Amnesia

by Julesmonster

Summary

Justin woke from surgery after the prom with no memory and serious long term side effects. This story tells how he and Brian learn to cope together.

Notes

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See the end of the work for more notes.

Part One

Brian looked down at his sleeping lover and brushed a lock of hair away from his forehead. Justin’s head had been shaved completely when the doctors had determined that they needed to do surgery to prevent Justin’s crushed skull bone from putting more pressure on his already injured brain. Then there had been the multiple times they had opened up his head to drain the excess blood from his brain. Now, three months later, Justin’s hair was finally growing back to what it had been before.

Brian sighed. Justin’s hair might have begun growing again, but everything had changed in the
months since the attack. Nothing was the same. Justin, the boy he had danced with at the prom that night, the boy he had met under a streetlight on Liberty Avenue, was gone. The doctors and therapists had been working with Brian and Justin’s family to help them understand and accept the changes in Justin even as they helped Justin adjust to his new life. Of course, Justin couldn’t remember the man he was before. He couldn’t remember anything before waking up after the surgery.

That wasn’t completely true. He remembered Brian. He couldn’t remember specific events and had no memories of them together, but Justin recognized Brian as soon as he woke. It had been a moment of hope for everyone present that had been quickly dashed when it became clear that he didn’t recognize his mother or any of the friends who came to see him in the days to follow.

He also remembered his art. Again, there were no specific memories, but one of the first questions Justin had asked the doctors upon waking was if he would be able to draw still. Since then, his sketchpad and pencils had rarely left his hands. He sketched everything and everyone he came across. He had even taken to writing little notes to himself about the person in each sketch and little details about their relationship to him.

Justin’s past memory wasn’t the only thing affected. His basic knowledge was in tact, but he had difficulty accessing that knowledge quickly and it took longer for him to learn new concepts or process new information. His speech was slower and more deliberate, but deteriorated to a stammer when he was nervous or upset. He often grew agitated and frustrated by these limitations, but that was another part of the long term effects he would have to accept.

Brian, for his part, had spent every second at the hospital until Justin had woken up after the surgery and had ordered him to finally go home and get some rest. Since then, he had spent almost all of his free time with Justin. They would talk about the people Justin couldn’t remember, they would do Justin’s exercises together, they would take slow walks through the hospital corridors as Justin regained his strength, and sometimes they just sat and watched television together. When visitors came, Brian would make room for them but rarely left Justin’s side. Only Jennifer was there as much as Brian, though she usually took days when Molly was in school and let Brian have his evenings with Justin.

In fact, Jennifer had just left, informing Brian that Justin had been given medication for another migraine but would probably wake soon. She was off to pick up Molly from a friend’s house before taking the young girl to visit her father for the weekend.

Jennifer’s divorce had become inevitable after the assault. Craig Taylor, a man who had once doted upon his only son, had only come to the hospital once to see Justin. When he realized that his son could not remember him but could remember Brian, he was infuriated and had not returned since. He made no move to contact Justin, nor had he asked for updates on his condition from Jennifer or the hospital staff. The bastard had removed himself completely from Justin’s life.
The only good thing to come from Craig Taylor’s withdrawal from Justin’s life had come in the way of financial support. Because of his neglect, Jennifer had been able to petition for control of Justin’s trust fund, which had been set up by Craig’s father and contributed to by Craig and both Craig and Jennifer’s families over the years. The divorce decree had also given Jennifer child support for Justin’s care until he was either twenty-five or able to support himself. With the way things were going, it would be quite some time before Justin would be able to support himself. His medical bills alone were astronomical, but Craig’s insurance for Justin was still in effect at the time of the incident, so that was a minor concern.

Brian sat back in his chair and studied Justin. The attack had been brutal and without cause or warning. He was grateful, though, that the parking garage had security cameras. The trial had been quick and decisive. Chris Hobbs’ lawyer had tried to muddy the waters with lies about Justin and Brian, inciting anti-gay rhetoric, but that video had been damning. The jury, even if they had been completely homophobic, could not ignore the fact that Hobbs had attacked them, unprovoked and premeditated—after all, who brings a baseball bat to their prom? Even the homophobic judge had not been able to ignore the law, and had been forced to sentence Hobbs, who was eighteen at the time of the crime and found guilty of attempted murder, to the mandatory minimum of twenty-five years in prison. For once, the law had worked in a gay man’s favor.

Jennifer, on behalf of Justin, was also suing the school in civil court. Her lawyer was a shark and Brian had no doubt that she would make the school pay. It was their fault that all of this had come about because of their anti-gay stance, and it was their responsibility to protect the students who attended school functions. Their attitudes and teachings had contributed to Hobbs’ belief that he could get away with shit like this.

Even if she didn’t win, Brian had no doubt that Jennifer would make that school pay.

“Hey,” Justin smiled groggily up at Brian, bringing the older man out of his reverie. “You’re here.”

“Where else would I be on a Friday night?” Brian asked as he leaned forward and brushed a kiss to Justin’s forehead.

“Oh I don’t know,” Justin smiled. “You could be off at Babylon picking up tricks.”

Brian smirked. “I suppose I could, but I’ve already found my trick for the night.”

Justin sighed and used the control to raise the bed into a sitting position. “If only.”
“Hey, none of that self-pity shit,” Brian scolded, “or I won’t give you your surprises.”

Justin’s face lit up. “Surprise? What is it?”

“Not telling,” Brian said as he shook his head. “You have to wait until after dinner.”

Justin deflated slightly. “More creamed crap on toast?”

Brian didn’t have time to answer before the door swung open and Gail, the night duty nurse came in with a tray. “Good, you’re awake. Dinner is served. And I don’t want to hear any complaints about it. You’ll eat everything on this tray or you’ll have me to answer to.”

“Yes, Gail,” Justin sighed. Gail set the tray on Justin’s bed table and Justin grimaced before lifting the cover. Justin’s eyes lit up when he saw what was there. “What? How?”

Gail smiled and nodded at Brian. “He talked to your doctor and arranged the whole thing.”

“Brian?”

Brian just shrugged. “Hey, I was just sick of hearing you whine about the food in this place. And Doctor Ramos said she was going to take you off the restricted diet today anyway.”

Justin grinned and dug into the greasy hamburger and fries from Liberty Diner that Brian had picked up on his way over. “The only thing that would make this better would be a strawberry milkshake.”

“Bitch, bitch, bitch,” Brian sighed melodramatically.

Gail laughed at their antics and went to the door. “I’ll just let you two enjoy your meal. And Brian, I know the other surprise you have in mind. Just be careful, okay?”

“Yeah, yeah,” Brian huffed. “I got it all from Doc Ramos. I’ll be careful.” Gail glared at his casual
dismissal, but left anyway.

“Be careful with what?” Justin asked as he dipped his fry into ketchup.

“All part of the surprise,” Brian said as he stole a fry from Justin’s tray.

“Hey!” Justin protested as he swatted at Brian’s hand. “Get your own!”

“I don’t eat that shit,” Brian denied and then bit the greasy French fry in two.

“Sure you don’t,” Justin said. “You mean you don’t order this shit for yourself. You’re perfectly happy stealing it from my plate, however.”

“Somebody has been blabbing again,” Brian growled. “It was Emmett, wasn’t it?”

Justin grinned. “Not telling. Besides, I like knowing these little quirks about you. About us.”

“I’ll tell you anything you need to know,” Brian said. “As long as it doesn’t make me look bad. Now, tell me what had you so worked up today? Your mom said you’d had a rough day.”

Justin’s smile faded a bit and he shrugged. “It wasn’t anything specific. Just sick of being cooped up in here. Sick of therapy and tests and the food. Sick of being a burden to everybody. I just want to go home, but I don’t even know where home is.”

Brian nodded. They’d had this conversation before. “Well, I’ll share part of your surprise if you promise to finish your dinner.” Justin nodded and deliberately picked up his burger. “Obviously, I talked with Doctor Ramos today. Not only is she lifting your dietary restriction, but she’s also set a date for your release.”

Justin dropped the burger on the tray and swallowed hard. “Really?”

Brian nodded. “As long as there are no further complications, you can get out of this place on Sunday. You’ll still have to go to outpatient therapy, both physical and occupational, as well as
regular follow-up visits with Doctor Ramos, but you’ll be home. One step closer to getting past all this.”

“One step closer to getting on with my life,” Justin smiled. “Thanks. I really needed that news. Where will I be living? With you or with Mom?”

Brian was still unused to this change in Justin, the way he simply spoke what came to mind with little ability to censor himself. In the past, Justin would have hedge around the issue and manipulated things to get his way. Now, he simply asked outright. “My place if you want. Jennifer and I have discussed this. If you want to stay with me, she’ll come over during the day to check up on you and take you to your appointments while I work. At least until you are comfortable getting around on your own again.”

Justin nodded and ate the last bite of his burger. “Alright. I’d rather stay with you, anyway. Molly still makes me nervous. Now, what is my other surprise?”

Brian tossed a small box to Justin and stood up. “Open it.” While Justin pulled the ribbon off, Brian walked to the door and locked it.

Justin pulled out two condoms and a small tube of lube. He looked up at Brian and grinned. “Does this mean what I think it does?”

“You’ve been cleared for more than just greasy cheeseburgers,” Brian smirked. “Now I suggest you lay back and get comfortable, because I plan to take my time and enjoy this opportunity.”

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“Is this where I lived before?” Justin said as he walked around the loft looking at all the small details. He came to the drawing he had done of Brian their first night together, not that Justin could remember. “I drew this, didn’t I?”

“The first night we met,” Brian said. “You gave it to the GLC for their art show and I bought it. And yes you did live here for a while, but things were different then and you went to live with Debbie and Vic for a while.”

“Why were they different?” Justin asked as he went to sit beside Brian who was sitting on the sofa.
“I know everyone has told you how… wild I am,” Brian started a bit uncomfortably. “I thought that love was bullshit, and I swore that I would never grow up into a boring adult. When you came along, you sort of took over my life. A part of me welcomed the changes you were causing. The other part of me fought you every step of the way. I didn’t want to grow up. I didn’t want to grow old. I didn’t want to be in love, especially with a seventeen year old twink who could beat me at my own game and seemed to be able to read me better than I could read myself.”

Justin reached for Brian’s hand. “So we fought?”

Brian squeezed Justin’s hand. “We didn’t really fight. I just held you at arms length until I kicked you out and tried to eject you from my life. Fortunately, you are more stubborn than anyone I’ve ever met and refused to give up on me. It got worse before it got better, but eventually I realized that I needed you in my life. You asked me to go with you to your prom and I refused, but…”

“But?”

“I did some crazy shit that almost cost me my life and it made me realize a few things,” Brian shrugged. “So I went to your prom and interrupted your date with Daphne. I had decided to just give in to what I wanted even more than my youth or my freedom. I was going to ask you to move back in, but I wanted to wait until after the prom. And then…”

“And then,” Justin agreed and they were both silent for long minutes as they remembered all that had happened since that night. “Tell me about the night we met.”

Brian laughed, the tension leaving his body. “I’ve told you this five times already.”

“Brian, you know how my memory is,” Justin pouted.

“That’s bullshit. I’ll bet you can recite the story as well as anyone by now,” Brian said, but he was still smiling. “Alright, I’ll tell you again. I was at Babylon with Mikey, Ted and Emmett enjoying a typical night.”

“Read: getting your cock sucked in the back room,” Justin put in.
“Yes,” Brian smirked. “Mikey and the others wanted to go, so when I was finished in the backroom I met them outside. I don’t remember what we were talking about precisely, but I do remember heading for my jeep. That’s when I saw you under the streetlight. You were wearing a jean jacket and looked so lost, but were trying not to look scared.”

“I bet you made that part up,” Justin said playfully as he laid his head on Brian’s shoulder. “Why would I be scared?”

“Because you were out alone in an unfamiliar part of town,” Brian shrugged. “Because you’d never seen the Pittsburgh gay scene up close. Because you were a virgin looking to get laid. Take your pick. But I’m not making that up, you were scared. You were also being so fucking brave. And when our eyes met, I knew that I had to take you home with me. I had to be the one to introduce you to the delights of sex.”

“You were still horny,” Justin interpreted.

“That too,” Brian laughed and stroked Justin’s arm. “We came here and you were so nervous. You lied about being experienced, but your body language and complete naivety gave you away. You just about creamed your jeans when I pulled off my shirt and poured water over myself to cool down. We went to bed and were just getting into it when the phone rang. I answered it and found out that while I was out having a grand time, my son had been born. And then you came all over my duvet.”

“If it was my first time, you should have realized I would have little to no control,” Justin pointed out haughtily, not at all embarrassed since he couldn’t actually remember doing such a thing.

