TIME'S UP VOLUME II: SHARE MY LIFE by Nichelle Wellesly

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by NichelleW1

Summary

After ten years, Brian and Justin are still meeting in secret. Now one is ready to make things permanent while the other...Hmm- not so much. It will ultimately come down to hard choices, sacrifices and what's more important: everlasting love or freedom? And how will secret and not-so-secret enemies affect their decision?

Sequel to TIME'S UP Volume I: IT'S ONLY TIME- The Ten Year Journey

**STORY IS COMPLETE**
ENJOY!!
BEING BRIAN KINNEY

Chapter Summary

If the first 7 Chapters of TU: Volume II are looking a little familiar, it's because THEY ARE. The last 2 chapters of Volume I, are done POV style where as the first 7 are done from a narrative view (and yes it provides minimal introspection into the characters too) so it connects the characters to their environments a bit more.

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Summary:

TU VOL II

Categories: Alternate Universe, QAF-U.S., Family, Angst, Bds, Brian/Justin, Canon, Could be Canon, Drama, Humor, Jealousy, Justin/Ethan, Justin/Other, REAL LIFE ISSUES, Romance, Toppy! Justin, Unsafe Sex, What If

Characters: Brian, Cynthia, Daphne, Justin, Original Character(s), Other Canon Characters, Ted

Challenges: None

Series: TIME'S UP SERIES

Chapters: 40 Completed: No

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Story Notes:

No Copyright Infringement is intended. Although there will be reference made to the original storyline and characters (which I do not own and am not affiliated with the franchise), there will also be some new characters and storylines which are solely mine.

This is part of what is intended to be an ongoing serial (or soap opera if that's what you would like to call it) and will be updated once per month due to my own obligations. Either way I promise you will not have to wait long for the next installment! The premise of the story is after ten years, Justin and Brian have been meeting periodically. Now one is ready to make things permanent while the other...HMmm- not so much. It will ultimately come down to hard choices, sacrifices and what's
more important: everlasting love or freedom?

I really hope you enjoy the story as it's being written. There are several subcategories listed which of elements which will appear over time as I add on more chapters. So I'm listing them now so I won't forget to later and have to issue an apology for shocking you...lol As always, our men are a handful and more to deal with. One more thing: I DO NOT WRITE TAME LOVE SCENES! I, in my real life as an author, am NOT a "FADE-TO-BLACK" and "CLOSE THE DOOR" kind of writer. Although I will give a small warning of the impending scene, it is graphic (Think the drawings of Rage ladies and gentlemen) so you may have to skip those parts if you are a prude like Mikey and Lindz...lol Brian and Justin wouldn't expect any less of me! Anyway, no matter what I write in the future near or far, theirs will always be the story of my heart. BRITIN FOREVER!!

Chapter 1- Being Brian Kinney by Nichelle Wellesly

Author's Notes:

Brian Kinney was tired. He was tired of being alone; of fucking around. He's always worked hard so he could play harder but now he was bored. Michael had long since given up the nightlife for domesticity. Emmett still came around once in awhile as did Ted. Drew and Emmett had reunited about four years ago when Drew was as tired as Brian was. Ted and Blake had officially been back together for the past ten years- since the night Justin had left to make his own way in the world.

He sighed as he looked out over his strobe-lighted Kingdom on one of the rare nights for the past five years he'd chosen to make an appearance. After Justin left Michael and Ted had talked him into rebuilding Babylon, making it better and even more structurally sound. Because he'd always loved the challenge, he had agreed. But what was once his playground had in a lot of ways become his prison. It just wasn't the same without Michael, Ted, Emmett and Justin. Back then they were young, vibrant, fun but most of all they were together. And although he would never tell them, he loved them because no matter how shitty he ever acted, the feeling was returned.

"Another," he told the Bartender. He stood there mentally cutting off the running tape in his head of times gone by and pressing business matters. That tape drove the Brian Kinney Empire toward success, guided every business venture he'd ever made. In the process it also kept him emotionally separated from everyone and everything, able to live a decadent life and be more successful than even he had ever dreamed of. Considered the "Golden Boy" of Advertising, he'd always seemed to know what his clients needed before they realized it.

As he raised the refilled glass of Jim Beam to his lips, his eyes drifted to a young blond man in the corner of the club. He stood near the entrance to the infamous Backroom, where almost every wild homosexual fantasy could be fulfilled. Brian smiled to himself in reminiscence of how many of his wildest imaginings had been indulged in there under blue and yellow lights, black paint and sectioned off areas. As Brian looked on with a slight smile on his lips, an auburn-haired man a tad older joined the blond and they disappeared into the darkness clearly happy and horny. It was a bittersweet reminder of the love had, love lost and the love which had moved on from him so fucking
After Brian and Justin decided to call off their long-awaited wedding ten years ago, Justin packed his bags and moved to New York City. Many wondered why he didn't follow Justin and the truth was they had talked about it but Sunshine had asked him not to. Justin Taylor needed to find who he could be without Brian Kinney to guide and protect him. It was a freedom both hard-won and tragically lost. In addition, Brian had just began to work in the capacity as CEO of Kinnetik- the company Brian started at the behest of Justin. Consequently, Justin didn't want him to uproot the business, cutting off his success before it even began. As always Justin was that calming influence for the ever impulsive Brian but not without collateral damage to both of them. It had hurt like hell to let him go then. As he stood there nursing his drink and looking out over the club which had once meant everything young, carefree and beautiful to him, he realized it still did. But he had loved Justin enough to let him go.

Sure as Justin optimistically stated on the night he left, they had managed to see each other over the years; sometimes scheduled, at other times by complete and utter surprise. The last time was in Toronto at Melanie and Lindsey's. Brian was there for Gus' birthday and had no idea Justin was there for an art show. That date always held special significance for all of them but most of all for Brian and Justin. The same night Gus was born was the same night both of their lives changed. Justin was only seventeen; Brian a twenty-nine year old man coming out of the same club he stood in the center of. From the moment they'd first kissed, he knew there was something special about that blond boy. There still is, he thought as he replayed their relationship, mentally cataloging every time in that first year they fucked.

Justin was like a stick of dynamite- fascinating as hell to watch burn but dangerous in close proximity; something Brian sensed immediately. In retrospect it was why he'd fought so hard against Justin and his allure. There was no better word to describe Justin Taylor except alluring- a wild boy at heart who captured and held the attention of a wilder man. A year later on the same night of Gus' birthday, Justin regained his entire memory from the bashing which almost killed him and his art career. That night in Toronto seemed like they had come full circle once again.

Brian reached inside his jacket pocket, touching the objects there. He traced a light circle around the smaller of the two. No one knew it but he carried them everywhere with him as a sort of talisman and in a way they had been. He'd never returned the wedding rings all those years ago. Sliding his hands gently out of his pocket, he opened his palm, cradling the precious metals. The thump a-thumpa of the music flowed through him, the strobe lights bounced off the rings making the sight of them even more mesmerizing. Brian smiled that sly, secretive smile which once made him the most desired man in Pittsburgh while staring at the rings. And he no longer felt tired.

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Two bodies writhed across the king-size bed- entangled, sweat pouring off of them acting as glue holding them together. Gasps and moans filled the air as the men wrestled their way to climax.

"Yeah, fuck me," the man on the bottom as he continued to be pounded into the mattress. There wasn't anything tame, mild or gentle about their coupling. It was raw and dirty with only one purpose: to get off by any means necessary.

A slight yelp came from the man on the mattress as Justin said forcefully, "You like that." It wasn't a question. Justin knew exactly what he was doing. He had practically begged to be fucked hard and fast and Justin was never one to disappoint.

"Yes," his partner groaned. "Don't stop. I'm close. Don't fucking stop."

Justin kept moving in strong, sure strokes, his dick constantly jabbing against the walnut shaped
gland in nameless guy's ass. His blue eyes watched the man under him as he pushed even deeper in him keeping a rhythm of two shallow, one deep. The deep-gutted moan which ripped from the guy was all Justin needed to hear. Yeah- he was close, a fact Justin was almost too happy with. He wouldn't have been there at all except Justin's body needed sex. Badly. He had already gotten off once and damn it he was going to get off again.

