clearly. I didn’t mean to brush off the whole situation with your parents finding out or underestimate how difficult this is going to be for you. I’m sorry I snapped – I should’ve been more sympathetic, more understanding.”

Brendon’s nose twitched and he sniffed, still avoiding eye contact. Ryan hooked his finger under the boy’s chin and raised his face slightly to meet his. “And if you trust Jon and he says they had nothing to do with this, then I have no reason not to believe him. I still want to help them out,” Ryan assured him slowly. Brendon nodded, but pulled away from Ryan’s touch, continuing to dry himself off.

“Maybe I was out of line earlier,” Ryan said quietly. “I’m sorry. I honestly wanted to help out, but I… I couldn’t.”

“Okay,” Brendon’s voice was small, conditioner softly. “I forgive you. I just need to think.”

Ryan forced a laugh. “This is not how I wanted to spend my morning. I seriously think something in this universe is conspiring against us – every time you try and fuck me, we get interrupted.”

Much to Ryan’s relief, his attempt to break through some of the tension between them worked. Brendon managed a smile as he picked through his clothes on the floor and dressed in silence.

“I told Bill the truth about how we met.” Brendon looked over his shoulder at him – he didn’t look pissed, more, weary, like he was fed-up of leading such a chaotic life. “He said he’d support us. We

...
can trust him. He said he’d do his best to keep all of this under wraps and if it does go public, we can try and turn this into a positive thing – you know, play it down, say it was something you did a long time ago… raise awareness for sex workers while we’re at it.” Brendon looked at him, unconvincing. “That was Bill’s suggestion anyway,” Ryan shrugged. “It’s up to you.”

“And what about my parents?”

“Whatever happens with your parents, we’ll deal with it – together. Whatever happens with anyone, I’ll be here for you – even if you do decide we need to take a break and you need some time on your own… I’ll support you.”

Brendon sat on the edge of the bed next to Ryan with a sigh. “I don’t want to take a break and being on my own is the last thing I need right now. It’s just a shock, y’know? I’m scared. I’m scared what my parents will think, even though they disowned me. I’m scared of what this will do to Dallon. Last time I was in Las Vegas, I told him I used to be a hustler. I mean, I can’t imagine him selling his story – that would mean admitting to the world that he’s gay and he still has a hard time admitting that to himself.”

“Does anyone else know? About us or about what you used to do for a living?” Ryan asked, stroking Brendon’s back.

“You mean, apart from the thousands of men who paid me during the last eight years?” Brendon sighed. “There was this guy, Spencer, I met while I was back home. We hung out while you were still in rehab. I told him about us, but he doesn’t know shit about my past. He seemed loyal enough but I don’t know… Maybe it was him? Then there was that guy, Zack, from the club we went to when we first met…”

Ryan remembered that guy – the bouncer dude who almost knocked the shit out of Brendon after they’d had one of the best fucks of Ryan’s life in a dirty toilet cubical. He paid that dude fifty grand to keep his mouth closed about that indiscretion, which happened months ago.

“If he was going to say anything, he’d have done it ages ago. Plus, he knew about me being a hustler, so if he went to the press, he’d definitely leak that information. I guess he still could.”

“You can’t think of anyone else who might have done this?”

Brendon shook his head slowly. They could go round and round for hours asking the same questions, trying to figure out who, if anyone, ratted them out to the press but it wasn’t going to solve anything. Brendon’s name was still out there and his dark past was likely only hours away from being revealed.

“Let’s forget about it all for a few hours. Come back to bed with me,” Ryan urged, pulled Brendon back under the covers. It was warm and familiar, their bodies fit together just so and they lay together quietly - for all of about ten minutes before Brendon’s phone started to ring almost constantly.

First to call – three times - was Dallon, his calls ignored as Brendon’s groaned at the number on the screen. Brendon’s parents left a series of accusatory voicemails, calling him things religious folks supposedly shouldn’t even be thinking of their worst enemy, much less about their own son. A barrage of angry, profanity-laden texts came through addressed from Dallon next, until Brendon threw his phone across the room, watched it smash against the wall and then crumpled in frustration against Ryan’s shoulder. Ryan did the best he could to soothe the boy and Brendon eventually fell asleep.

Ryan’s mind, however, was too wired. He couldn’t relax. While Brendon dozed against him, he
scrolled through the news stories on his phone, until he eventually came across a name he never heard of before – Brent Wilson, a former employee at the Ross Hotel, Casino and Spa in Las Vegas. He sold his story and leaked Brendon’s name after being fired from his job at reception. ‘Unfair dismissal’ this Brent guy called it, but the manager at the Ross Hotel claimed Mr. Wilson had been fired for turning up to work high.

So, Ryan guessed that explained it. Some loser who once worked at his dad’s hotel saw his opportunity to make a quick buck and took it. The mystery was solved and in actuality, it was a lot less scandalous than either of them first assumed. Ryan was just thankful it wasn’t someone closer to them who ratted them out – it was just some stoner, who was bitter about losing his job and leaking Brendon’s name was a big fuck you to the Ross Corporation.

He thought briefly about waking Brendon to inform him of his new discovery, but decided to let his boyfriend sleep. He was warm and comfortable - Brendon’s arm was looped around Ryan’s waist, his forehead pressed into his shoulder and Ryan, for one, was not going to ruin that boy’s small window of peace simply to unload more stress on him.

Works inspired by this one: Vile Taste by hollowfirefly, Love or Security by hollowfirefly

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