“I should have,” Brian agreed wryly. “And I probably shouldn’t have kept jerking you off while on the phone. Oh well. Live and learn. Anyway, I got dressed and met up with Mikey and we all went go to the hospital. You came with me, met the munchers and named my son.”

“And Lindsey and Mel allowed that?” Justin asked just as he had each time Brian had told the story.

“Well, it was more a matter of breaking a tie between the two over Abraham and Gus.”

“Abraham would get the kid creamed on the playground,” Justin said.
“That’s what you said that night,” Brian chuckled. “Anyway, after that, we came back here.”

“You left out the part where Michael tried to make me go home,” Justin said. “And I told him I was going with you.”

“Well, since you know the story so well, why don’t you finish it?” Brian huffed.

“Okay,” Justin smirked. “We came back here and you were gentle and patient and made love to me. It was hot and perfect and you fell in love with me that night.”

“I wouldn’t have put it that way,” Brian said. “But that’s the gist. Afterward you got out of bed in the middle of the night to draw my naked body because I was just that inspiring. And then you came back over and over again, even though I tried to get rid of you. Like a damn stray cat after you feed it once.”

“But you couldn’t get rid of me, because I was already in your heart,” Justin said.

“Yeah,” Brian sighed. “And you’ve been a pain in my ass since.”

“Good story,” Justin smiled and then yawned. “I think I’ll wait to unpack until tomorrow. Take me to bed, lover boy.”

“To sleep?” Brian asked. It was still rather early, even for Justin.

“Eventually.”

Part Two

Brian looked out his office window and thought about the months since Justin’s release from the hospital. In some ways, his life hadn’t changed at all. He still spent his evenings with Justin, only now they were in the loft instead of the hospital and they could order out or cook as they liked. In other ways, his life was drastically different from anything he’d ever known. He had shared space with Justin before, but he had not shared his life with him then. Now, he found himself considering Justin’s feelings and reactions to even the smallest decisions Brian made. It had started with
something so small and simple that Brian could hardly pinpoint the moment when his brain began to shift from “Free and Single” towards “Relationship” mode.

The morning after Justin came to the loft, Brian was getting ready to take his shower before running out the door to work. They had made love again before the alarm went off and now he was running behind. Justin followed Brian into the bathroom and began to look around, chatting with his lover while Brian showered. At some point in the conversation, Justin brought up the fact that Brian’s towels were getting a little old. Brian had shrugged and told Justin if he wanted new towels, he should just buy them. Brian simply didn’t care about the towels.

Justin had backed off the subject, saying he hadn’t meant that they needed new towels right then, but Brian could hear something in his tone that said something else was concerning his young lover.

“What is it Justin?” Brian asked.

Justin sighed. “They aren’t 100% cotton. They are a poly-blend.”

“And that bothers you?” Brian asked as he shut off the shower and grabbed the towel from Justin’s hand.

“Not bother, really,” Justin shrugged. “But cotton towels dry better. Like I said, there’s no need to go out and buy all new towels right now. But maybe when we do buy new towels, we should get cotton.”

“Okay,” Brian agreed and left the matter there. He had to get to work and didn’t have time to discuss the towels just then.

Unfortunately, the towel issue stuck in his mind for the rest of the week. Every time he showered or dried his hands, he thought about the towels and wondered if having 100% cotton towels would really make a difference. By Saturday, Brian hated his old towels and demanded that they shop for new ones. Justin had smiled and gone with him happily. They had found new towels, 100% Egyptian cotton, and had bought them. Brian, who had always insisted on the very best sheets, had never realized what a difference having good towels could make.

After that, Brian had begun considering Justin’s opinion on everything he purchased, from toothpaste to toilet paper. He had even called his younger lover from the grocery store on several occasions to solicit his opinion on cheese varieties or the brand of water. It had become almost second nature by
Things had escalated from there. Brian asked Justin’s opinions on almost everything. He had even gotten advice about work from Justin. It wasn’t that Brian doubted his own ability to handle situations that arose; it was simply the fact that having someone who cared and wanted to help him made him feel so damned good. And, as Justin had pointed out on more than one occasion, Brian had been offering that same support to Justin since the hospital.

They had fallen into a comfortable routine in the weeks since Justin’s release. Brian worked and Justin painted during the day. Justin’s physical and occupational therapy sessions had dropped off to be replaced by sessions with a psychologist who was helping him adjust to his new circumstances. He met with Doctor Jack Reyes twice a week, once alone and once with Brian. The doctor was helping them both adjust, really. Brian, loathe though he was to participate in the beginning, had found the sessions to be beneficial. He wasn’t sure that he could have dealt with the changes in his life or Justin so well without Jack’s help.

In the evenings, they would spend time together, often just talking or watching television. Sometimes friends would come over or Jennifer would bring Molly by. Fridays, they went to Woody’s and Babylon, though they never stayed late. They had learned quickly that Justin had developed a dangerous sensitivity to alcohol since the injury and couldn’t drink at all without a severe reaction. He would dance with Brian and enjoy the music and atmosphere for a while, but eventually the noise and crush of people would become overwhelming and Brian would take Justin home.

They had argued more than once about the fact that Brian refused to go out without Justin anymore. Justin felt like he was holding Brian back, but Brian had argued that he simply didn’t want to go without Justin. The truth was a little more complicated and Jack had forced them to talk it out in one of their joint sessions. Brian admitted that he was afraid that if he went alone, he would more than likely end up picking up some trick and he didn’t want to fall into his old habits. It was partly because he knew Justin would be hurt by the action and partly because he was growing to accept that the way he had been before was self-destructive, unhealthy and unsatisfying in the long run. Brian didn’t say so, but almost killing himself had forced him to reevaluate everything in his life, including the reasons for many of his past behaviors. After that session, Justin stopped pushing.

Things weren’t all roses for them. A few weeks after he had come home, Justin talked Brian into taking him out to an abandoned parking lot and letting him try to drive. It had been a complete disaster. It wasn’t that Justin didn’t know how to drive, but his reaction times were delayed to the point of being dangerous. He had to think every step out and it took him long seconds to do something simple, like hit the brake. After almost crashing the jeep into a light pole, they had both agreed that driving was not going to be an option for Justin. This had led to several days of depression that had only begun to lighten after Justin’s next appointment with Jack.

Another failed attempt that had nearly broken them both had come when Justin decided to try taking
a college course for the spring semester. It had been eight months since the injury and Justin had reasoned that he should be well enough to make the attempt. It was a life drawing course, and should have been fairly simple, considering it was mostly drawing, but the speed with which the professor covered new techniques and the required research paper proved to be too much for him. This time, Brian was the one who found a way to bring Justin out of his funk.

Brian had gone to the school and spoken to several of the professors about private lessons. While the structured academic setting of university was not for Justin, he was a talented artist and could still learn from a patient instructor. Now Justin took lesson twice a week from two professors respected in their field.

Brian smiled as he recalled how happy Justin had been when Brian had told him. Seeing Justin smile again had been even better than the blow job he’d gotten as a thank you.

“You looked blissed,” Cynthia said from Brian office doorway. Brian turned to her and scowled. “Hey, no offense, but that doesn’t work on me.”

Brian sighed. “Right, what’s up?”

“Ryder just called,” Cynthia said as she picked Brian’s suit jacket up from the sofa and handed it to him. “He wants you in his office. Sounded big.”

Brian stood and pulled on the jacket and allowed Cynthia to straighten his tie. “How big?”

“Holly was crying,” Cynthia said. “But she wouldn’t tell me why.”

Brian frowned. “Reschedule the afternoon. I have a feeling I’m going to need my time free.”

“Will do, boss,” Cynthia said and watched Brian go out the door and down the hall.

Brian took a deep breath before knocking on Ryder’s office door. Holly, her makeup tear-streaked, had waved him through. When he heard the deep voice of Marty Ryder call him in, Brian opened the door. It had been almost two weeks since Brian had last seen his boss. Marty seemed to be out of the office quite often these days. So, Brian wasn’t prepared for the pale and sickly looking man who was sitting behind Ryder’s desk.
“Brian,” Marty wheezed out. “Have a seat.”

“Marty, pardon me for saying so, but you look like shit,” Brian said after taking a seat across the desk from his boss.

Ryder chuckled, but it was raspier than usual. “Tell me about it. That’s why I wanted to talk to you. I’ve got lung cancer. The doctors are doing what they can for me, but the prognosis isn’t great. I need to put my affairs in order.”

“Shit Marty,” Brian gasped. “You’re…?”

“Dying,” Ryder nodded. “Unless there is some miracle, I’ve got about a year. Of that, maybe six months will actually be worth living. I want out. I don’t want to spend my final days here, in this office. I want to take my wife on a cruise of the Mediterranean, like I always promised. I want to spend time with my kids. I want to make these last months count.”

Brian nodded slowly, “So what happens to the agency?”

“That’s why I called you,” Ryder said. He was interrupted by a coughing spell and it was several minutes before he could go on. “Sorry. The cough is bad today. I have two options, Brian. I’ve been offered a tidy sum from Gardner Vance to purchase the agency outright. Six months ago, I would have jumped on the deal, but over the last six months, I’ve watched you pull in four new accounts, lock in contracts with several of our clients who had been on the fence, and basically keep this place running while I’ve been out visiting specialists.”

“You are offering to let me buy the agency?” Brian asked.

“I know you can’t afford to purchase it for what Vance offered,” Ryder said. “I’m willing to take a lower price if you are interested in buying me out.”

Brian was in shock. Ryder, while he had always respected Brian’s talent, had never really liked him personally. “Why? I mean, why me?”

“Like I said,” Ryder shrugged, “you’ve settled down a bit, proved you are more than a reckless hot-
shot talent. You’ve got brains, drive, and talent. That counts for a hell of a lot in this business. None of my kids want the place and none of them could run it if they did. And to be frank, I’d rather my legacy wasn’t consumed by that man’s mediocre company. But you want it. You want it more than Vance and will do more with it than he would.”

“You’re right, I do, and I will,” Brian said. “Give me time to talk it over with my partner?” Brian paused for a minute, surprised that he had used the term partner, but realized that it was true. Justin was his partner.

Ryder raised an eyebrow. “Partner? Is that the reason for the sudden changes? Well, good for you. Talk it over. Have Holly give you a copy of the Vance file. It has the offer he made as well as the details for the counteroffer I want to make you. Look it over and get back to me. Sooner is better.”

“I’ll let you know,” Brian nodded and headed out.

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“Cash, I’ve only got about forty percent of the purchase price. If I liquidate my stocks and empty my retirement accounts, that number goes up to eighty percent,” Brian told Justin as he stared at the figures on his computer screen, trying to make them come out another way. “I suppose I could borrow the money, but I don’t like taking on that kind of debt if I don’t have to. Interest is great if it’s in your favor, but sucks when its not.”

“What about taking on a partner?” Justin asked. He was in the kitchen cleaning up the dishes from their dinner.

“Who?” Brian asked and looked up. “I don’t trust many people, and those I do trust don’t have this kind of money.”

“Do you trust me?” Justin asked. “Because the settlement money came through last week. I could buy forty-nine percent, leaving you with the controlling interest, and be your silent partner.”

Brian got up from his desk and walked over to Justin. “Are you sure about this? I mean, that’s more than half of the settlement. You could invest that money in much safer ways.”

“I think you are a good risk,” Justin grinned and wiped his hands on a towel. He met Brian beside
the refrigerator and looped his arms loosely around his neck. “And I like the idea of sharing this with you. I might never be able to hold a real job, but at least I’ll know I’m contributing something to our life together. And then you won’t need to touch your retirement accounts and can save most of your stocks as well.”

“We’ll just be cash poor for a while,” Brian grinned as he held Justin tightly. “We may actually need to use that allowance your mother set up from your trust to help pay the bills for a few months.”

“So, we’re going to be partners?” Justin asked.

“We already are,” Brian told him. “This will just make it official. Although…”

“What?” Justin asked while nuzzling the sensitive spot on Brian’s neck.

“Nothing important,” Brian groaned as he started pulling Justin towards the bedroom. “Let’s go celebrate our partnership.”

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“So you are Brian’s partner,” Marty Ryder smiled as he shook Justin’s hand a few days later. “You are the man responsible for all the positive changes I’ve seen over the past months.”

Justin smiled but shook his head. “No, that would be Brian. I’m just reaping the benefits.”

“You did luck out with him, Kinney,” Ryder said with a chuckle. He didn’t wait for Brian to reply, but instead went on to introduce them to his lawyer. Brian then introduced his and Justin’s lawyer and they all sat down at the conference table to hash out the final details of the deal. It took nearly two hours to come up with the final agreement, but when it was done, they were all satisfied.

“I’ll have the final contract drawn up and sent over tomorrow,” Ryder’s lawyer said before he left, Brian’s lawyer on his heels, eager to discuss one of their mutual colleagues.