The thought spurred him on as he redoubled his efforts. He was close to coming too but his teacher had always told him to make sure his meal of the evening was always the first to blow his load. It kept them addicted and was considered gracious. Fuck gracious. Justin kept pumping while focusing on his pelvic floor muscle to keep from cumming. Admittedly the guy had a great ass but he was sick of fucking. Justin let go of his hips which he'd gripped to keep him at the perfect angle. Using his knee to lock down the tightest ass he'd had in weeks in place, Justin reached up to squeeze a nipple while filling his other hand with his balls. Justin rolled the latter in his hand gently at first then pulled firmly but not enough to hurt- at least not much. He twisted the nipple in his other hand while keeping up the pulse-pounding rhythm of his hips. Finally he heard the tell-tale hitch of breath, issuing little warning before "nameless" announced, "Fuck I'm coming!" And he did...and did. Justin was finally free to do the same and felt relaxed for the first time in days.

Justin released the bonds at the younger man's wrists and left the bed while he laid there insensate, trying to catch his breath. Heading into the bathroom, Justin rolled off the condom, tossed it in the trash, peed and stepped immediately into the shower. As the water cascaded over his hair and body he fought back memories which chose to intrude on his post-coital bliss. Mental images bombarded him of a shower just like the one he was in with a person he had been doing his best not to think of since returning from Toronto a little less than a year ago. After Canada, he and Brian had agreed not to see each other for the next two years- a long standing habit of theirs since Justin left Pittsburgh ten years ago.

Grabbing the soap, Justin busied himself washing his hair and body hurriedly, needing to escape the enclosed space as soon as possible. The thoughts served no purpose and just put him in a place mentally it wasn't safe for him to dwell in too long. As he was rinsing the soap out of his hair, he heard the shower door click open and felt the strong gust of cooler air. He lowered his head to stare into the eyes of the guy whose name he couldn't remember. Didn't care to remember was more like it. It was a one-time thing anyway. The hot water felt good caressing his lithe five-foot-eight frame as he brushed his shoulder-length hair back from his forehead. He dipped his head in the water once more to ensure it stayed where he put it. He reopened his eyes and lowering them followed nameless guy's movements as he dropped to his knees in front of Justin. Never one to turn down getting his dick sucked he let him give him a blow job. The guy was damned good at it even though Justin once again zoned out, reflecting on another blow job-only he was the one on his knees in the shower stall. It had become a normal occurrence and ultimately left him dissatisfied for the long-term.

After he'd come for the third time that night he calmly said, "Hurry up and shower. I have things to do." He strolled toward the left door of the two entrances. Grabbing a towel from the rack, he began to dry himself off vigorously while standing in front of the built in vanity.
"Wait. What? You're just kicking me out? I thought--" the guy let his sentence trail off at Justin's smirk.

"You didn't think I was going to ask you to stay did you?" At the trick's continued silence, Justin chuckled slightly and shook his head. It always continued to surprise him how it was automatically implied he would offer anything beyond his bed for the duration of a fuck. He guessed something could be said for still looking innocent even at his age. "Sorry to disappoint you but no one stays here but me and I don't do overnight guests. So if you don't mind..." Justin gestured his hand toward the shower.

As soon as he left the warehouse, Justin climbed the stairs toward the roof since it was August and an overly warm night. The fact that he lived close to the East River made no difference- it was still hot and humid. But it was peaceful and exactly what Justin needed in that moment. With his mind in turmoil, he stripped out of the lounge pants he'd recently donned and dived into his pool. The deck during inclement weather could be closed off so he never had to be without it if he didn't want to. That was another advantage of loving and living with Brian Kinney off and on for five years. He had taught Justin to never settle for less than what he wanted and it was a lesson Justin had learned well. He swam to the farthest end of the pool where the Empire State Building was lit up in red, white and blue in honor of Labor Day- the last official holiday of the summer. It had taken three years to get his home the exact way he's wanted it. A lot of time was spent with him living in his rented art studio until it was decorated to his specifications. His patience had paid off even beyond what he thought it could.

At thirty-three, Justin Taylor was successful, rich and still young enough to enjoy it. Although he started out as a "starving artist" thanks to the article of some cunty art critic whose name he couldn't remember, it didn't take long for his work to get noticed and that was thanks in large part to both Lindsey and Brian. All of his paintings sold out at art shows which helped keep his studio afloat while he was traveling. He debuted in Milan, Paris, London and Venice all in the course of his first four years as a New Yorker. He'd also done shows domestically in Los Angeles and of course New York each year since relocating. So when he decided to stay put for a while, he logically started his own Art Firm based in Dumbo- a section of Brooklyn bordering the East River with a gorgeous view of the New York Skyline. His operation was mostly geared toward businesses which were just starting out but couldn't afford a huge advertising budget. When Brian heard what Justin was involved in during one of their every-two-year-sex-a-tons, he contracted Justin's services for a few of his minor clients who he saw potential in but they couldn't afford the usual fee. The strategy paid off. Because of Justin's designs and Brian's backing, those small companies became major clients. It was a win-win for both of them and gave Justin the residual income he needed since he retained all the copyrights to his artwork and the companies paid him yearly to use it. Even major corporations had taken note of his work and many had hired him to redesign their company logos. He was in business for himself, no longer starving but he still wasn't satisfied.

There was no doubt he loved New York City and all its boroughs. The sights, smells and sounds
called to his artistic soul. There was no shortage of inspiration even in the quiet, upscale neighborhood where he lived in Dumbo. Going through the city or escaping from it was as easy as a train ride away. "The City that Never Sleeps" described it perfectly. There was always something to do or someone but he was bored. The men were not as exciting as they once were to him. Oh sure...they were good looking enough and book smart. They were either masculine and gorgeous or a cute little twink like the one who had left after Justin fucked him but they didn't excite him.

Once again his mind conjured the image of the one man who did. Brian Kinney. Six-foot-two-auburn hair-hazel eyes which sometimes looked green-utterly kissable lips-getting sexier and more refined by the year-Brian-motherfucking-Kinney. He was the root cause of the heaviness Justin always felt every time they separated for another two years. It routinely took a year to bounce back from the experience only to have it happen all over again. Justin huffed out a large breath in annoyance at Brian but mostly himself. Their time in Canada was unscheduled but worth every second. It was as if they had never split up- the shared jokes, secret looks, obvious flirting which always led to A-fucking-mazing sex- all of it was fucking perfect. That was the problem.

Watching the Empire State Building as if it held the answers of the universe, his body reacted strongly to thoughts of the last time they'd seen each other. The tight hugs and prolonged kiss goodbye, where it could never be determined when one kiss stopped and the next began was the sweetest most addictive brand of agony. He could still hear Brian's raspy voice close to his ear saying, "You take care of yourself and keep in touch when you can." Could still see him as he headed toward the boarding gate, turn and give a quick final wave, mouthing the word "Later," as he handed the ticket agent his boarding pass.

Reflecting on it all Justin knew the only way anything would change was if he did it. This situation had turned him into an emotional masochist. It had been many years since he had to reevaluate his life and what he wanted. Decision made, Justin climbed out of the pool and headed into his house not bothering to dry off.

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Chapter 3- Sunshine State of Mind by Nichelle Wellesly

"Welcome back, Mr. Kinney."

"Thanks, Oliver. How's New York been without me?" Brian smiled as Oliver chuckled in response.

"Very dull, Sir. How long will you be staying with us this time?"

"Not sure yet, Oliver. There's a pressing piece of business that it's past time I tend to."

Oliver nodded seemingly in understanding. Because of Brian's frequent trips to New York even when Justin was out of town, Oliver Jenks and Brian had become friends of a sort. If Brian needed anything so small as a Kleenex or as large as a yacht, Oliver knew how to get it. Being a manager at
one of New York's premier hotels brought a lot of clout.

"Will you need anything else tonight?"

Brian shook his head while smiling slightly. "Just my bed and pillow for tonight Ollie but tomorrow is another day." He headed off to the elevator, his bags already in the room waiting for him thanks to the efficient staff upon check-in. The glass elevator sped upward for which Brian was ever grateful. He hadn't slept much, anticipation of the next time he saw Justin monopolizing his thoughts both day and night. More and more lately Justin became "Sunshine" in his thoughts which was not odd as much as unsettling since he hadn't thought of Justin by the name Debbie had given him since he left the loft on Tremont behind ten years ago. As soon as Brian decided to visit New York sooner than later, thinking of Justin as Sunshine had become as natural as breathing to him.