“How about lunch, to celebrate?” Ryder asked once they were alone.
Justin looked at Brian who grinned and nodded. “That sounds… wonderful, Mr. Ryder.”

“It’s Marty,” Ryder said as he ushered Justin out the door, leaving Brian to follow behind.

Brian shook his head and allowed them to chat as he followed them to the elevator and down to the street. Marty was in rare form today. It was like the old days, with Marty doing his best to win a potential client with his wit and charm alone. Only Brian couldn’t understand why he was turning that charm on Justin. Then he realized that to Marty, Justin was the spouse of an important business contact. He was treating the younger man the same way he would the wife of any client.

He realized that he had been lost in his own thoughts for too long when he saw that Justin was looking a bit flustered.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to pry,” Marty was saying as Brian came up and wrapped a reassuring arm around Justin.

Justin gave a shaky smile, “No, it’s fine. I just don’t… talk much about it. I don’t get out… much, you see, and… friends and family… all know details already, so…it just doesn’t come up. I don’t mind… talking about it. Really.”

Brian knew they were now talking about the assault, and his first instinct was to cut the conversation off, but Justin seemed like he was recovering from the shock okay, so he remained quiet. They had arrived at the restaurant and had to wait while they were seated and drink orders were taken before Ryder was able to continue with his questions.

“I didn’t realize the connection at first,” Ryder said. “The media coverage never mentioned Brian by name, but I assume he was the boyfriend who stopped the attacker?”

Justin nodded and took a sip of his water. “He was. He saved my life.”

Ryder gave Brian a sidelong look but said to Justin, “I won’t ask how you became involved with a man so much older than you, but I am interested to know more about what happened. As I said, the media coverage left out many of the details.”
“Well, you’d have… to ask Brian,” Justin said. “They aren’t sure if it was the from the… initial attack or from the surgery… they did, but when I finally woke up after… it was all over, I couldn’t remember anything. Well, that’s not true. I remembered Brian.” Brian smirked and nodded. “Everything else is just… a blank. I’ve had to rebuild… all of my relationships and learn… second hand about my life before.”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” Ryder said. “It must be difficult.”

Justin shrugged again. “It’s not as bad as you might think. Because I can’t remember… what I’m missing, I don’t miss it. Does that make sense?”

“It does,” Ryder agreed. “Has that been the only side effect?”

“No,” Brian answered this time. “There have been a few others.”

Justin smiled and took Brian’s hand. He knew that Brian wasn’t comfortable talking about this. “My brain doesn’t work… the way it used to. All of the essential… knowledge is still there, as is the ability to learn, but it takes me twice… as long now to process things. I can’t go to college… because I can’t learn… the way most people do. I can’t drive… because my reaction times… are too slow. I can’t work, at least not in a… traditional job. If you knew me before, you would know… that my speech has slowed… considerably. I’m not stupid, though some… might assume so; I just take… more time to do everything now. I was an artist… before the attack, and my art is what keeps… me going most days. That and Brian. And I’m learning how to… live day by day.”

Ryder nodded thoughtfully. “When the doctors told me that I was dying, I was angry. Angrier than I have ever been in my life. I kept thinking that it couldn’t be true, that this couldn’t be happening to me. Slowly, with my wife’s help and a few sessions with a therapist, I’ve come to realize that I just have to be grateful for every day that I have. Though some days are still easier than others.”

“It’s cliché, but as they say, one day at a time,” Justin said.

The rest of the lunch was a lot less intense, and Brian was grateful. It wasn’t only Justin he wanted to protect from reliving that awful night. Hell, Justin didn’t remember what happened. But Brian did. He hated thinking of Justin lying there in a pool of blood. He hated the overwhelming sense of helplessness that hit him every time he thought about it.

“It was a pleasure to meet you, Marty,” Justin said as they reached the building where the agency
“The pleasure was all mine,” Ryder returned.

“I’m going to take Justin home,” Brian announced. “I’ll be back in an hour.”

“No, Brian, I can take a cab,” Justin protested.

“Justin…”

“Why don’t you just take the rest of the afternoon off,” Ryder suggested. “Do something to celebrate.”

“Good idea,” Justin smiled. “I have just the thing.”

Brian shook his head and admitted defeat. He couldn’t beat both of these men. “Alright, let’s go. I’ll see you in the morning Marty.”

Part Three

Justin’s idea of celebrating included a couple’s massage, facials, manicures, and an hour in a bath for two filled with rose oil and lavender.

“Emmett told me about the couple’s package here,” Justin admitted as he leaned back against Brian’s chest while they relaxed together in the scented water. “It sounded really nice, so I thought it would be a good way to celebrate.”

“I’m loath to admit that I have enjoyed it,” Brian said. “I will, however, deny ever being here if you tell any of our friends or family. While I love being pampered, this is just too…romantic. I do have a reputation to uphold.”

“Whatever will you tell Marty tomorrow?” Justin laughed.
“That my wife came up with some incredibly embarrassing activity for two and nothing more,” Brian said smugly. “If he presses, I’ll threaten to share the information with his wife.”

“I’m not your wife,” Justin grumped and swatted at Brian’s arm.

“No, you are my partner,” Brian whispered just before he kissed Justin’s neck.

“Stop that,” Justin scolded and tried to scoot forward in the tub. Brian just pulled him tighter against his body, his half hard cock swelling against Justin’s round ass. “Brian, we can’t do that here.”

“Why not?” Brian asked as he nibbled on Justin’s ear and gently tweaked Justin’s nipple.

“Brian!” Justin moaned.

Just then a knock sounded at the door. “Sirs? Are you alright?”

“We’re fine,” Brian called out. He sighed and released Justin. “I’m starting to dislike this celebration.”

When Justin was safely on the other end of the tub, he said, “Well, we could skip the last half hour and go home. Hell, I bet they sell the bath oils out front. We could recreate this entire setting in our bathtub at home.”

Brian nodded thoughtfully. “Or we could skip the tub and get straight to the sex.”

Justin laughed. “You don’t have a romantic bone in your body, do you?”

“Not that I’ll ever admit,” Brian smirked as he stood in all his naked glory and held out a hand to Justin. “Shall we?”
They signed the final papers the next day and scheduled an all staff meeting for Friday to make the announcement to the employees. As far as Justin was concerned, his part was finished the minute the ink dried on his signature, but both Brian and Marty had insisted that the staff should have the opportunity to meet the company’s co-owner at least once. Justin reluctantly gave in and resigned himself to an uncomfortable afternoon of awkward conversations with complete strangers.

Justin knew that he hadn’t always felt so awkward having conversations with unfamiliar people, but since the assault, he was self-conscious about his slow speech and difficulty processing information. He was perfectly comfortable with Brian and his mother, even Debbie and Emmett, but other people, especially those he didn’t know, made him nervous, which made the problems more pronounced and obvious. His occupational therapist had spent time teaching him relaxation techniques that were supposed to help, but never seemed to do more than make him more aware that he was different than most people.

Deciding not to dwell on the situation, Justin went back to work on his latest project. He had discovered not long after his release that, much like his art, computers seemed to be second nature to him. Using a mouse was as natural as holding a paintbrush. With that knowledge came new explorations into what he could do artistically with the technology at hand. So he had begun experimenting with graphics programs and Photoshop. Brian had bought him a very nice digital camera and Justin had begun incorporating photography into his art. Not only did he use Photoshop and other graphics programs to create digital art, he began using prints to create collages on canvas.

Justin had adapted several photos of Brian, close-ups of various body parts, to be used in a collage. He had enlarged and manipulated the photographs to enhance color and texture, and sent them off to be printed. The finished prints had arrived that week and he was now carefully piecing them into the portrait he was painting of Brian. He had already completed three collages using this method but this was the first portrait he was attempting, and Justin believed that it was the best work he had done. It was modern and Impressionistic all at once. He couldn’t wait to show the finished piece to Brian. Brian had been enthusiastic about all of Justin’s work, but Justin was sure this latest piece would really impress his lover.

Justin was considering whether he should hire a model to pose for his next project when the loft’s buzzer sounded. With a sigh, Justin put down his paintbrush and wiped his hands on a rag before covering the work-in-progress and walking to the intercom.

“Yes?”

“Justin,” Michael Novotny’s voice sounded through the small speaker. “Can I come up?”
“Sure Michael,” Justin sighed and pressed the button that would unlock the front door. Justin opened the door for Michael and then went to clean up his brushes and palette. He knew from experience that when Michael showed up, he wouldn’t get any more work done for a while. He was pouring paint thinner over his brushes at the sink when Michael came through the door.

“Where’s Brian?” Michael asked, looking around the loft.

“He’s still at work,” Justin said. Brian hadn’t shared the news of the purchase with anyone yet, so Justin chose his next words carefully. “He’s dealing with a big… negotiation right now and has… had to put in a lot of extra hours.”

“God, this place is a mess,” Michael said as he took in Justin’s work space near the back windows of the loft. Brian had moved his desk against the wall and given Justin room to set up his easel and computer near the south facing windows. It was a bit cluttered, especially since Justin had been working, but it was not a mess. “How does Brian put up with all this junk around?”

Justin held back a growl and asked, “Did you need something?”

“I was just stopping by to see if Brian wanted to come out with me tonight,” Michael shrugged. “You know, boys night out?”

“Yes, well, I’ll let him… know you stopped by,” Justin said, attempting to get the annoying jerk to leave.

“What time do you expect him?” Michael asked as he pulled a beer from the fridge and sat down at the counter.

Justin carried his brushes and palette back to his work area and began straightening up. “He didn’t say. He only said… not to hold dinner for him.”

Michael smirked. “Are you sure he’s working?”

Justin glared at Michael. “Get out.”
“What?” Michael asked innocently.

“I said get out,” Justin repeated. “I don’t… want you here. You aren’t pleasant and… I don’t like
you. Get out and leave… me the fuck alone.”

“God, you are such a waste of space,” Michael laughed. “Listen to you. ‘I don’t like you!’ Give me a
break. You know Brian only lets you live here out of pity, right?”

“Get out,” Justin repeated and walked to pick up the phone. “Get out now… or I’ll call the cops and
have… them throw you out.”

“And what will Brian have to say about it when he finds out his defective twink threw out his best
friend?” Michael sneered as he slammed down the beer bottle and stalked towards Justin. There was
something distinctly menacing in the way he was moving and looking at Justin.

“I don’t care,” Justin said holding the phone in his shaking hands, though he knew Michael could
easily snatch it from him. The other man was only inches from him now and his eyes gleamed with
hatred. “I don’t have… to let you… stay. Now get out!”

“Hey, what’s going on?” Brian’s voice asked from the doorway.

Justin dropped the phone and practically ran to Brian, who automatically wrapped his arms around
Justin. The younger man was trembling and Brian wasn’t sure if it was from fear or rage. “What did
you do to him, Mikey?”

Michael put on his best hangdog face and said, “I didn’t touch him. We were just talking and he
exploded. There’s something wrong with him.”

“What did you say to him, Michael?” Brian asked again in a dangerous tone as Justin moved to stand
behind Brian.

Michael decided to change tactics. “Fuck you, Brian. Why do you have to assume it was me who
started things?”
“Because it’s always you,” Brian retorted. “Ever since we were kids, you started shit and I had to clean up your messes. Now don’t try to bullshit me! What did you say to him?”

“I told him he was just a pity fuck,” Michael finally blurted out, his mask of innocence falling as quickly as he had donned it. “How the fuck can you stand to be around him? He’s damaged! He talks like a two year old!”

“And yet, he’s still smarter than you,” Brian scoffed. “I think Justin had the right idea. Get out. You aren’t welcome here.”

“What the fuck?!” Michael raged. “You’d choose the retard over me?”

“He’s not retarded!” Brian shouted, moving threateningly towards Michael in an imitation of Michael’s earlier movements. “He a fucking genius! He’s as brilliant as he ever was, he just can’t express himself in the same way as before. And you are just as stupid as ever if you can’t see that! Get the fuck out Michael! And don’t bother coming back until you have a sincere apology for Justin.”

“That will be a cold day in hell,” Michael muttered as he grabbed his jacket and stomped out the door.

Brian walked to the door and slammed it closed before wrapping Justin in his arms again. Justin was still shaking and Brian held him tight and whispered soothing words in his ears until he felt his lover begin to calm down. “You okay now?”

Justin nodded and took several deep breaths, though his nerves were still pretty shaken. “He made me mad… so I told him to leave… but he wouldn’t. He scared me. I knew I couldn’t defend myself. Too slow. Said I’m messy. Said you weren’t working. A pity fuck. Defective twink.”

Brian had learned to understand much of Justin’s disjointed speech patterns over the months and actually followed what Justin was telling him. “He’s the defective one, Justin. You have had to face many obstacles, but you have faced each one with courage.”

“I don’t feel… very brave,” Justin muttered into Brian’s shoulder. “I feel like everything is just… so damn hard.” Justin paused and Brian knew that he was gearing up to ask a question. “Why do you… stay with me?”
Brian touched Justin’s chin and the younger man looked up at him. “I stay because I want to be here. I want to be with you. We talked about this.”

“But that was before,” Justin whispered. “Before you knew how… damaged I am.”

“Justin, we are all damaged in some way,” Brian said carefully. “Michael is damaged. I’m damaged. And we all have to learn to live with the consequences of the pain that others inflict on us. Yours just happens to be more noticeable than some. It doesn’t make you any less of a man. In fact, the way you stood up to Michael, even though you were afraid, even though you felt threatened, that makes you strong.

“I stay with you, keep you here with me, because I admire and respect you,” Brian continued. “I keep you around because I like who I am when I’m with you. I keep you around because I’m not sure what I would do without you in my life.”

There were tears in Justin’s eyes, but they didn’t fall as he nodded his understanding. “I’m sorry I caused a rift between you and Michael.” Brian was glad to hear Justin’s speech pattern returning to its customary measured cadence.

“You didn’t,” Brian denied. “Michael did. He’s the one with a problem. And he’s the one who has to accept the fact that you are part of my life now. If he can’t, then he’s the one who loses out. I don’t want him in my life if he can’t accept you. We’re a package, you and me. He can’t have one without the other.”

Justin nodded again and pressed his cheek to Brian’s neck. “Did you eat?”

“I had a late lunch, but nothing since then,” Brian admitted. “Did you eat? Or did you work right up until Michael interrupted you?”

Justin grinned sheepishly. “I worked. But I got a lot done today.”

“Does that mean I can look at the portrait?” Brian asked.

“Not yet,” Justin said. “Maybe this weekend.”
“Okay, well, why don’t we order in dinner and then go to bed?” Brian suggested. “With the staff meeting tomorrow, I think we could both use the rest. I won’t be going in until after lunch, so we can just laze in bed all morning together.”

Justin smiled. “Sounds like a good plan. I’ll order from that new Thai place while you shower.”

Part Four

The staff meeting had turned into an unofficial cocktail party held in the restaurant at the top of the high-rise building that housed Ryder Advertising. Justin was surprised by the number of people present; he hadn’t realized there would be so many. And, as Brian helpfully pointed out, they all worked for them now.

“I want to thank you all for coming today,” Marty Ryder said, gaining the attention of everyone present with his hoarse voice. “As I’m sure that rumors have been circulating these past weeks, I doubt it will come as a shock when I tell you that I’ve decided to retire and sell the company. What you probably don’t know is that one of our own will be taking up the reins. Brian Kinney and Justin Taylor purchased the Ryder Agency and Brian will be taking over as CEO as of Monday. Brian, would you like to say a few words?”

Brian nodded and walked up to the small dais. He looked over the room and, when his eyes came to Justin, gave a small smile. Justin didn’t pay much attention to what Brian was saying, knowing it was mostly about what they would need to concentrate on in order to make a smooth transition. Instead, he let his mind drift to his art and began cataloguing who in the room would make a good model for his next project—not that he would ever actually use one of their employees, but it was something to do. He was surprised, therefore, when he heard his name being called.

“Justin?” Brian said with a slight smirk, knowing he had caught his partner daydreaming.

“Sorry?” Justin said with confusion.

“I was trying to introduce you,” Brian teased quietly so that only those closest to them could hear. “You could at least pretend to be interested in what I have to say.”

“Sorry.” Justin mumbled as he joined Brian on the dais.
“As I was saying, Justin is half owner of the company, but will not have much to do with the daily operations,” Brian continued loud enough for everyone to hear. “Would you like to say anything, Justin?”

“Well, I’m not really,” Justin said sheepishly. “I’m not good…with public speaking.”

“Okay,” Brian said. “I guess that’s everything. Enjoy the refreshments folks, and feel free to approach me with any concerns you might have about the transition.”

Justin took a deep breath and let it out slowly, glad that most of the people had turned their attention to the buffet and bar and away from him. Cynthia, Brian’s assistant came up to Justin and helped him with introductions as various employees came to greet him. Brian was being inundated with questions and congratulations, so Justin was grateful that his lover had thought to ask Cynthia to shepherd him through the gauntlet of people.

“It’s nice to meet you,” Justin said for what felt like the hundredth time as he shook the hand of a man in his early thirties. He was one that Justin had contemplated using as a model, but up close, he realized that he was all flash and little substance, a trait that would show through in both photograph and paint.

“If you don’t mind me saying, you seem awfully young to become co-owner of a major advertising agency,” the man, whose name Justin had already forgotten, said. “Besides investing in business, what do you do? Are you in school?”

“I’m an artist,” Justin said. This man was making him uncomfortable, but Cynthia had stepped away for a minute and he could come up with no polite way out of the conversation.

“Ah, I see,” the man smirked. “Isn’t that just a euphemism for rent boy?”

Justin’s eyebrows raised, “No it is not.”

“Sure, kid.”

“Justin, I see you’ve met Mark, he’s one of our graphic designers,” Brian said as he joined them, making Justin sigh with relief. “Mark you could learn a thing or two from Justin here. You remember that piece in my office you were raving over last week? That was Justin’s.”
Mark seemed taken aback and Justin smiled at Brian. “I didn’t know you’d hung that.”

“Of course I did,” Brian smiled. “Now I interrupted your conversation. What were you boys discussing so intently?”

“Whether the term artist is a euphemism for rent boy,” Justin said in his guileless way, making Mark blanch.

“Really?” Brian said and narrowed his eyes at Mark.

“I…I…”

“You should know Mark, it’s not very bright to insult your employer,” Brian sneered. “And your reasoning is flawed.”

“How so?” Mark pulled himself together enough to ask.

“If I was kept… how could I pay… for half the company?” Justin asked. “Forty-nine percent, to be… precise.”

“I’m very sorry,” Mark finally said, his face flushed with embarrassment.

“Go away, Mark,” Brian said, shooing the other man with a casual wave of his hand. “And remember, just because there is alcohol provided, does not make it a smart idea to overindulge at an office party.”

“Yes, sir.”

When he was gone, Justin burst out laughing. “I thought he was going to pee his pants when I told you what he’d said.”
“Yes, well, at least he knows now to keep his trap shut,” Brian smirked. “Are you ready to get out of here?”

“I thought the party was supposed to go for another hour?” Justin asked.

“It is,” Brian said. “But we’ve done our duty, and without us around, the staff can actually enjoy themselves.”

“Then I’m ready,” Justin smiled. “Just let me thank Cynthia."

BJBJBJBJBJ

Justin opened the loft door to let Debbie inside. Her visit was unexpected, and both he and Brian were rather surprised that she was there given that it was a Sunday and she was usually busy doing the family dinner with Vic and Michael right about then. Of course it might have something to do with the fact that Brian and Justin had decided not to go following their confrontation with Michael.

“Sunshine! You look good,” Debbie smiled and gave Justin her usual hug. When she released him, she went over to the sitting area where Brian was lounging on the sofa. She sat on the chair and Justin moved Brian’s feet and sat at the end of the sofa. Brian smirked as he put his feet back up, this time on Justin’s lap.

“So what’s up Deb?” Brian asked.

“I think I should be asking you that,” Debbie said. “I thought we had a standing appointment on Sundays?”

“We did,” Brian admitted as he sat up and faced Debbie. “But things change.”

“Like my son being a prick again?” Debbie said with a frown.

“If you already know the answer, why ask the question?” Brian asked smartly.
“I don’t know the answer,” Debbie retorted. “When I asked Michael what was up, he clammed up, the little shit. If you had done something, he’d have whined all afternoon about it, so I figured it must be something he did.”

“Does it really matter why?” Justin asked. He was reluctant to let Debbie put herself into the middle of this. He knew that she cared about him, but Michael was her son. Surely it would be easier for her not to be involved.

Debbie gave Justin a sad knowing smile. “It matters, sweetheart. You and Brian both matter.”

Brian cleared his throat. “Michael said some pretty unforgivable things to Justin the last time he was here. I made it very clear to him that he wasn’t welcome back unless he had a serious shift in his attitude towards our relationship. Towards Justin specifically.”

Debbie nodded. She could imagine some of the hurtful things her son might have said. “Well, then I understand why you wouldn’t want to come around when you know Michael will be there. But don’t think this gets you out of family dinners. We’ll just have to figure something else out.”

“Why don’t you and Vic come here for dinner once a week?” Justin asked. “I love to cook. Or we could take turns. And maybe you and Vic could pose for me. I’d love to do a portrait of the two of you.”

“Well that sounds like a wonderful solution, Sunshine!” Debbie enthused. “And Brian can’t sneak away early if we’re at his house.”

Brian gave mischievous smile, “I’m sure I could find a way.” Debbie and Justin both scowled at him, so he relented. “But I won’t. How about Wednesdays?”

Debbie smiled. “That’s perfect. We’ll be here at six to help you cook, Sunshine. And plan dinner for seven. And we’d love to sit for you. I don’t work Tuesdays, and Vic usually keeps that day free as well. We could come by then.”

“That would be great,” Justin smiled.

“How is your work going?” Debbie wanted to know.
“You should show her the portrait you just finished,” Brian smirked. Justin had finished it on Saturday and Brian had been quite pleased with the results. It was stylish and sexy and still had an edginess that would appeal to many critics. The fact that it made Brian look good didn’t hurt either.

Justin smiled and led Debbie over to where the canvas was still drying on his easel. He carefully removed the cloth and watched Debbie’s reaction. He wasn’t disappointed.

“Oh, Sunshine!” Debbie gasped. “It’s amazing. I’ve never seen anything like it before. The colors and textures…and the way you used the photographs…it all blends together and looks like one picture. How did you make the photos look like that?”

Justin shrugged shyly, “I did a bit of work on the computer before I had them printed.”

“Don’t let him fool you,” Brian said as he came up behind Justin and wrapped his arms around the younger man. “He was very meticulous about the whole thing, taking measurements so that the pictures and painting would be in proportion, matching colors and textures. It was a very painstaking process, and one he did mostly in his head. He had more than half of the painting completed before he even got back the first test prints.”

“You’re going to show this, aren’t you?” Debbie asked. “Something this good should be on a gallery wall. Hell, it should be in a fucking museum.”

“We’ll see,” Justin said. “It’s not easy to get a show. And I need more work before I go out trying to get one. I’m not even sure how I would do it, considering my issues.”

“We’ll get you a show,” Brian promised. “We’ll work together to make sure it happens.”

Justin smiled but changed the subject. “I’ve decided to look for a model for my next piece. I was doing mostly still-lifes at first, but I think this technique is more effective with the human form. So I want to find a model.”

“You could ask friends first,” Debbie suggested.

Brian laughed. “I don’t think so. No offense, but I have no desire to have Ted, Emmett or Daphne
naked in my loft.”

Justin nodded. “It would be uncomfortable.”

Debbie shrugged. “I suppose. But it won’t be uncomfortable having a naked stranger around the place?” She looked from Justin to Brian, both of whom had incredulous looks on their faces, and shook her head. “Never mind. Forget I asked.”

“Brian works with models at the agency, so he can get me photos of a few and I can contact the ones I think will fit best,” Justin explained. “It’s business to them, and they are used to posing, so I wouldn’t have to train them. But Brian, can we afford that right now?”

“Things are tight, but Pittsburgh models aren’t as expensive as a national model would be,” Brian told Justin. “I’ll work up a contract with a set fee we can afford.”

Justin nodded, trusting Brian to take care of the business end of things.

“Well, I should get back to the house,” Debbie sighed. “Vic will have tortured Michael into confessing by now, so it’ll be my turn when I get home.”

Brian walked Debbie to the loft door and gave her a hug. “Thanks Deb.”

“For what?” Debbie asked, confused.

Brian gave a small smile. “For coming here today. For being there for Justin.”

Debbie gave Brian’s cheek a pinch. “Michael is my son by blood, but you and Justin are my boys by choice. I love all three of you. No matter what goes on between you and Michael, that won’t change.”

Though neither man had brought up the subject, both men were well aware that the anniversary of
the attack was rapidly approaching. Jennifer had expressed her concerns to Brian, and he had done
his best to reassure her, but he wasn’t all that confident in his ability to deal with his own emotions,
let alone Justin’s. Justin had discussed the anniversary with Jack at his now weekly sessions, and
hoped that he would be able to deal with the anniversary.

In the end, Brian arranged for the two of them to take a week off so that they could be alone and
away from everything for the event. He rented a cottage at a seaside town in North Carolina and they
hid away from the world for the days before and after the anniversary. Justin packed his camera and
his sketchpad so he could work while Brian tanned. On the day of, Justin brought out a video that
Daphne had given him months ago, but that he’d never had the courage to watch.