Stepping off the elevator, Brian tipped the elevator attendant and headed off in the direction of his room. The hotel was quiet as ever, no sound from the busiest street in NYC penetrated its vaunted halls. Upon entering the empty suite, he removed his shoes while shedding his suit jacket. It was August and hot but traveling first class one had to look as if they had been there before. It was a rule he adopted in high school and it had never steered him wrong. He unbuttoned his shirt, moving further into the suite. It was the one he usually stayed in when visiting. He crossed over to the window peering down into the traffic below. From his vantage point it looked like traffic was gridlocked. Thank Fuck he wouldn't hear any of the resulting car horns. Feeling the immediate need to stretch his neck, shoulders and spine he lifted his arm deciding he needed a shower immediately. August in New York was nice as long as there was an air conditioner handy at all times.

He finally got the shirt peeled off, peeking briefly at the label. He smiled to himself as he thought back to his thirtieth birthday when Melanie had called him a "Label Queen." Not much had changed and nothing but the best for Brian Kinney. It was nice to have champagne taste and the money to match. Being forty-five and all he would have liked to have that "Deathday" cake moment back and everyone else right along with it.

Heading toward the massive bedroom on the right side of the suite, he thought of best way to approach the subject with Sunshine. The last time he proposed everything was going according to plan until both realized their timing couldn't have been worse. Justin had the chance to live the dream he'd had since high school, perhaps even before then, and he was willing to blow it off to be with Brian. Meanwhile, Brian was turning into a Stepford fag- the kind of husband he thought Justin wanted. Again he smiled sadly as he stepped into the shower. Justin had called him on his bullshit as he often did. Eventually they called off the wedding and went their separate ways. He was proud of Justin who had even managed somehow to finish his Bachelor's of Fine Art degree and design a life for himself even beyond what he could have imagined for himself. He had once accused Justin of not having big enough balls and in turn Justin had showed him just how big his balls really were. Hard choices and sacrifices had to be made and it felt like he and Justin had paid astronomical prices for the dreams they carried.
Sticking his head under the water trying to wash away the feeling of loneliness enveloping him, he replayed the chance meeting in Toronto again for the hundredth time since they parted. God, it had already been almost a full year since they last laid eyes on each other. Phone calls were few and far between because of the schedule Justin kept nowadays but then that was always the case in the year after-year before syndrome Brian and Justin seemed to be stuck in. A year of trying to recover normalcy followed by a year of anticipation. Brian shook his head to clear his thoughts. "Shit I must be getting fucking old to have become so fucking maudlin," he said aloud.

Stepping from the shower, he walked over to the mirror. He hadn't aged, at least not to himself or to Ted who he saw everyday at work. Consequently, Cynthia and Ted were the only ones who knew he'd gone to New York. He hadn't even told Debbie who he saw regularly and still considered his "mama." He knew he could trust the two of them with Kinnetik as he'd always done especially after the Babylon bombing ten years prior.

"How long will you be gone?" Ted asked him.

Brian had thought to tell him only a few days but he wasn't sure of anything so he answered as truthfully as he could. "I don't exactly know but I think I'll check out a few locations on Madison while I'm there."

"Okay and what do you want done about Brown and Iconix while you're gone? Also you had a meeting with Drew and Emmett that has to be moved."

"The contracts for Brown and Iconix are on the desk. Have legal go over them with a fine tooth comb and fax them back. As far as Drew and Emmett ask if they're willing to SKYPE otherwise it's going to have to wait until I get back." Brian adjusted a few other files on his desk detailing what they were to Ted in case he was unavailable.

Ted held his head down, nodding and taking notes as Brian spoke. When Brian finished Ted asked quietly, "You're going to see him, aren't you?"

Brian looked at Ted. From the look in Ted's eyes, Brian knew there was no point in covering the truth. Ted was the first person he had told about the Testicular Cancer eleven years ago and he had kept the secret, allowing Brian to share his own news. Brian knew he could trust Ted with truth about Justin as well. "Yeah I am but don't say anything, Theodore." At Ted's continued silence Brian said, "I have no idea what's going to happen or what he's going to say. What I do know is that I can't wait another year."

Ted's answer surprised him. "Well then do what you've gotta do, Brian. I won't lie to you and say
that I didn't think you were a fool ten years ago letting him go in the first place but I understood your reasons. But in doing so, you hurt yourself in the process."

"Gee, thanks, Captain Obvious. Care to tell me more?" Brian rejoined sarcastically earning a small chuckle from Ted.

"Hey--you didn't let me finish," Ted said, clearing his throat and growing serious again. "What you did took guts but I also saw you after Justin left and have seen you every time you've come back from meeting him. Your life stops and yes you cover it well for those who don't know you. You become a workaholic which you pull off brilliantly but the Brian Kinney I've come to sometimes love and more often than not loathe disappears for a time." He walked over to where Brian stood against the desk, touching his shoulder in support. "You have to do whatever is right for you this time, Bri."

Brian laid there in the king-size bed thinking of the subsequent events from that conversation. He grabbed his garment bag, not bothering to look inside. He always kept a suit handy in case of impromptu trips--a habit since landing the Brown Athletics account when working for Vanguard eons ago. He then stuffed a small overnight bag figuring if he needed anything past what fit in it, he would buy it in New York. He remembered the urgency he felt within himself telling him to hurry up...he did practically running for the boarding gate. But as he lay there in the stillness and quiet staring up at the red, white and blue of the Empire State Building—the only light in the darkened room—he wondered what the fuck to do next.

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"You look particularly enchanting today, Dr. Chanders." And she was as she always had to him. He heard her shocked gasp of surprise just before she turned around to face him. Daphne Chanders was as bright-eyed and intelligent as she ever was and Brian was so fucking happy to see her doing so well for herself. She and Justin had been best friends since the days of grade school and she looked like she hadn't aged a day.

"Brian!" She jumped on him shamelessly, clipboard and all, locking him in a vice grip. "What are you doing here? It's been a long time. Is Justin with you? Wait! You're not sick are you?"

He hugged her back reveling in the familiar feel of the fastest talking female he'd ever met. He couldn't help but chuckle remembering exactly how they met. Justin was living with him then having left home due to his homophobic father, Craig. Brian had been oversleeping when he heard Justin and some loud, almost squeaky voice in the kitchen. He remembered opening the door naked as the day he was born and the shocked yet intrigued look on young Daphne's face even as she reluctantly looked away. It was one of those moments he would always remember with humor and longing. They became true friends that day despite their age difference and whenever Justin was in trouble,
she came to him. Now he was in trouble and he needed her.

"No, I'm not sick. I came to see you and no, Justin isn't with me. In fact he doesn't even know I'm here," He answered her. "Do you have time to grab coffee?"

"Sure. I have one more patient to see and then I'm free for a little bit. There's a park across the street so you can wait there. I know you hate being in here so it must be pretty serious," she said looking him in the eyes as if examining him.

"Go play doctor and I'll be outside," he said laughingly. He watched her hurry down the hall, disappearing into the room at the end of it.

Stepping out into the sunshine which was partially shaded by the huge buildings, he took a deep breath. Even though it was stifling with the August heat, it was still better than inside. Daphne was not wrong about his aversion to hospitals. It had been eleven years since he'd set foot into the last one; the same one Michael had been in the night of the bombing of Babylon at the "Stop Prop 14" benefit when he'd nearly lost his life. Prior to that, it was for his own surgery for Testicular Cancer, which is still in remission. Ben had nearly lost his life because of pancreatitis— a side effect of his HIV medication. Michael had called Brian to help him through his meltdown. But the worst time was fifteen years ago when he had almost lost Justin thanks to a homophobic teen.

Brian sat heavily on the park bench remembering the fear, the heartbreak and the guilt. Even all these years later, he remembered everything vividly. He arrived at Justin's prom unexpectedly wearing his Armani tux with a white silk scarf around his neck. Daphne had seen him first so he stood there waiting until Justin noticed him. It was easier to pretend shock at finding him in the vast sea of hormonal teens. When Justin said to him, "I thought you wouldn't be caught dead in room full of eighteen year olds," Brian had smoothly replied, 'I thought I'd recapture my lost youth,' his intentions were sealed in that moment. They'd danced and it felt like they were the only two people in the room. When they kissed it felt like nothing Brian had ever felt before. Whisking him away, Brian kissed him even more thoroughly, untying Justin's tie in the process. Down in the parking lot, they had danced around, sung with Brian swirling Justin around and capturing him when he sang "and in whose arms you're gonna be." It was magical and fun. Ridiculously romantic. It was their moment. He kissed Justin a final time, said "Later" and watched happily as Justin left him to return to the prom. Only he never returned to his rite of passage. Brian closed his eyes to the memory of the bashing, resulting in some of the worst moments of his life.