“What is this?” Brian asked as Justin handed him the video.

“A video of the prom,” Justin said. “Daphne gave it to me a while ago. I thought, maybe, we could
watch it together.”

Brian looked at the tape in Justin’s hand but did not touch it. “Are you sure you want to do that?”

Justin shook his head. “No. I have no idea what’s on the tape. I have no memory of that night. But I
know how much thinking about it hurts you, so no, I’m not sure. I don’t want to hurt you. I also
don’t want to watch it without you.”

Brian nodded slowly and took the tape from Justin. “We’ll watch together.”

Minutes later, they were holding each other on the couch while they watched random teenagers
laugh and dance to cheesy music, nothing like what they played at Babylon. They were all dressed
up in their gowns and tuxedos. None of them knew how the night would end for Justin and Brian.

“There I am,” Justin said, and Brian saw Justin in the background dancing with Daphne. Then Brian
walked into the frame and Justin’s face lit up.

Brian paused the tape. “You were so happy to see me. I remember feeling like there could be nothing
better in this world than to see your face light up the way it was right then.”

“You looked very handsome,” Justin smiled. “But what is with the scarf?”
Brian frowned as he remembered tying the scarf to the rafter. He remembered it soaked with blood as he sat in the hospital waiting to hear if Justin would live or die. “Maybe I’ll tell you someday.”

Justin nodded and didn’t press the issue. Brian pressed play and watched as the two men on the screen began to dance. It was like it was from another lifetime. Like it had happened to two different people.

“We were quite good together,” Justin sighed.

“We still are,” Brian murmured and pulled Justin closer, waiting for the moment when they left the floor and disappeared from view. When it came, he stopped the tape. “We made a stop in the men’s room in the lobby for a quick fuck before taking the elevator to the parking garage. You were laughing and dancing and I couldn’t help but smile at how happy you were. We walked to my jeep and shared a kiss. You turned to go back to the dance and I turned to get into the jeep. I could see you in the mirror as I unlocked my door and I remember thinking how lucky I was to have you in my life. And then I saw him… He had the bat and I tried to call out to you…I tried to warn you, but I was too slow…”

Justin held onto Brian tightly as he felt the shudders run through Brian’s body. As difficult as it was for Justin to hear this, it was ten times harder for Brian to say. But Justin needed to hear it and Brian needed to talk about it. They had learned to deal with the aftermath in therapy together, but they had never really dealt with the assault itself, or how it made Brian feel.

“I was helpless to stop him,” Brian said as he buried his face in Justin’s hair, as he sobbed. “Then he…and there was so much blood. I wanted to beat the shit out of the fucker, but I had to help you. And you were so still in my arms…”

“It’s okay, Brain,” Justin whispered and pulled Brian down so that they were face to face. “I’m here. I’m alive. He didn’t kill me. I survived.”

Brian nodded and held onto Justin tighter. It was some time before either of them was ready to loosen their hold, but when they did, it felt like they were both beginning to heal just a little.

**Part Five**

“Come to work with me this morning,” Brian suggested on a Thursday two weeks later as he was
getting ready. Justin, who was sitting on the bed wrapped in a towel and watching his lover raised his eyebrows in surprise. “I had Cynthia put together the model profiles you wanted and you could look through them. We could have lunch together and then I’ll bring you home this afternoon so you can work.”

“I suppose,” Justin said. “I do want to look at the models and it would be nice to get out of here for a while. Sometimes I feel like I’m caged up here.”

Brian frowned and dropped the tie he had been considering. “Caged?”

Justin shrugged as he went to his dresser and pulled out a pair of khakis, a t-shirt and a sweater. “It’s not all the time. Most of the time, I’m glad to be here. I feel safe here. But sometimes…I just get cabin fever, I guess.”

“Justin, you don’t have to stay here all the time,” Brian told him as he wrapped his arms around the younger man. “Just because you can’t drive yourself doesn’t mean you’re locked in here. I know you aren’t comfortable taking the bus anymore, but you can come to work with me, you can call Deb or your mom or Emmett. Hell, call a cab. Jack has said you should start exploring your boundaries.”

Justin nodded. “I know. It’s just easier staying here. But you’re right. I should start going out more by myself.”

“Good,” Brian said and let his lover go. “Now get dressed. It sets a bad impression if the boss is late for work.”

“Yes, sir,” Justin gave a salute and avoided the swat Brian aimed for his ass.

Twenty minutes later they were pulling into the parking garage under their building and taking the elevator up to their offices. Justin smiled when he saw the frosted glass entry to the agency. The Ryder logo had been removed and had been replaced by the graphic that Justin had designed. The name Kinnetik Advertising was emblazoned across the window.

“I see you got the signs changed already,” Justin grinned.

“And all the letterhead,” Brian said. “You did well with the design. Several of our regular clients have commented, wondering why we save our best work for ourselves.”
Justin laughed. “That’s just flattery.”

Brian quirked his eyebrow and stared at Justin. “That’s the truth. The head of our art department has been nagging me to sign the guy who designed this. If I thought you had any interest in advertising at all, I would ask you to come in here to work.”

Justin studied Brian’s face and realized he was serious. “I could have a real job, if I wanted?”

“Even if you weren’t half owner of this place, I’d hire you,” Brian said. “Justin, you are extremely talented. Disabilities or no, you could make a good living as a graphic artist.”

Justin gave Brian a slow smile, “I’m glad I don’t have to, but it’s good to know I would have options if I needed them.” Justin followed Brian into he reception area and noted that two of his graphic prints were hanging on the walls there. He hadn’t realized that Brian had taken them to be framed, or that he had decided to hang them at the office. He realized that Brian was several steps ahead of him, so Justin hurried to catch up, ignoring the curious glances of the employees.

Once inside Brian’s new office, Justin noticed more of his artwork on the walls. “Brian, when did you put these up? And the ones in the reception area. I didn’t even know you’d taken them.”

Brian grinned. “I needed something to spruce this office up. Ryder had it decorated like a mortuary.”

Justin shook his head in exasperation, but accepted the stack of files that Brian handed him. Without further questions, he sat down at the small glass conference table and began to look through each file. He made three stacks as he went: no, maybe, and yes. The yes stack was considerably smaller than either of the other two piles, but he was actually pleased with the half dozen models in them. After sorting through all of the files, Justin went back and began reviewing the curriculum vitae of each of the models and began formulating ideas about how he would like to see each one posed based upon their past work and physical attributes. He took a break at one point to ask Cynthia for a notepad to jot down his ideas about each of the models and make photocopies of their pictures and contact information. By lunch time, he had complete files for each of the six and had begun sorting through the maybe pile again.

“Hey, you ready to go?” Brian asked, breaking through Justin’s wall of concentration.

Justin shook his head. “I’ve still got a few more files I want to go over.”
Brian grinned. He loved the way Justin could become so consumed in his work that he forgot about everything else. “We should take a break to eat, even if you aren’t ready to leave yet.”

Justin nodded distractedly, his face already buried in one of the files again. “Order whatever.”

Brian watched Justin for a few minutes as he pulled out his notepad and began writing furiously. He even paused to create a rough sketch of, Brian supposed, the pose he wanted to use with that model. Justin was biting his lower lip as he considered the various photographs in that model’s file. Then he began to write more notes before setting the file aside and picking up the next. This one was quickly discarded into the no pile and Brian shook his head in bemusement as he picked up the phone and asked Cynthia to order sandwiches from the deli.

It was three hours later before Justin looked up again. He had accepted and eaten the sandwich Brian had handed him but had never really stopped what he was doing. He only stopped when he was completely finished with the files and had a list prioritizing which models he wanted to contact first.

“All finished?” Brian asked.

Justin gave a sheepish grin but nodded. “I think I’ve got what I need.”

“From that stack of files, I’d say that you have enough to keep you busy for the next six months,” Brian teased. “Anything worthwhile?”

Justin lit up as he picked up two files and brought them over to Brian, sitting on the edge of Brian’s desk, between the taller man’s knees. “Look at these two and tell me what you think.”

Brian opened the first file and looked at the photos before reading the bio. The model was in his late twenties, tall, of Jamaican descent, with short dreads and well defined musculature. He had an easy smile and sexy eyes, but it was his strength which drew the viewer to him. The next file was for a much younger model, only nineteen. He was smaller than the first, with light brown hair and blue eyes. This time, it was the innocence and vulnerability of the model which stood out.

“You want to use these two together,” Brian deduced. Justin nodded. “I can certainly see the appeal. The juxtaposition of strength and vulnerability, of light and dark, innocence and sensuality…well, I can certainly see the potential.”
“You don’t think it will be too much, do you?” Justin asked, again biting his bottom lip nervously. “I mean, for the first time working with professional models?”

“I think it will be fine,” Brian said. “But if you are nervous about it, I can arrange to be there for your first meeting with them.”

Justin nodded and smiled gratefully. “Thanks. Will we have to go through their agents?”

“Yes, but let me have Cynthia handle all that,” Brian said as he set the files aside and pulled Justin closer to him. “She knows my schedule better than anyone and she can arrange things with the agents. She can also email a pdf of the contract and offer. Three sittings like I did? Or will you need more, since there are two of them?”

Justin paused to think. “I think at least four sittings. The first two for the photographs and sketches, the third and fourth for the painting. Possibly a fifth for finishing touches. At least two hours each.”

“I’ll have her contract for five at three hours each,” Brian said. “That way you’ll be sure to have all the time you need. Twice a week, or do you want more time in between?”

“The first two in the same week,” Justin said. “Then once a week after. With working on Debbie’s portrait, I’ll need a little extra time. Besides, I’ve been told I should get out of the house more often.”

“That you should,” Brian agreed. “I’ll get Cynthia working on this and then I can drop you home. Or, if you want to wait an hour or so, we can go have dinner together when I’m finished for the day.”

Justin thought about it for a moment. “Dinner out sounds good. And I wanted to wander down to the art department and see what they actually do down there, so now’s as good a time as any.”

“I’ll call Steven and see if he has time to show you around,” Brian said. He leaned up and gave Justin a kiss and then pushed Justin away so he could stand. “You might want to ask him about the Carry-all account.”

BJBJBJBJB
Justin was impressed by the equipment that Steven showed him in the art department, but was not as impressed with the work they were producing. Steven had reintroduced Justin to each of the designers on staff, eight in all, and each one had given him a peek at whatever project they were working on. All in all, they seemed competent, and the campaigns were innovative, but the artwork was rather lackluster in comparison to the ideas that were being pitched.

After looking around the rest of the department, Steven invited Justin into his office. “So, what did you think?”

Justin wanted to soften his opinion, but his brain didn’t allow for that these days, so his answer was rather blunt. “They aren’t as good… as they should be. There’s talent and… technology enough, but there’s no passion or… creativity.”

Steve nodded. He knew that they were missing something, but had been unable to inspire his team to do the kind of work he knew they were capable of doing. “So, what do we do about that?”

Justin thought for long minutes before asking, “How many… of your team come from… a fine arts background?”

“Two,” Steve answered. “The rest are either computer whizzes or photo geeks.”

“Let me guess, based on the work I saw today, I’d say Carl and Janine are the artists,” Justin said. At Steve’s nod, he went on, “I think we need to… reintroduce the rest of the team to the fine arts. Take a few field trips… to see what’s possible, not just technologically… speaking, but creatively. We’ll go to the Carnegie Museum… and the Warhol Museum and let them get a feel for… some of the cutting edge artwork that… moves people. Then we come back here and brainstorm ideas… and see where that gets us. If that doesn’t work, then we need to reconsider the… dynamics of this department.”

Steve nodded. “Carl and Janine are both behind the curve when it comes to what is possible technologically speaking, but they have more creativity in their work than the rest of the team combined.”

“Maybe you should consider pairing… them with a computer whiz,” Justin suggested. “A team approach might… give you some better results. Now, Brian said I should… ask you about the Carry-all account.”
Steve laughed. “I’m sure he did. We’ve been killing ourselves trying to come up with artwork that will fulfill the needs of these assholes for weeks. The product they are trying to promote is a multi-function tote bag that can be changed into a number of different configurations depending on what the user needs. We’ve given them series photographs, morphed graphics, even animated graphics, but nothing we’ve come up with so far stands out. Brian’s got great copy, but we can’t seem to match it with great art.”

Justin nodded. “Can I see what you’ve done so far?”

For the next hour, Justin and Steve looked over the work and brainstormed ideas for the account. Justin even began sketching out some of the ideas as they talked. Neither man even noticed when the sky outside began to darken and the rest of the team left for the night.

“You see what I mean?” Justin asked as he showed Steve his latest sketch. “We can keep the morphing graphics and combine them with a series of morphing painted backgrounds—settings where the bag could be used—creating a collage of sorts for the final shot.”