"Must be some daydream you're having, Brian," Daphne's voice thankfully woke him up from the more bitter than sweet memory.
"Yeah but it's over. Ready to go? Starbucks?"

"Nope. I prefer some place a little more quiet," She answered cheerily. Her chipper attitude rubbed off a little on him and he couldn't help but smile. It still amazed him that with all her inherent optimism she became a surgeon.

Arriving at a little hole-in-the-wall coffee shop about three blocks from the hospital, he almost hesitated to go in but she promised him Starbucks would taste like mud compared to the coffee at Stapletons. Giving the barista a single wave, the robust lady shuffled right over. "Dr. Chanders, you're a little early today," the lady said while eying Brian up and down a little frown creasing her forehead.

Daphne laughed. "Calm down, Myrna. This is my very good friend, Brian and he's gay."

Myrna visibly relaxed. "Well in that case what can I get you?"

Brian had started to place his order when Daphne interrupted. "Triple Nonfat Latte for him and a tall Hazelnut with a shot of espresso for me." At Brian's raised eyebrow she said, "Whatever you're about to say, I know I'm going to need the extra dose of caffeine." Grabbing their drinks, they moved to the last booth in the long line of window seats. "So what was so important you had to seek me out? Speaking of which, how the hell did you find me anyway? There are like one-hundred-ten hospitals in the City."

Brian took a long drought of the latte. He had to admit it was better than Starbucks--piping hot and rich. Daphne knew what she was talking about. He sank into the comfortable seating a little deeper, staring out the window for a few moments watching busy New Yorkers go about their lives. He looked up when he felt the slight touch on his hand. Daphne had been watching him so taking a deep breath, he figured it was time to tell her everything.

"I arrived in New York last night and had the hotel manager, Oliver call around to find you. He told me where you were and now I'm here. I need your advice or help. Really a healthy measure of both."
"Well as long as it's not illegal or killing someone through venipuncture or cutting them up to put in a freezer, you have it. My name's not Dexter, you know," Daphne answered.

They burst out laughing. "Geez Daph, you've become gory in your old age," Brian said as he continued to chuckle.

"Kinda goes with the job. So spill! What's going on with you?"

"I want to make things more...permanent with Justin." At her surprised look he said, "I know. Ted has already informed me that I've taken long enough to make up my mind. It wasn't that. He and I have both been busy to the point of hardly speaking for months at a time."

"Yet you two have found time to fuck every two years over the past ten years," she answered with a little smirk on her lips. She picked the coffee up and took a sip all innocent like.

"I shouldn't be surprised you know about our arrangement. How much more do you know?"

"Enough to know that you two are the most successful, absolute idiots I know."

Brian laughed. "Your honesty is so refreshing, Daphne." He sobered and took a sip of his drink trying to get his racing thoughts under control. "Look, I know I'm risking a lot but..."

"Yeah you are. I have to tell you this. Whereas you're ready, he may not be."

"Why not? I know that our timing has always been off but this time I think we could make it work for real," Brian said.
"Oh--I know you could, Brian," Daphne assured him. "I've never met two people who are more right for each other than the two of you. You hand him bullshit and he throws it right back to you. You both challenge each other. You make each other better. I also know that after you two meet, Justin withdraws into himself for a time. Consequently, his work which is always impeccable transforms into something well beyond that. If you go to the gallery on Fifth, you'll understand what I mean."

"So you're saying being with me would hurt his work?" Brian asked suddenly feeling a little dejected.

Daphne shook her head. "I'm not saying that at all. Let me ask you something...how are you the year after you and Justin part ways?"

He thought back to his most recent conversation with Ted. The constant need to work to keep from thinking was always to the forefront of his mind. It was an incurable restless feeling. Yet when he was with Justin, he didn't feel that way. He was relaxed, at ease with everything. He didn't think about their parting until the day of and as soon as Justin was out of sight, the anxious feelings returned with a vengeance. He couldn't sit still, would work to the point of exhaustion so his body wouldn't crave anything--so he wouldn't dream. He told Daphne all of this. For some reason, she was the only one he could tell about it. Even Theodore didn't know the full extent of what Brian went through although he knew a great deal.

"You just described Justin," she said simply. "Only there's more."

"How much more could there be?" he asked chuckling.

"He's basically turned into you from the five years of your 'relationship.' And I know how much you hate that word but that's exactly what it was, Mr. Kinney."

"Yeah I used to hate it pretty badly. Oh the fucking irony that I actually want one with him now. So what do I do?"
She thought a moment, her eyes focusing on the passersby. "The first thing you should do is book a flight." She looked him directly in the eye. "Justin's in Pittsburgh."

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Finding a park on Liberty Avenue was almost as bad as trying to find a park anywhere in New York City but Justin had finally managed to do it. He walked in to the Diner and was immediately transformed years back from the first time he'd walked in. As with so many times from the time he was seventeen, he was looking for Brian.

"Hey Deb, can I get a cup of coffee?" He said moving further into the space.

"Oh sure, Sunshine, I'll be with you in a minute." He saw the exact moment when she realized what she said. "Sunshine! What--what are you doing here?" She grabbed him, hugging him so close her arms felt like boa constrictors.

"Debbie, I can't breathe," he half gasped, half chuckled but he hugged her back. Feeling her arms
around him reminded him of comfort. No matter how much he aged, nothing would ever replace the feeling of love he received while working as a busboy at Liberty Diner nor the major role Debbie played in Justin becoming the man he was.

"Oh, sorry, Sunshine. It's just been forever since I've seen you," she said reaching out to cradle is cheek in her hand. "Look at you, all grown up. Turn around and let me see if you still have that bubble butt." Debbie's signature laugh was evident as ever.

"Move over, Debbie and let me have a shot at him," Emmett said reaching in and embracing Justin. "Hey sweetie, it's been a long time. What brings you back?"

"Don't worry, guys I'll answer all of your questions in a moment as I'm sure you have a million of them."

He was greeted by both Drew and Blake as he settled into the booth they all frequented directly across from the counter. Debbie grabbed his coffee and joined the impromptu welcome back party. "So now that we have your coffee all settled, you can tell me--I mean 'us' what you're doing in Pittsburgh."

Justin sipped his coffee trying to decide just how much he should tell them. He wasn't sure how much they already knew considering before all the changes they were still like family but this was different. The story of Brian and Justin was a well-known but touchy subject amid all of them mainly because of how it all began. What was only meant to be a one-night stand had blossomed into a relationship of sorts full of passion, fun, excitement, jealousy, rage and turmoil. It was in the very booth where they all sat where Brian had 'introduced' him to his one-time lover Ethan who Justin later referred to as the biggest fucking mistake of his pathetic stupid life which was how he felt at the time. Across from the table stood the stool where Justin remembered being pissed off about fucking "Zucchini Man." It was in the very diner they sat where Brian and Justin saw each other for the first time after the Rage party, where Michael and Justin had come up with the idea to create the comic book which bridged a gap between Michael and Justin but also ultimately helped tear Brian and Justin apart. So many memories both good and bad happened within the four walls where he sat.

"I'm here to see Brian," he said matter-of-factly.

"Well we know that," Emmett said. "What I want to know is why."
Justin had to laugh. Emmett was never known for subtly and this was no different. "If you must know I'm here to end things for good." He looked around the table at each of the occupants. This couldn't have come as a shock, could it? "It's not that we don't love each other. We do and always will but our lives are separate and it's time we acknowledge that and move on."

"Yeah but Justin, to give up on everything you both have fought through even after calling off your wedding—" Debbie said disbelievingly. "This is ten years of your lives and no it may not have been everything you wanted it to be, Sunshine, but it's worth more than anything you've had. Are you really prepared to give that up?"

Justin was saved from answering as the bell to the door rang out. "Debbie I have to...Oh my God! Sweetheart?"

Justin stood up to face his mother, Jennifer. "Hey Mom," he said moving toward her to embrace her. They hadn't seen each other in the better part of four years at her wedding to Tucker. "How have you been? How's Mollusk adjusting to life at Dartmouth?"

Jennifer held him at arms length looking in amazement at the man her son had become. She touched his shoulder-length hair tweaking the ends. She remembered when he'd first cut it during that whole "Pink Posse" episode of his life. She still thanked God that was over without Justin being harmed. "Molly is doing fine. We just left her to return here. Why didn't you tell us you were coming?"

"It was a spur of the moment trip, Mom," Justin evaded her question.

"Well you simply must come to dinner."

"Well see," he answered noncommittally. It wasn't that he had a problem with Tucker anymore. He was well past that once he found he wasn't going anywhere. He still inwardly rolled his eyes at the thought that his mom was dating--no married to--someone only six years older than he was. But it was the first time they would have the house completely to themselves now that Molly was officially away at school. He shook his head to mentally clear away any images which surfaced at the thought of what they'd be doing. EW!! He hurriedly continued the conversation. "Well Dad has finally gotten
one of kids to Dartmouth. Good for him," he said a little sarcastically at the end.

"Yeah he did. Are you going to see him while you're in town? You all haven't seen each other since the summer of 2005. He's still your father. Don't you think it's time you two talk?"

"Nope. I'm fine with the fact we haven't. Besides, Molly tells me I have a new baby brother. Well not exactly new. The child--Stephen is it?-- should be about six or seven by now, right?"

Jennifer dropped her eyes. She remembered that time in their lives well when Justin came out. It was painful for all of them. Craig and her had been having problems so they divorced. Craig blamed Justin for everything which couldn't have been further from the truth but Justin took it to heart for a time. She wondered if he was really over all of it. "Yeah he's seven. I see them in passing every now and again but Molly has kept the relationship up."

"Well now that's good. Don't worry, Mom," Justin said. "I have long since moved on past Dad. I'm living a life I'm happy with for the most part and have achieved everything I set out to do. I have no reason at all to be unhappy with the way things turned out."

She nodded. "Wait--what do you mean for the most part? Is everything alright, Justin?" She looked him in the eyes searching for answers.

He took her hand and kissed it while returning her look. "Everything is fine, Mom. Just have to resolve a few things and then even the most part will be in order." He hugged her again.

Going back to the rented car after leaving the diner, Justin thought of all Debbie had said prior to his mom's arrival. Was he really ready to let Brian go? Everything in him rebelled at the idea but Justin needed to get off the Kinney/Taylor Rollercoaster. It wasn't healthy; more like co-dependent. The past ten years had been great for both of them and no, he couldn't deny they would always love each other. Brian's actions before and after the wedding plans--even though they remained plans instead of actions--showed his love for Justin.

Standing at the bank of the Susquehanna River, Justin replayed all the key moments of their
relationship over the past fifteen years. What began in the year 2000 and had grown into a once-in-a-
lifetime opportunity to love and be loved in return then became relegated to an affair for two weeks,
every two years. \textit{How the hell had they gotten themselves into it?} Justin grew misty as he
remembered the exact moment and what Brian said just before they'd made love a final time at the
place where it all began. \textit{Whether we see each other next week, next month--never again, it's only
time.} The problem with time was that it always ran out at some point. Resolve solidified, Justin made
his way to the one place he was sure Brian would be... Kinnetik. ×

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FLIGHT DELAY

TIME'S UP VOLUME II: SHARE MY LIFE by Nichelle Wellesly

Summary:

TU VOL II

Categories: Alternate Universe, QAF-U.S., Family, Angst, Bdsm, Brian/Justin, Canon, Could be Canon, Drama, Humor, Jealousy, Justin/Ethan, Justin/Other, REAL LIFE ISSUES, Romance, Tophy! Justin, Unsafe Sex, What If Characters: Brian, Cynthia, Daphne, Justin, Original Character(s), Other Canon Characters, Ted
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Chapter 6- Flight Delay by Nichelle Wellesly

Fuck. Shit. DAMN!! Brian sat on the plane heading back to Pittsburgh International Airport, only the plane which was taxiing on the tarmac about to take off suddenly stopped. The restless energy which brought him to New York in the first place was back full-force. He tried to calm down but couldn't. The passenger sitting next to him felt the need to talk his ear off and he was trying his best not to tell him to shut the fuck up but it certainly wasn't easy. Brian was ready to barge into the cockpit and offer money if they would just get the goddamn plane off the fucking ground.

"Stewardess, what seems to be the problem?" He asked calmly. He should have rented a private jet or better yet took Ted's advice from years ago and just bought one.

"I'm sorry, Sir. They're just waiting for the green light from air traffic control. We should be up in the air at any moment."
He nodded his thanks and pulled out his Ipod. Maybe the person would get the hint that he wasn't into conversation and had more important things on this mind. Placing the ear buds deliberately in his ears--making a show of it for the guy's benefit--Brian turned it on and leaned his head back. The smooth 80's sound of Black's *Wonderful Life* began calming his nerves immediately as he remembered the time he'd done the Liberty Ride against Justin's wishes. He smiled briefly at the cussing out he received on the way back to the loft before Justin laid the pillows on the floor and helped him down to take a nap. It seemed they had no shortage of adventures between the two of them; the King of Babylon contest amongst them. It was the first of many times Justin had forced Brian to see him as a man and not just a human sex-toy...even though he definitely enjoyed having Justin and sex-toy in the same sentence. He nearly laughed aloud at the thought.

As young as he was, Justin was his equal in everything--ambition, sex drive--the only one who could keep up with Brian in any form or fashion. Daphne was absolutely correct when she said Sunshine had made him better...he did. Offering wise advice where Gus was concerned, helping him start Kinnetik Corp. and just by being there even when he went into debt stopping that crooked political animal named Stockwell. If it wasn't for Justin, he would have happily suffered in silence, refusing to ask anyone for help as usual. But Sunshine wouldn't hear of it. He gathered their friends and community to hold a benefit where there was a check recouping almost all the money Brian had put out of his own pocket. Justin always credited Brian for saving his life after the attack but Justin had saved Brian's life many times over; in more ways than Sunshine would ever know. Finally up in the air, Brian settled in for the hour and a half flight back home.

Justin hustled through Pittsburgh International Airport. *What the fuck was it doing so crowded at ten in the damn morning?* Since it was a close-in booking, the ticket fee was astronomical and he was wait-listed in case there was a cancellation. Upon arriving at Kinnetik, Ted informed him that Brian was in New York. *Shit. Fuck. Damn!* Justin raced toward the other end of the airport trying to make the flight he'd booked late last night at the hotel. Because he was afraid he would miss any available flight into JFK International Airport, he checked out of his hotel, turned in his car and waited...and waited. Fed up with waiting he called the automated hotline, constantly checking every fifteen minutes for cancellations. On the last try, he nearly fainted with relief when the automated voice on the other end of his cell phone said he only an hour to get to the ticket agent, change his ticket and collect his boarding pass. The first two things were easily accomplished since he was already in the airport but the third proved more difficult than he heard giving birth was courtesy of Melanie regarding her daughter.

He careened into person after person, even having to cuss back at some of them. He just needed to get to the last gate which seemed the length of five football fields away. He ducked, dodged and elbowed his way through constantly moving. The fact that Brian was on his home turf spurred him on that much more. He felt the urgency to end it more than he had when he had first made the decision. If they were ever going to have a life of their own, it had to go. There wasn't any other way. It had to be. His body and mind still rebelled at the idea but he reasoned over time he would get past it if he could just get to the fucking gate. Moving faster than he ever had in his life, he bumped into the last person he ever expected to.
"Hey watch it, assho--"

"Sorry, Brian," Justin whispered. ×

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The Ninety Day Rule

Seeing each other for the first time in nearly a year, neither could quite grasp that it was real. Except for the garment bag Brian had dropped when Justin had crashed into him, there wouldn't have been any evidence at all that it happened since Brian had managed to retain hold of his carry on. Steady hazel eyes met panicked cerulean blue ones.

"Where you going?" Brian asked calmly.

"Home," Justin stated equally calm. It was taking every ounce of strength in him not to tackle Brian, shove his tongue down his throat right there in the middle of Pittsburgh International Airport. The smell of his cologne and that scent which was innately, uniquely Brian, clouded his mind enough
where it was hard to form anything else but a monosyllabic answer.

Brian smiled slightly before answering. "Well if that's the case, you're going the wrong way. You up for coffee?"