“I should have known sending you down here would solve all our problems,” Brian smirked from the doorway. “Let me see what you’ve done?”

Justin smiled at Brian and handed him the sketches he’d been working on. Brian quickly flipped through the sketches. “Can we do this, Steve?”

“I think we can,” Steve grinned up at his boss, knowing just how good the ideas were he was looking at.

Brian smiled. “Then let’s get on this first thing tomorrow.”

“I’ll assign Mark and Carl to it,” Steve said. “Mind if I keep your sketches and notes, Justin?”

“Help yourself,” Justin smiled. “We’re all on the same team. And I’ll call you on Monday about setting up a time for that field trip we discussed.”

“Are you ready to get dinner?” Brian asked, tongue in cheek. “Or did you two have more you need
“We’re finished,” Justin said unrepentantly. “And I’m starving, so you better take me some place good. I worked hard for your company this afternoon.”

“Our company,” Brian smirked. “And I only sent you down here for an hour to look around, not three and a half and to solve every problem in the art department. If you keep this up, we’ll have to put you on the payroll.”

“Good night Steve,” Justin called as Brian ushered him out the door.

“We’ll talk in the morning,” Brian called over his shoulder. “Go home to that wife of yours. It’s already past seven.”

“Shit! Connie’s gonna kill me!” Justin heard Steve swear as the door to the art department swung shut behind them.

Part Six

Brian was supposed to be going over the budget for their latest account one Saturday in September. Instead he was watching as Justin put the finishing touches on his fifth portrait using the models Brian had lined up for him. The first, had been very provocative with the two men Justin had selected tangled together, the larger man curled protectively around the smaller man. The second was more innocuous with a single man sitting with one leg crossed and one knee raised, his cheek resting on his knee and looking up through lowered eyes. The third and fourth were individual portraits of women, one pregnant and one of a Latino woman in her sixties, both were posed standing, though the older woman leaned against the brick wall of the loft and the pregnant woman cradled her belly. For this fifth painting, Justin had used two men again, one in his fifties and one in his twenties, along with a boy about seven years old.

That had taken some work to arrange. Justin had agreed that not only would he allow the boy to be covered in the painting, but he would allow him to keep his underwear on at all times during the sittings. The boy’s mother had also insisted that the two men would be covered whenever the boy was present. So they had set appointments for the three together and for just the two men alone, when Justin could flesh out the details. As Brian watched, the boy’s mother sat in a chair near the front of the loft reading some trashy novel.
Of the paintings Justin had done so far, not counting his own, this was Brian’s favorite. The older man was lying on his side, his head propped up with one arm and his knee up. The younger man was sitting cross-legged in front of the older man’s bent knee and the boy was kneeling behind his back. One could look at the picture as father son and grandson, or as stages in the same man’s life. Justin had chosen his subjects well, with the same coloring and similar features.

“Jimmy,” Justin called out to the boy. “I’m done with you. You can get dressed. Mike and John, you can take a break until Jimmy’s gone. There’s water and soda in the fridge.”

Justin walked over to the front of the loft to speak with the boy’s mother while the two models headed for the fridge. Brian hadn’t been allowed to watch any of the earlier sittings, but since Justin had to schedule around Jimmy’s school schedule, the sittings were frequently on weekends and Brian had been present for most of the sessions this time. He knew that Justin tended to treat the models more like friends than employees. Brian supposed it would be hard to be completely detached with someone who was getting naked in your house.

Justin’s confidence in his work was improving, and with it his confidence in his ability to relate to people other than friends and family was improving as well. Brian rarely heard his young lover stammer the way he had in the early days. His speech was still slow and deliberate, but it was less noticeable than before.

Justin had started coming out of his shell. It had begun with working with Steve and continued with the models. Now, Justin usually spent one day a week at the office, working with the art team, giving them creative inspiration and brainstorming ideas with them. Their work had never been better. Justin’s personal work had continued to flourish as well. In between model sittings, he had continued painting still-lifes and had even conned Brian or his mother into taking him out to various parts of the city to photograph and paint cityscapes. He now had a rather full collection of collages. And his graphic work was continuing to evolve as he learned new techniques from the art department at work and incorporated them into the pictures he had in his head.

They hadn’t discussed finding an agent or trying to show Justin’s work since the morning Debbie had come over to find out why they weren’t coming for family dinner. Brian knew that Justin was proud of his work and wanted to share it but was still too nervous to do anything about it himself. This was why Brian had sent snapshots of Justin’s work to a Gallery owner that Lindsey knew without telling Justin about it. He probably should tell him that the man was coming over this afternoon, but Brian was reluctant to interfere with this final sitting. If Justin was nervous about the man’s visit, he might not get everything finished before the end of the session or the way he wanted it.

Brian looked back over to where the men were once again posed under the light of the loft’s back windows. This was one of the things he liked best about being around for the sittings. The view. Even at fifty, the older man was a treat to ogle. And the younger man, while he had nothing on
Justin, was well built and sexy. Brian may not have been out picking up tricks for a while, but he still enjoyed the beauty of the male form.

Justin glanced over at Brian and gave him a wry smile before shaking his head and turning back to his easel. Brian grinned and turned back to his own work. The next hour went by quickly and Brian got lost in the details of the new account. When the door buzzed, he was almost as surprised as Justin.

“Are we expecting someone?” Justin asked with a frown.

“I am,” Brian said. “Finish up. I’m sure that Terry won’t mind.” Justin nodded and went back to work while Brian let Terry into the loft. They talked quietly for a few minutes while watching Justin work from across the wide loft space. From where they stood, they had a clear view of the canvas Justin was painting.

“He’s more talented than I imagined,” Terry said. “Those snapshots didn’t do his work justice. I can’t wait to see more.”

Justin put down his brush and stared at the canvas for long minutes before he nodded. “That’s it, guys. You can get dressed. Thanks.”

“Hey Justin, can we see the finished work?” John, the younger of the two, asked.

“Sure,” Justin shrugged and stepped back to let the two men get their first good look at the work they had spent hours posing for.

“Wow,” John said. “When you’re a famous artist, I’ll be able to tell all my friends that I posed for you.”

“It’s really great, Justin,” Mike said with sincerity. “If you ever need a model, call me.”

“I’ll do that. Now go get dressed,” Justin said, blushing.

“Justin,” Brian called once the men were moving toward the bedroom to dress. “Come over here for
a minute. I want you to meet someone.”

Justin glanced at his brushes and palette that needed cleaning and sighed. He walked over to Brian and gave the tall older man with him a smile. “Hello.”

“Justin, this is Terry Carpenter,” Brian said. “He’s an acquaintance of Lindsey’s. I asked him to come over to see your work.”


“One and the same,” Terry smiled and held out his hand to shake Justin’s. “Brian sent me a few photographs of your work. I was intrigued and I wanted to see your paintings for myself. I have to say, from what I’ve seen so far, I believe it won’t be long until that young man can start bragging to his friends.”

“I… I… Thank you,” Justin stammered, and Brian could tell that it wasn’t due to the assault, but his surprise.

“May I see more?” Terry asked, and Justin almost jumped.

“Of course,” Justin said. “Um, just let me see John and Mike out and clean up my equipment first?”

“Certainly,” Terry agreed.

“How about a drink while we wait,” Brian offered and led the other man over to the kitchen counter while Justin went to fetch his brushes and palette to clean.

It only took a few minutes to deal with everything, but it was time that Justin had needed to get his mind clear and tamp down the butterflies that were threatening to overwhelm him. Once Mike and John were gone and his equipment cleaned and stored away, Justin was able to calmly call Brian and Terry over to look at his work.

One by one, they viewed and discussed Justin’s work. The six nudes were the most impressive, but
the ten still-lifes and half-dozen cityscapes were almost as intriguing in Terry’s opinion. The graphic prints had a completely different feel to them, but they were just as impressive in their own way. Once each of works were examined, they went through them again. By the time Terry and Justin were finished, Brian had given up and went to lounge in the sitting area with a beer and a book.

When the other two joined him Brian looked up expectantly. “I want to feature the entire series of collages with a selection of the graphic prints to round out the show. Justin has said that he does not want to sell the painting of you, Brian, but I would still like to display the work. I usually like to introduce a new artist slowly, building up their reputation slowly, but I don’t think that will work here. Justin’s work is simply too extraordinary. My customers will be clamoring to get their hands on his work.

“I was thinking of reserving the entire main gallery for your show,” Terry continued. “We’ll run through the month of November, and I’d be willing to bet that most, if not all, of your work will be sold by the end. Our gallery takes a ten percent standard commission on all the paintings we sell, so the higher the price we can get for your work, the better off we all are. I’m thinking of starting the collages at seven thousand apiece with the nudes running from ten to fifteen. The graphic prints will be more reasonable at one thousand dollars each.”

Justin’s eyes were wide. “You really think you can get that much for my work?”

Terry smiled. “I’m not one to boast normally, but I run the preeminent gallery in Pittsburgh with the finest clientele. I’ve become the best because I only present the very best artists, artists whose work will increase in value over time. I’m seldom wrong about these things.”

“You’ll have the contracts forwarded to our lawyer?” Brian asked as Terry rose, prepared to go.

“I will,” Terry agreed. “Justin, I look forward to working with you over the coming weeks.”

Justin nodded dazedly, “Yes, thank you. I’m looking forward to it as well.”

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The night of Justin’s gallery opening was hectic. Justin spent most of the day at the gallery with Terry arranging each of the pieces. When Brian arrived to take him home to change, he practically had to pry Justin away from the gallery.
“Brian,” Justin whined. “I need to make sure that they get the lighting just right!”

“You need to go home and eat something and get changed,” Brian countered. “Terry is a professional. He won’t let anything go wrong tonight, so stop obsessing.”

Justin pouted the entire way back to the loft, but Brian was fine with that. He was used to Justin’s sometimes volatile moods. When they did arrive at the loft, Justin sulked, but he ate what Brian prepared for them and showered and changed when Brian asked him to do so. By the time they needed to return to the gallery, Justin’s sulk had turned into severe insecurity.

“They’ll hate my work,” Justin predicted once back in the jeep. “I’m going to be the laughing stock of the Pittsburgh art world, not that there is much of an art world in Pittsburgh. But if the regional twats hate me, what shot do I have of ever making a name for myself nationally?”

“The regional twats are going to adore you,” Brian said. “And if they don’t, we’ll take your work to New York. Or Chicago. Or London…”

“Great, so I can be humiliated internationally,” Justin muttered. “I don’t know why I’m even trying.”

“You are trying because you are very talented and the world has a right to know just how talented you are,” Brian countered. “Now shut up and enjoy tonight. This self-pity shit is making me soft.”

Justin laughed at the familiar admonishment, the tension finally easing from his shoulders. “And we wouldn’t want that, now would we?”

“I’m sure you don’t want that,” Brian smirked. “I happen to know you are quite fond of my cock. Just look at all the pictures you’ve taken of it.”

“It is quite photogenic,” Justin teased. “It would be a shame to hide it from the world now that you’ve given up giving out free trials to the entirety of Pittsburgh gay community.”

“Only one man gets to sample the goods up close and personal these days,” Brian said as he took Justin’s hand.
“Thank you,” Justin murmured a few minutes later.

“For what?”

Justin smiled. “For being you.”

The show was an unqualified success. The very first night, Terry told him that he had sold two collages and two prints and had interest from three other buyers that he believed would be back within the week to finalize the deal. Justin was hard pressed to keep track of all the people he met, but among the many and varied elite of Pittsburgh society, he did recall meeting several critics as well. Terry acted like it was just par for the course, but Justin had been floored by the attention and had relied heavily on Brian to fill in the gaps where Justin’s brain refused to keep up with the conversation.

When Frank Mason, the critic from the New York Times, seemed a bit put off by Justin’s seemingly aloof attitude, Justin finally admitted the problem. “Please excuse my… silences. Brian speaks for me… because it can be difficult for me… to communicate.”

“It’s fine,” Frank said but he looked confused.

“Justin suffered a brain injury last year,” Brian explained. “As a result, his speech patterns have slowed and he sometimes gets flustered when he’s nervous.”

“I’m sorry,” the man said, now looking uncomfortable. “I didn’t realize.”

Justin smiled. “It’s okay. Most people don’t have… the patience to listen to me… stammer.”

“If it wouldn’t be too rude to ask, how has this affected your work?” Frank seemed to be warming to the subject now that he saw that he wasn’t being snubbed and hadn’t offended the couple.

“Believe it or not, Justin’s work has improved drastically over the last year,” Brian informed him.
“I can’t go to… school or get a job,” Justin said with a small laugh. “I have nothing to do… but work on my art.”

“After we realized that art school was not an option,” Brian said, “we looked into private tutoring. Justin has been training under two of the best professors from Pittsburgh Institute of Fine Art for the last several months.” Brian named the professors and the critic looked suitably impressed.