Justin smiled in return. It was classic Brian to not ask for what he really wanted, just dropping hints. "No."

"Home then," Brian said.

"That depends," Justin said. At Brian's confused look Justin continued, "On whether you feel like another plane ride or not. I just raced halfway across a fucking airport, I should damn well get on the plane."

"Forget the plane and come home with me," Brian said smiling. He bit his bottom lip which at his age should've been completely illegal considering it was sexy as hell. Brian still held his eyes captive and Justin could feel his resolve weakening little by little. *Maybe it would be easier this way.*

"Okay," Justin answered as he resettled his bag on his shoulder.

Settling into the driver's seat of the Jaguar F-type R, he watched as Justin settled into the passenger seat after depositing his bag in the trunk beside Brian's. "Comfortable?" Brian asked smugly, watching Justin's reaction to the car.

"Yeah. Nice car. New?"

"Fairly. Business has been good," Brian answered. "Ready to go or-"

"Or?"

Brian smiled. "Or am I going to have to ask for a kiss hello?"

Justin undid the seatbelt, leaned and gave him a chaste peck on the lips. Again Brian smiled and shook his head.

"You said you wanted a kiss hello. You got one," Justin said and chuckled.

Brian undid his seatbelt in return and slung his arm around Justin. He waited patiently until he felt Justin relax into him and look at him directly. For the first time in many years, Brian wished he'd had his Jeep back wanting nothing more than to have Justin then and there in the parking garage of the airport. Resolving if all he was allowed to have then was a kiss he was going to damn sure make it good. Watching Justin, he brought his head closer pausing just slightly before touching his lips gently to Justin's. He relished in the release of breath he felt as Sunshine released the pent up breath he never realized he held whenever they kissed. Brian added a degree of pressure to the chaste kiss encouraging Justin's mouth to open for him. It did. At the first taste, Brian felt as if he'd come home after a long time away. Relief and lust, not necessarily in that order, flooded him as Justin responded in kind. Passion ignited in the two-seater, neither could get close enough to the other. Brian's fingers locked themselves in Justin's hair, the silky soft strands sliding between his fingers. Justin's groan of pleasure sounded like music to him and he deepened the kiss again, felt Justin suck on his tongue to bring him even closer. Breaths mingling, tongues tangling, hands groping-Brian wanted nothing more than to be naked and making love to the man in the passenger seat right then. Breaking the kiss before he lost total control, he advised Justin-flushed and breathing as heavy as he was-to attach his seatbelt and he drove like a bat out of hell from the parking garage.
They rode in silence for a time, each absorbed in his own thoughts. As soon as Brian exited the garage he put the top down on the car and they hit the interstate almost immediately. Traffic on the other side of the road was almost at a standstill, many people trying to make their flights. The wind felt good on Brian's scalp which was still a bit heated from the exchange with Justin. The blond dynamite analogy popped unbidden into his brain again and he it became a little tough to concentrate on the road with his hard on taking over.

"Um, Brian," Justin said interrupting his thoughts. "You just missed the exit to your place."

"No. I didn't," Brian answered him.

Justin laughed. "Considering I rented a car when I got here, I'm pretty sure the exit to Liberty Avenue was back there."

"I haven't lived on Tremont for the past nine years. I only stay there from time to time when I have early meetings the next morning. A lot has changed since you've been away."

"Apparently," Justin said quietly. "Brian-"

"Uh-uh." Brian cut him off remembering that particular tone from many years gone by. "We'll talk about things when we get home. In fact we're almost there." Brian took the next exit.

Knowing something was weighing heavily on Justin, Brian immediately went into planning mode. There wasn't much he could do given they had literally run into each other at the airport of all places but Daphne had given him quite a bit of insight into Justin's mind and he absorbed it like a sponge. He'd thought of every possible argument to combat Justin. You didn't spend five years living with someone nor ten years off and on living apart but still connected and not know or remember little nuances about them-like the way he cradled his right hand whenever he was frustrated or nervous about something. Or the way his chest rose and fell when there was something he wanted to say but was unsure how it would be taken. As much as Justin had changed over the years, Brian was glad those things hadn't. It meant there was hope for him...for them. The silence lengthen again as Brian drove on, making a left into a quiet park. The trees were thick with leaves; the summer breeze slicing through the still quiet of the neighborhood.

"What are we doing here?" Justin asked. *So he remembered it, did he?*

Brian stepped out of the car, leaving the key in the ignition. He looked up at the beige and brown building. "It's home," he said simply.

Justin stepped out of the car in shock. Brian guessed he was remembering the first time they arrived at the house together. Brian had presented it as *The Country Manor of his dreams.*

"You live...here?" Justin asked looking at Brian in shock.

Brian returned the look smugly. "Yeah for the past nine years."

"But-"
"Yeah, I know. Come on." Brian grabbed Justin's hand, climbing the three short stairs to the front door.

Gone was the tarp covering the furniture the last time Justin had been there. The same Italian fixtures Brian had installed at the loft, were continued in the living room of the manor. The furniture alternated between Mid-Century modern and Old world Italian; a new Barcelona chair graced a corner on one-side of the fire. The naked guy painting had been given a place of honor on the other side which made Justin laugh.

"What?" Brian asked, enjoying the sound of Justin's sharp bark of laughter and the sight of Justin smiling since they walked in. He was a little concerned the shock of him living there would have been a little too much.

"I was just thinking of how much the naked guy would probably appreciate the fire when it's lit."

They burst out laughing again. And it felt good. It felt right. "Make yourself comfortable. I'm going to get a drink. Want one?"

"Jim Beam if you have any," Justin answered. At Brian's raised eyebrow, Justin said, "Liquid courage."

While Brian was off fixing their drinks, Justin had time to absorb all that had happened from the time of their meeting at the airport. The kiss in the parking lot curled his toes which kissing Brian always had. He even found himself briefly wishing for the Jeep again; the Vette was never large enough to consider the hot activities they were accustomed to in the larger vehicle. Chuckling silently, he remembered how many blow jobs he'd given in that damn vehicle and the very brief first encounter the night Gus was born in the back of it before Michael, in his jealousy, swerved the car. His smile disappeared remembering Craig Taylor and the time he'd hit the first one. The good memories mixed with the bad memories so much, Justin snatched at his hair a little while staring out the front windows.

"What's on your mind?" Brian asked. Justin was so lost in remembering he hadn't heard him reenter the room.

"Nothing. Thanks," he said taking a relatively large gulp of the drink. Brian raised a single eyebrow and stared at him until Justin decided to tell him. "This isn't working for me anymore."

"What the drink? You just got it," Brian answered wryly before taking a sip of his own.

Justin looked at him directly. "You're going to pretend you don't know what I'm talking about?"

Brian took a deep breath. "I know what you're talking about. It's why I went to see you in New York."

Justin breathed a sigh of relief. *Wait!* "So we're in complete agreement?"

"If you're asking if we're in complete agreement that we should finally take this further then yeah we're in agreement."
Justin pinched the bridge of his nose and shook his head. Justin moved away from Brian and the window, sinking heavily on the couch. This was going to be harder than he thought but there was no choice but to just say it. "No. I mean we should end this-us. It can't go any further. We've tried, have been meeting for ten years. Your schedule isn't letting up, neither is mine. It's becoming...difficult to not want more but neither of us can give any more than what we already have."

Brian slowly placed his glass on the ledge, walking toward the fireplace. Justin couldn't bear to look up at him. Keeping his eyes lowered he swirled the amber liquid around in the glass hoping Brian would just let it all go. There was just no way in hell it would work but he knew Brian pretty well. If there was one word to describe Brian Kinney it was determined, even though arrogant and persuasive always followed close behind. And despite of how easy Justin wished this would be he knew there was no way Brian was just going to let the matter go. He was right.

*I'm so glad to see you, now I have the chance to say
Our love's been growing freely, what must I do to make you stay?***

"You always look so innocent when you blow me off, do you know that?" Brian said.

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"I seem to recall a situation similar to this one only the positions were reversed and you were determined to get me back. You were young and inexperienced then-innocent. I seem to miss that Justin right about now."

Justin laughed outright. "You're the one who took my inexperience for innocence, Brian. That was your fault not mine."

"Maybe so but now you're as experienced as I and definitely no longer innocent. How about trying this-us again? No bullshit. We both know what we want now. I want you not for a day or two weeks every two years nor by accident; I want you for good... permanently."

"Well you can't always get what you want."

Brian laughed. "Sexually? Since when? But this isn't about that."

"I'm not a toy, Brian," Justin said vehemently. He knew he was in for a fight but damn-

"I know that, Justin. You want proof of much I want you? Well you'll have to give me a chance to prove it."

Justin looked at Brian again shaking his head. "This whole conversation is fucking unbelievable."

Brian smiled that sly, slow and seductive smile causing an reluctant smile from Justin in return. "I thought we'd already established that I am." Brian moved toward him while keeping Justin's eyes captive;his stride purposeful yet evenly measured as if in no hurry. Brian stopped in front of him, leaning down to look him in the eyes. Justin had almost forgotten to breathe, his arousal rising with Brian's proximity. He was close enough Justin could feel his breath ghosting across his chin. "In fact it was right here, in front of the fire on the floor, tenderly then roughly but thoroughly that I proved to
"What do you want?" Justin whispered before he could stop himself. Brian's lips had begun to rub softly against his own. Fuck! Brian had no need to use sex as a weapon. Brian was sex personified, a walking, talking, breathing aphrodisiac and he was obliterating Justin's resolve inch by inch.

"Ninety days," Brian whispered back, placing a slight but clinging peck to Justin's lips. "I already know your schedule is clear except for a few minor things so you can't hide behind work."


"Later," Brian said diving onto Justin, stretching them out on the couch and kissing him thoroughly while blowing Justin's mind to bits.

_Don't Go**

*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

**Brian's POV

Ten years... Ten fucking years it took me to get to this point. When I think back to the night we met and all the things we've gone through, it really is a miracle that both of us still have our sanity. Between the bashing and the bombing alone both of us should be either drugged up or checked into a psych ward with a straight jacket, three meals a day and all the Xanax we could handle as fast as we can. That doesn't even include the other traumas of childhood, family and friends. I honestly wouldn't have made it through a lot of it without Justin by my side. I can admit that now- if to no one else but myself. Waiting for him hasn't been an issue...well not much of one. I understood that he did what he felt he needed to do. It was his life to lead and it still is. But I'll be damned if I let him leave now when we're finally at the place we've fought so hard and waited so long to be in.

_I feel the time is right_

'Cause my love for you has grown

_Up until this very night**

The boy- who was never really a boy in my eyes- is a full grown, self-assured man. More than the man I'd hoped he'd become. He's intelligent, has business savvy, gifted in so many ways and as sexually insatiable as I am; my equal in every way. _And now he wants to leave? No! _He spent the first five years of our non-relationship wearing me down, repeatedly breaking down my walls at every turn, surprising me around every corner and invading every aspect of my life only to want us to go our separate ways in the end? _Bullshit! _And now that I've actually accepted that I cannot and will not live without him, he wants to give me up? NO! _These last ten years of covert meetings- some planned and some not- has taught me the most valuable lessons of my life with Justin. When we met fifteen years ago, there were things I never expected to find; love and unconditional acceptance were two of them. Unlike many people in my life, the only thing Justin has ever asked of me was to love him. Everything else I've done for him was because I wanted to. It took me awhile to understand the theory and stop running from the fact that I really did love him since that first night. Yeah, it started off as a healthy dose of lust but being with him- being _inside_ him- quickly turned into something more. Something meaningful. Something life-altering. I can admit that the reason I ran and
fought so hard against it was the fear of change and of giving myself to another person. I had belonged to my parents and look how that turned out. I was their son but they abused me. I was Michael's friend- still am- but he used me too. So did Lindsey, Melanie, Emnett and Ted. However intentional or unintentional it may have been, they did even if it was just for living vicariously through me or financially. I was happy to provide them with endless fodder to keep them from the inner recesses of my ice cold heart. Keeping people at bay was a skill I'd cultivated but I can't lie and say that their judgment and preconceived notions didn't hurt. They did but I'd learned a long time ago to just bury it and move on. But the arrival of a blond man trapped in a pubescent teen body changed all that.

_I had doubts your love was strong enough_

_To break me down_

_Now I'm caught up in this web_

_You've spun for me tonight_

_Don't go**_

Justin was the surprise of my life that I had no right or reason to expect. His innocence- even if he doesn't call it that- and his honesty reminded me of what I should have been like at seventeen instead of the worldly creature I was. I'd learned how to toughen up and harden my heart by then so to see an openly giving young man with a fabulous body, sparkling eyes and an untapped source of bravery, it was easy to want him- easy to fall for him. Then as time marched on, he became an addiction. I craved _him_, not just his body but his company. We would laugh for hours and fuck for hours and talk for hours. Many people would be surprised to know that about Justin and I. People just minimized our compatibility down to just sex because there's no question that we're both hot and whereas he was young, it was even harder to believe that the Stud of Liberty Avenue was more attracted to the Twink King of Babylon's brain than his ass. It was easier to put us into that box- to justify the ongoing attraction- especially amongst those who we consider _friends_. Little did they know that it was so much more than that.

_It takes a gifted man, To release the love in me_

_So far you're the only man, Who has gone this far for me**_

From the night we met, Justin has been there for every major event and crisis of my life including the birth of Gus and my father's death. Almost losing my job to a bogus Sexual Harassment lawsuit, John's lie about molestation, Stockwell and Cancer were other examples of how he'd been there. Whether it was just him listening or gathering information to help me out like the situation with John, he did more than just sit there. Sometimes it was just knowing that he supported me throughout it all, that made the difference. I never wanted to depend on another person for anything, yet I found myself doing just that with Justin. The more I fought against loving him, the deeper I fell. It's like a rip current- the harder you fight to swim against it, the faster you sink or the more exhausted you get. The funny thing is that Justin is easy to love unlike me. He isn't whiny or dependent nor is he aloof or combative. You never have to wonder what he's thinking- at least most of the time. From speaking with Daphne, I know that the distance and scheduling has taken a toll on him just as it has me but I think it was harder for Justin. I also know that for a period of time, something happened to change Justin but he hasn't said what and although my initial inclination is to push, I won't do that. He'll come to me or tell me when he's ready... if he ever is. All I know is that I can't lose him again. Yeah, he broke my heart once but considering how many times I've bruised and broken his, I'd call us even. If he leaves this time, I know I won't survive it.
I feel it's out of my hands

Can't think twice, it's much too right

This may be my only chance

Don't go**

Damn how morbid are my thoughts. Anyway, he's not going anywhere because I won't let him. It's as simple and plain as that. We've worked too hard, have sacrificed too much. I know it sounds kind of stalker-ish but there it is. He's. NOT. Going. I've always been the type to achieve whatever I set my mind to and this is no different. He's spent the better part of his adult years making me admit things and making me feel things so now it's my turn. I know beyond everything, including his sudden need to be free of me, that he loves me. Not superficially but that deep and abiding love that people spend their entire lives searching for; that elusive depth of emotion that permeates everything from decisions to the act of breathing. He's in love with me and I am with him. I just have to make him remember that he is. He hasn't stopped loving me and he never will but he has managed to suppress it- I know that all too well. So now the time has come again to put up or shut up and I have no intention of giving up. Of course there could be meaningless romantic gestures but really what tops a house? No, the key to Justin is much more elemental and primitive than anything I could buy for him. Besides he has his own money and could buy it for himself. What could I offer him at this point except all of me- my fears, my triumphs- my heart which is what he's wanted all along. I know he's had it even if I didn't tell him or show him that it belonged to him everyday. And he knows he has it, too. He wouldn't have stuck it out if he was unsure. No, our problem is that although I've wanted him and vice versa, I've been guilty of the same thing Justin has. I haven't asked for what it is I've wanted too afraid of stunting his growth as a man and as an artist. Too afraid of needing him. Well it's now or never. Either I show it to him or he's gone and that is just... unacceptable to me.

I've been such a fool, To have kept my love from you

Could have lost your love, Searching for the truth

Don't go**

I haven't set foot in the master bedroom since I had it remodeled. I've been sleeping in one of the numerous guest rooms instead. I hadn't had a desire to enter it until Justin came home. Opening the door and guiding him inside, I'd forgotten how much this really is our room. Everything in it, from the cherry wood furniture to the organza and cashmere drapes is ours. The bay windows and doors filled the room with bright sunlight which bounced off Justin's blond locks just like I'd always imagined it would when he'd finally came here.