“They don’t know much about… graphic art,” Justin said. “They mostly help me with… traditional art forms.”

“And Justin takes what they have been teaching him and combines it with his own interest in digital and graphic art and you can see the result,” Brian said proudly.

“It is extraordinary,” the critic agreed. “I don’t believe that I have ever met an artist your age as talented as you. The work you are doing is groundbreaking.”

Justin blushed. “It all started because… I wanted to paint Brian. But he’s unique… and I wanted a unique way to portray him.”

Terry came over just then, “I’m sorry to interrupt, but Justin, I need you for a moment.”

Justin nodded and excused himself, leaving Brian alone with the critic. “He’s a remarkable young man,” Frank said as they watched Justin make his way across the room.

“He is,” Brian agreed.

“If it’s not too intrusive, how was he injured?” Frank was very careful about how he broached the subject this time. He could tell that Brian Kinney was not comfortable discussing this, but at the same time, his curiosity was piqued.

Brian nodded and said, “I’ll tell you, but I think we should hit the bar for this. I need a drink.”

Brian led the way through the crowd to the bar and ordered a neat double scotch for himself while Frank asked for a white wine. Once the drinks were in their hands, Brian took a swallow of the
amber liquid before speaking. “After his high school prom, a homophobic classmate followed us to the parking garage and took a bat to Justin’s head. I wasn’t fast enough to stop him. The little prick’s in jail now for attempted murder and Justin’s entire life has been changed because somebody decided it was a good idea to teach that it’s okay to hate people who aren’t like you.”

The man looked absolutely sick at this, but he asked his next question anyway. “You said that Justin can’t attend school or get a job. Why? It must be more than his speech problem.”

Brian took another long swallow of scotch and nodded. “The damage was more extensive than that. Justin suffers from almost complete amnesia. I was actually the only person he recognized after he woke up. Justin says it’s because he loves me too much to forget me. The doctors think it was because I was with him right before and after the attack. I’m not sure what I believe.

“Anyway.” Brian said and shook his head to get back to the subject. “Yeah, his verbal skills were damaged, but more importantly, his thought processes have slowed. He’s as smart as he ever was but it takes him longer to process everything and formulate a response. The doctors say that the pathway that most people’s brains use to process information was damaged and now the synapses have to travel a new route which causes the delay. His reaction times are slowed, so he can’t drive. And art classes were impossible because there was not time for him to think things through. If he wanted to go to a regular class, I suppose he could do it. He could use a tape recorder and transcribe all the notes that way, but... Well, it would take absolutely forever for him to do the bare minimum of work to get by.”

“And the same goes for a normal work environment?” Frank asked.

Brian smiled here, “That is true, but Justin has already proven that he can find ways around his disabilities. We own Kinnetik Advertising and Justin works with the director of our art department on improving the overall artistic output of the firm. He has also done several projects for the firm. I tell him all the time that if he ever wants to give up the fine art stuff, he could make a killing doing freelance work in advertising.”

“I believe you,” Frank chuckled. “But I wouldn’t encourage him to give this up. His work really is amazing. He has a bright future ahead of him.”

Brian turned a defensive eye to the critic. “I have always supported his art.”

Frank smiled. “I’m sure you have. I didn’t mean anything by my remark. While I’ve already pissed you off, however, can I ask one more invasive question?”
Brian sighed melodramatically. “The shit I put up with for that twink. If you must.”

Frank laughed again. “How did you and he…? I mean, there is quite a bit of an age difference between the two of you.”

Brian gave an enigmatic grin, “He’s a persistent asshole when he wants to be. We met one night and he decided that I was the love of his life. Then he proceeded to wear me down until I believed it too. We’ve been through hell together, but I wouldn’t trade a minute of that time. We are partners in every way that counts. Now, good or bad, he’s stuck with me.”

“Be careful what you wish for,” Frank joked. “You just might get it.”

“Exactly,” Brian grinned.

**Part Seven**

“The write up in the Times was really good,” Justin said on Sunday morning as they read through the papers and ate a late breakfast. Brian had gone out early to pick up copies of all the papers that had sent critics to the gallery the night before. Brian had read the Times first before passing the paper to Justin.

Brian sipped his coffee and set aside the Pittsburgh paper he was reading. “Frank must have had a very late night going through the news archives. We didn’t give him that much detail about the attack.”

Justin nodded and said, “But he was pretty sensitive about it, not making it the center of the story. It’s more background information than anything.”

“He practically gushed about your collages,” Brian said. “Though his review of the prints was a little less enthusiastic, it was still encouraging overall.”

Justin smiled. “It’s a good start. What did the Post-Gazette say?”
“More of the same,” Brian shrugged. “But they didn’t mention the attack or any personal information about us. They included a picture of my portrait.”

“Just imagine,” Justin teased, “people all over Pittsburgh are waking up to the sight of your cock. That’s a good way to start any day.”

“ Seems to keep you in a good mood,” Brian responded with a leer.

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Justin’s reputation as an artist grew in the following months, along with his profits from sales of the collages and prints. Terry decided to have a second showing in February and Justin provided more collages and prints, but also a few more traditional paintings as well. Because of his unique style, these sold almost as well as the collages. There was interest from galleries in New York, London and Paris for shows in some of the best galleries in the world, and Brian couldn’t have been prouder if he had done the work himself.

In the meantime, Kinnetik was flourishing under Brian’s guidance. Brian, however was becoming restless. There was something that was bothering him, and Justin wasn’t able to figure out what that was. He was rather surprised, one night, when Brian broached the subject without prompting, though Justin didn’t realize right away what the subject was.

They were lying in bed, the only light in the loft the soft blue light around their bed. They were tangled in each others arms, and Justin was about to drift off to sleep when Brian asked, “Do you like living here?”

“Huh?” Justin asked sleepily. Brian repeated the question and Justin shifted around to look at Brian. “You mean the loft? Yeah. I like it.”

“Is there anything that you would change if you could?” Brian asked, unwilling to let the subject go or let Justin sleep.
Justin paused to consider the question. “It’s a bit cramped at times. Especially when I’ve got a model posing and you’re trying to work. There isn’t much privacy. Oh, and there’s not enough closet space. Your wardrobe is fucking huge; I barely have room to hang a jacket.”

Brian nodded thoughtfully as if Justin had confirmed his thoughts. “I think we should get a bigger place.”

Now Justin was fully awake and a bit shocked. He sat up and looked down at Brian. “I thought you loved the loft.”

“I do,” Brian said as he sat up as well. “But, like you said. There’s no privacy, there’s not enough storage…and…”

“And?”

“And it’s not ours,” Brian shrugged. “It’s a part of my life from before and I feel like that’s the only reason I’ve held onto it for this long. I knew before you came home from the hospital that it would be cramped, but I didn’t want to consider moving then.”

“But you want to move now?” Justin asked. “Why?”

Brian looked around the dimly lit loft as though seeing ghosts from his past. “Because I’m sure that that part of my life is over now. I wouldn’t go back even if I could.”

“And you weren’t sure before?” Justin asked warily. He had thought Brian’s doubts had been set to rest long ago.

“I knew I wanted you in my life,” Brian said. “But I couldn’t trust that it would last. That I wouldn’t suddenly fall back into old habits.” “But you’re sure now,” Justin said. Brian looked him in the eye and nodded. “And so you want to move.” Brian nodded again. “So we can build a life together in a place that belongs to both of us.”

Brian nodded a third time.
“Okay.”

Brian blinked at Justin. “Okay?”

Justin shrugged. “I don’t remember anything from before, Brian. I don’t have the same attachment to this apartment that you do. If you want to move to a place with more storage and more privacy, I’m fine with that. I just don’t want you to regret it later.”

“I won’t,” Brian told his partner before he kissed him.

“Can we afford a new place?” Justin eventually asked.

“The agency is doing quite well,” Brian told Justin. “As are your art shows. The loft is mortgage free and has risen in value quite a bit since I bought it. If we sell it, we’ll have a sizable down-payment for whatever we choose to buy.”

Justin shrugged and laid back down, pulling Brian down with him. “House, penthouse or another loft?”

“I’m not sure,” Brian said. “But whatever we find, it has to have a studio for you and a study for me.”

“And a bedroom for Gus,” Justin added. “He’ll want to spend the night sometimes now that he’s getting older and should have his own room.”

“It’ll have to have parking,” Brian mused. “And security.”

“I wouldn’t mind a nice view either,” Justin said. “Maybe a place with a balcony or deck.”

Brian chuckled. “I think we’re limiting our options already. I doubt we’ll find a loft with a balcony.”

“A house would be okay,” Justin said.
“But the kind of square-footage we need along with a view will take us out of the city,” Brian said.

“Which limits my options for getting around town,” Justin said. “Sounds like we’re down to penthouses. I do like living in the city.”

“Well, your mom’s a realtor,” Brian said. “Maybe she’ll know of a loft with a balcony or a house in the city with a view. Wherever we end up, I’m sure it will be perfect for us.”

“I have plans to go out with mom in the morning. I’ll tell her we want to put the loft on the market,” Justin said with a yawn. “And ask her to start looking for a new place. Now, can we sleep? I’m fucking exhausted and mom will be here at an ungodly hour tomorrow.”

“Sleep,” Brian sighed. He felt as if a weight had been lifted from him and he was soon joining Justin in dreamland.

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“I know the perfect place,” Jennifer said excitedly as soon as Justin finished explaining what he and Brian were looking for over breakfast the next morning. “Tom, a developer I’ve worked with a few times, is just finishing up a project. He converted several old warehouses on the South Side, near East Carson Street. It overlooks the Monongahela and downtown, has great lighting, since it has floor to ceiling windows, and the two largest units which take up the top floor have balconies. He showed it to me last week and I’m sure Brian will love it.”

“It’s a loft?” Justin asked.

Jennifer nodded with a grin. “Tom reused a lot of the original materials, but updated the look. For instance, he salvaged the old plank wood floors and had them planed and refinished. After the new concrete floors were poured for structure and sound proofing, he re-laid the old floors. And you should see the old brick alongside the whitewashed concrete interior walls. It has style and character and more space than you can imagine.”

Justin thought it sounded too good to be true. “Is it in our price range?”
“Tom owes me a favor or two,” Jennifer smiled enigmatically. “I think I can get him down to where you and Brian want to pay. I’ll call him and see if we can get in today.”

“What about the museum?” Justin laughed. It was always fun to see his mother on a mission.

“It will still be there next week,” Jennifer said wisely. “This property might not. Now let me call him and then we’ll head over there.”

Justin called Brian while Jennifer called Tom and the four of them met up outside the complex of old warehouses. The ground floor of each of the buildings was taken up by upscale retail stores and services, though not all of the locations were filled yet. There was ample parking, with four reserved spots for the loft they were there to see. The building had a doorman for security and each apartment was wired with an alarm system. Brian liked the neighborhood. Though it wasn’t far from downtown, it was in a better area than the loft. It also had on-site amenities like a gym, spa and pool.

Justin grabbed Brian’s hand as soon as they entered the loft’s front door. The entryway was separated from the rest of the space by a glass block wall that created a privacy barrier without making the space feel enclosed. The ceilings in this part of the loft were only about 12 feet, but as soon as they walked around the glass wall, you could see the breathtaking view of Pittsburgh and the river, and even Point Park.

“The other fifth floor loft only has one guest bedroom,” Tom said as they all took in the view. “Other than that, the two spaces are identical.

The view was the most eye catching thing, but the rest of the apartment was pretty nice as well. The living dining and eating areas were all open to each other. Off the kitchen were doors to the laundry, guest bath and a storage and utility room. On the other side of this open room, doors led to the two guest bedrooms and there was a staircase to the loft area. The living room area, which was by the wall of twenty foot windows, opened up to the upper space with ceilings twenty-two feet high. On either side, the wall of windows continued into another room, though these rooms were not enclosed by doors.

“We could use one for your studio and one for my office,” Brian said.

“I want to see upstairs,” Justin replied and didn’t wait for the others to reply. He simply ran up the
floating stairs to the master bedroom. The room was huge, taking up the same square footage as the kitchen and dining areas directly below. There was glass block wall about three and a half feet high that ran the length of the room, allowing anyone standing in the room a perfect view out the wall of windows. Justin smiled when he saw that heavy drapes had been installed to enclose the space and block out the light in case one wanted to sleep late on a Sunday morning.

“The curtains work by remote,” Tom said when he noticed Justin eyeing the drapes. “You don’t even have to get out of bed if you forgot to close them the night before.”

Justin grinned at Brian who smiled back. Then they separated, each one exploring one of the two doors in the room. On the left, where Brian entered, was the master bath. It had a huge steam shower, a bathtub that would easily fit two grown men, and two sinks. The fixtures were top of the line and very sleek and modern. And on the wall over the tub and in the shower, there were more glass blocks which let in light from the wall of windows beyond.

“Brian!” Justin shouted from the closet. “You have to come see this!”

Brian entered the closet and froze in his tracks. It was a fashion queen’s wet dream. It was the size of the two guest bedrooms combined and had built in shelves and racks for shoes with an island in the center with dozens of drawers and a seating area. Everything was made out of cherry wood and stained a deep rich red color. And the interior wall in here had more glass blocks to allow in natural light. He would have to buy a lot more clothes to fill this closet.

“I think we should buy the place just for the closet,” Brian whispered, so Tom couldn’t hear. “Although the master bathroom comes in a close second.”

They looked at the balcony next. It ran the length of the loft and had three sets of French doors leading to it from the living area, the studio and the office. There were built in teak benches and several planters that Justin could imagine filled with flowers. Brian imagined having Gus over to ride his trike on the smooth concrete area.

Tom insisted that they look at the other loft to see if they liked it better, and while it was nice, Brian and Justin both liked the idea of having a separate room for Gus. In the end, they put in an offer on the loft, ten percent below the listed price and Tom accepted it without hesitation. Now they just had to sell the loft, which Jennifer assured them would not be difficult in the current market.

She was right. Within a week of listing the loft, they had small bidding war with three buyers and ended up selling at almost ten percent above the list price.
“We’re going to need more furniture,” Justin said a few weeks later as he and Brian watched the movers carry their sofa to the elevator. There were only a few boxes left in the entire apartment. “The new loft has four more rooms and an extra bath that we didn’t have here.”

“Not to mention the balcony,” Brian reminded him. “I can’t wait to spend our evenings out there.”

“We’ll need a grill,” Justin said. “And a nice table and chairs for out there. Maybe a swing of some sort, or one of those glider things.”

“I called a designer,” Brian said as the movers returned for the final load of boxes. “Her name is Patty and she’ll be by on Monday. I’ll take the morning off so we can both meet her and tell her what we want.”

“Then it will be up to me to make sure she gets it right,” Justin said wryly.

Brian turned to Justin with a grin. “Well, you do work from home, so it makes sense. By the way, is your mother still coming tomorrow to help us unpack?”

“Along with Debbie, Vic, Lindsey and Emmett,” Justin said. Brian frowned. “Hey, I know it’s a bit much, but the more help we have, the sooner it will be done. I don’t know about you but I don’t want to spend another month living out of boxes.’”

Brian sighed. “You’re right. I guess I can put up with an invasion from the gang for one day.”

They were both silent in the now empty loft. Finally Brian said, “Well, I guess we should get going or the movers will be standing around waiting for us.”

“You okay?” Justin asked as Brian continued to look around the loft, not having moved at all.

Brian looked at Justin and smiled. “Yeah. I am. Let’s go.”
It took another month for the decorator to finish furnishing the loft, but when it was finally finished, Justin insisted that they have a housewarming party. Brian grimaced, but gave in without too much fuss. He would do just about anything to make Justin happy.

The day of the party, Brian hid in his study while Justin drove himself crazy with preparations. Brian looked around his study and was pleased once again with the finished room. His picture of the naked man hung on the wall below the glass blocks from their closet upstairs. There were built in book cases and a large desk for Brian’s computer. He no longer had to try to squeeze his paperwork onto a small work surface already crowded by his laptop and printer. Now he had space and he had privacy. Although he missed being able to glance across the room and watch Justin paint.

The collage Justin had made of Brian was hung above their bed. The decorator had insisted and Justin and Brian had easily agreed. She had also insisted that Brian’s old bed needed to be replaced. Their new king size bed, while still modern and sleek, was on a raised platform which allowed them to look out over the half wall to see the view of the city even when reclining in bed at night. The color scheme was much warmer than the blues and grays of their old bedroom. Now there were rusts and creams and soft greens taken directly from Justin’s art. Brian’s old sofa, an expensive piece of Italian craftsmanship, had been relegated to the sitting area in their bedroom along with a new chaise. The scale of the sofa was just too small for the large living room they now had, according to both Justin and the decorator.

In the living room, they now had a huge white leather sofa that could easily seat six people. There were also black leather arm chairs and a red leather chaise all with gleaming chrome legs and clean lines. The area was separated from the rest of the living space by a huge rug with spirals of red, orange, black and brown. And there were red and orange throw pillows scattered around.

They had a completely new dining set, made from tiger wood and frosted glass. The table was long and could seat up to ten people easily. The buffet separated the dining area from the living area. The chairs were upholstered in red leather and matched the four bar stools that lined the breakfast bar in the kitchen.

Justin’s studio was more casual than the rest of the house. It suited Justin’s personality and the function of the space. He now had a screen which he could use as a backdrop for his models. The screen could be covered with several different cloths that gave a different feel to the compositions. He also had another small sofa and chaise in there both for him to relax and for his models to pose on. His computer desk and art supplies were both lined up against one wall and completed projects and works in progress were stacked haphazardly around the room. While it was never really messy, to Brian the space felt cluttered and chaotic, but it seemed to work for Justin.
Gus had his own bedroom now and Brian couldn’t wait to show him. The toddler would love it, he was sure. Justin had painted murals on the walls of trucks and planes and trains, all of Gus’ favorite things. And he had painted one wall with chalkboard paint so that Gus could have a place to vent his creativity safely. Seeing Gus’ face when he saw the room that evening almost made up for having his space invaded by the rest of the bunch.

The second bedroom contained their old bed with a new mattress and new linens. Brian had to admit, he didn’t miss the cool tones of the old loft. The wide expanses of whitewashed concrete, red brick and warm wood floors leant itself to a warmer palette of colors. He did miss the blue lights from their old bed, however, so Justin had arranged to have special lighting in their bedroom. Now, the glass wall that lined the loft area and the edges of their bed’s platform area could be lit with a variety of colors or set to rotate through the rainbow.

When the gang began arriving, Brian shut down his computer and straightened his desk up before joining Justin in the living area. Justin was talking to Jennifer and Molly near the entrance to his workspace. Debbie and Vic were on the sofa, along with Mel, Lindsey and Gus. Emmett and Ted were in the kitchen, Emmett putting something on a platter while Ted kept stealing bites. Gus, when he saw his daddy, toddled over to him and Brian swept him into a hug.

“How are you Sonny Boy? Did you miss your old dad?” Brian asked.

“Miss you Daddy,” the two-year-old jabbered in his lovable way.

“Wanna see the room Justin made for you when you come spend the night?” Brian asked, ignoring the grumblings from Melanie. Justin left their guests and followed Brian and Gus into the boy’s bedroom. Gus seemed to be amazed by the room and was quickly wiggling to be let down so he could play with the toys Justin had bought. A few minutes later, Brian and Justin left Gus to play while they rejoined the group in the main room.

“Where’s Gus?” Mel asked suspiciously.

“We sold him to gypsies in the parking lot,” Brian quipped as he stole a tomato off a tray on the kitchen counter.

“He’s playing in his room,” Justin said. “The food is all ready, so why don’t we eat? I’ve got a plate set aside for Gus. I can heat it up when he gets hungry.”
This seemed to both placate Melanie and spur the others into moving towards the dining table and sideboard where the food was laid out. Wine was poured and food consumed as the group all laughed and caught up with each other. Even Brian kept his typical snarkiness to a bare minimum, only baiting Mel when she harped first.

It was about ten o’clock, long after Gus had been tucked into his bed, when the doorbell rang and everyone stopped talking.

“We aren’t expecting anyone else are we?” Justin asked Brian as he rose from his seat beside Brian on the chaise. Brian shook his head and got up to go with Justin. The reached the front door together and Justin opened it.

“Michael.” Brian said flatly. “What are you doing here?”

Michael looked nervous and stammered for a minute before holding out a gift bag. “I brought you a housewarming gift. I…I wanted to apologize—to both of you—and see if maybe we could talk.”

“Now’s really not a good time for this,” Brian said curtly. “We have guests, as I’m sure you are aware.”

Michael’s entire body seemed to droop. “I know. I shouldn’t have come. It’s just… I leave tomorrow.”

“Leave?” Justin asked, speaking for the first time. There was a part of him that was still angry at the dark haired man before him, but part of him pitied him, too. And he knew that the rift had been difficult for Brian. “Where are you going?”

Michael looked up, surprised that Justin was the one who had asked the question. “You know that David and I have been trying to make the long distance thing work for a while now, but it’s getting too hard. So I saved up a bit and with David’s help, I bought a comic book store out there. I sign the final papers Monday.”

“So this is your last night in town?” Justin asked confused. “Why didn’t anyone say anything? We could have rescheduled.”
“They all think I left this morning,” Michael said. “I was supposed to leave this morning, but I… I couldn’t leave with things the way they are.” He paused and looked at Brian’s still impassive face before turning back to Justin. “I really am sorry for what I said to you. Not just that day, but… I’ve been a prick to you for a long time because I was jealous. I felt like you stole my best friend from me.”

“I would have shared,” Justin said quietly.

Michael nodded. “I know that now. I lost my best friend because I didn’t know how to share.”

“You didn’t lose him,” Brian finally said, “just misplaced him for a while.”

Michael looked up at Brian with such hope that Justin had to smile. “Why don’t you come in? We’ve already eaten, but there’s still plenty of food left. I can heat you up something.”

“Thanks, that would be… great.”

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That night, as they lay in bed, Brian held Justin tight and thought about the events of the evening. Michael had come in and everyone had welcomed him, though Debbie had cussed him out for not telling her his plans had changed. They had all laughed and reminisced for hours. And Brian had used the excuse of showing Michael around to have a chance to really talk to his friend.

“You know,” Brian said, breaking the silence. “I feel like I’ve gained and lost him all over again.”

“You haven’t lost him,” Justin said. “He’s moving, yes, but he’ll be home to visit. And you can keep in touch. Hell, knowing you two, you’ll be on the phone almost daily.”

“Hmm.”

They were both silent again, tiredly watching the lights on the glass wall circulate through the colors of the rainbow and the city lights beyond. Brian absentmindedly stroked Justin’s arm and shoulder.
“I think Gus liked his room,” Justin said, eventually.

“I think he was excited to be able to stay here with his Justin,” Brian said and Justin could hear the smile in his voice. “I don’t think the wicked witch will be able to hold out against his Kinney determination for long.”

Justin had been slightly disappointed that Mel had insisted on taking Gus home with them, even though he had been happily sleeping in his new room. Gus had woken and had thrown quite the fit over being made to leave.

“Just wait until he sees the jeep you got him out on the deck,” Justin laughed.

“Every boy deserves a toy car,” Brian defended.

“Every boy deserves a father that loves him as much as you love Gus,” Justin corrected. They were silent again, both thinking of Craig Taylor, who hadn’t loved his son enough.

Something occurred to Brian and he let it slip out without thought, something he only did with Justin. “Do you ever think you’ll remember? I mean, the doctors say that the memories are still there, you just can’t access them right? And you were able to reroute to improve your speech. So maybe someday, your brain will find another route to those memories?”

“I don’t think so,” Justin sighed. “To be honest, I don’t really miss those memories that much. I have you and our life. I’m happy. I can live without the past. I must admit, though, it would be nice to remember our first night together.”

“It was a very special night,” Brian agreed and kissed Justin’s neck.

Again they were quiet.

“Wanna go to New York next weekend?” Brian finally asked. “I’m dying to fill that closet up with some new clothes.”
“Only if you promise to buy me that leather blazer by John Varvatos,” Justin countered. “And let me pick out three new shirts for you.”

Brian hesitated. He was fine with buying the jacket for Justin, but to give Justin carte blanch on his wardrobe choices? “Who are the shirts by?” Brian finally asked. He knew from the way that Justin had worded his request that he had something in mind already.

“Paul Smith,” Justin said. “I love his designs. And I think you have just the right personality to pull off his colorful shirts without looking like a total queen. Me? I’d look like a total twat in purple paisley.”

“You are a total twat,” Brian said and avoided the elbow aimed for his ribs. “It’s a deal. I actually do like his shirts, but haven’t had time to get any. And maybe we’ll get you a custom suit from Zegna. You’ll look fabulous in his designs.”

“Your just saying that because I look horrible in Prada,” Justin sighed. “He designs for men built like you, tall and lean. Not short with a bubble butt.”

“I happen to love your bubble butt,” Brian said and ground his cock into Justin’s behind. “And the rest of you as well.”

“Good,” Justin smiled as he turned in Brian’s arms to face his lover. “I happen to love you too.”

After that, they were both too immersed in pleasure to talk about anything.

The End

End Notes

A/N: So, I recently realized that when I was transferring my stories onto this site a couple years ago, I apparently left out a few. This is me attempting to fix that. Hope you enjoyed it! Jules

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!