"You like it?" I asked already knowing the answer but needing to hear it anyway.

"I can't believe you remembered, Brian." His voice was full of awe. We'd talked about the design at length on the way back to Pittsburgh the day after we got engaged.

"How could I forget? A whole half hour of listening to you ramble about designs and patterns on the way back to the loft while stuck in traffic."

Justin laughed. "You did your fair share of rambling yourself. When did you do this?"
I couldn't help but shift from foot to foot in nervousness. I'd already told him that I've been living here for the past nine years but admitting that I'd had the house redecorated while I was missing in action for the eighteen months after he left...well that was another matter. But I can't lie to him, not at this stage and no matter how tempting it may be to save face. "It was one of the first rooms I had redone before I moved in but I haven't been in here in awhile." He looked at me waiting for me to finish. "I didn't want to be in here without you." *There I said it.* Now it was my turn to wait.

Justin walked from bedroom to the walk-in closet, stopping to peek inside the bathroom and finally to the bay windows which lead to the balcony outside of our bedroom. I watched the blue eyes take in the landscape; watched the steady rise and fall of his chest as he absorbed everything he'd seen and heard from me so far. He moved to stand directly in front of me and although I itched to grab him, I stood there and let him touch me. This had to go at his pace for so many reasons; it had to be his decision how far he wanted this to go and how fast. I know that sounds strange coming from a known and self-proclaimed control-freak but I know what I'm doing when it comes to Justin. It's about Free Will- a concept that makes this his decision now. Mine is made and no, I'm not above seducing him until agrees to what I want but it wouldn't mean that he would stay. I could kiss and fuck him to within an inch of his life but it would be just a fuck to him. We would get off but it would still mean 'goodbye' instead of him actually acknowledging that he wants to try this for real.

"Brian, why do you want this now?"

"The question, Sunshine is why *don't* you?"

"It's not that I don't...not exactly." He swallowed hard and licked his lips. Standing there while he's unbuttoning my shirt and not touching him in return is slowly killing me but I know everything has to come from him in this moment. "It's just that it may be too late, Brian. That's not to say that I want it to be. There's nothing I've wanted more than this but our lives are so different now. I'm not that little kid who used to follow you around."

"I know that, Justin, probably better than most. In fact, I know that better than everyone except probably you yourself. And I've never treated you like you were mindless; never handled you like a kid."

"No, you haven't."

"So what's the real problem, Justin?" I have to ask it and he has to answer. If he really wants to be with me, then what's stopping him?

He hesitates and then kisses me skillfully in the way I like to be kissed. I know he's evading the question but because his lips, his scent, his nearness- everything about him- makes me instantly aware of him, I'll let him get away with it...for now. It escalates quickly which is another thing I don't mind. I haven't laid eyes on him in a year but it feels like it's been a century. As hungry as I am for him, he appears to be just as thirsty for me. The whimpering and moans escaping him tells me that. The feel of his nails scraping down my spine makes me involuntarily shiver while I'm constantly devouring his lips. I want to be in him-no scratch that- I need to be inside of him so fucking badly, that it's taking all of my focus not to strip him and flip him onto the bed in the center of the room. But I won't do anything beyond this until he asks for it.

*Let's make sweet love tonight*
I won't put up any fight

Your wish is my command**

Before I realize that we moved from the bay windows, I'm falling back on the bed with Justin towering over me. No one on earth could perform an eye fuck like Justin. Everywhere he looks on my body, feels like he's penetrating me- looking into me. It makes me feel hot and cold at the same time and increases my appetite for him to ravenous. As if reading my mind, Justin finishes undressing and climbs onto me. The skin-to-skin contact is incendiary as he begins kissing me again and rubbing himself all over me.

"God, I've missed this," Justin says and I can't help the small smile that formed on my lips in response.

Justin reached over to the side table and my wallet, opening it with a slight smirk finding a condom and a small tube of lube in it's normal compartment. My predictability in that regard is something he and I will always be grateful for. He doesn't waste any time preparing me or himself. Rolling the condom down my dick, he takes the opportunity to give me a hand job while plunging lubricated fingers in and out of himself. The moans and groan coming from both of us told me that we wouldn't last long this first time out. Pulling him over me, I kissed him deeply as he settled on top. I swallowed his gasp as I felt my dick breach both rings of muscle; felt him slowly sliding down, taking me in inch by inch. I held myself perfectly still absorbing the heat from him as he fully encased me, giving him time to adjust to the fullness. It took every ounce of restraint in me not to ram my hips upward while holding him down by the shoulders, making him take me hard and fast but this was Justin's show. If there was a time when words failed, our non-verbal communication never did. That's what sex is for us mostly- a way to say the things which could never be spoken aloud. Sure it's fun and burns a shit load of calories but it's also when Justin can't hide things from me and vice versa. We're most honest and vulnerable when we fuck. It's just our way.

Lay me down upon my bed

And make me feel the heat

Of your body next to mine

I just have one demand

Don't go**

Justin rode me fast and furiously, rotating his hips at the base to swipe across his sweet spot. His nails raked down my chest while my fingers dug into his sides. I knew there would be bruises on his fair skin but he didn't care; neither did I. The frenzied pace he set was punishing, an inhale on his ascension and an exhale of emotion on his descent. His eyes held mine captive measuring my understanding of what he could not and would not speak, letting his body convey the messages. The fear. The ecstasy. His wants and needs. The challenge of keeping him. I gripped his shoulder-length
hair, pulling his face closer to mine while he continued to grind down onto me. I wanted him to see the assurance that this is what I want more than anything, willed him to see my acceptance of his challenge and my ambition in meeting it; I am not letting Justin Taylor go...EVER.

*You send chills down my spine*

*I surrendered all my love*

*You captured all my life***

"Mine," I said through gritted teeth. A moan of surrender escaped him. I repeated it so that there would be no mistake or misunderstanding between us. He was here and here was where he was going to stay.

*In just one night of ecstasy, You brought me to my knees***

Flipping him on his back without breaking the connection, I set about making him mine all over again just as I had some almost fifteen years ago. There was no fucking way, I wasn't going to fight for him with everything in me. Just like I fought for my life escaping my father and the streets in a past I won't talk about. Just like I fought the bullies who wanted to beat me down because I liked dick. Just like I fought for my scholarships and my career and my business. I will fight for the most important person in my life. Without Justin, I merely exist. He makes me want to live. I never feel more alive or aware than when I'm with him and I cannot go back to that other existence. I will not go back.

*Your first bite was just too strong, You left a scar on me***

Justin's body stiffened underneath me and I knew he was coming right before I felt the sticky wetness between us and felt him tremble. I fucked him through it and then released within his tight ass. I wiped the tear out of the corner of his eyes while just looking at him in our bed where he belonged.

"Love me, Justin," I whispered hoarsely.

"I already do," he answered equally gruff.

"Then give me what I'm asking for."

"Ninety days. You've already got it."

"No. Forever. That's what I want."
"Brian-

"Don't tell me ‘no' just yet, Sunshine. I know what you want and vice versa."

"But?"

"No buts. I promised you time. That's all it ever is. We've given everyone else their time; now it's ours."

"'It's only time.'" Justin smiled slightly. "Those were the last words you said to me before I left for New York. So what is this? Full-circle?"

"No. Their hourglass has run out. Their time's up. And ours is just beginning."

*Don't go nowhere, you know I care*

*Stay right here with me forever, baby*

*I need you right here with me*

*Don't go**

**Don't Go (sung by En Vogue)- McElroy, Thomas Derrick/ Foster, Denzi**

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He Won't Go

Brian knew what he was risking in not following Justin back to New York. Part of him was worried that he would go back on his word but the biggest part of their problem was trust. Brian had to take him at his word and Justin had to learn to trust this Brian the way he trusted the one he'd always known. There was definitely a reason to question his sanity already feeling bereft of Justin and he'd only been gone a day. But in classic Kinney fashion, once Brian made up his mind to do something it was as good as done. Coming up with the idea of ninety days was a spur of the moment thing. He just hoped his gamble paid off.
Walking into the Diner, he heard her long before he'd seen her. It seemed like forever since he'd been in there and truthfully it probably was. Although he and Michael were technically still friends, their lives were so separate they barely saw each other and calling was like an afterthought.

"Eat a vegetable once in awhile, it won't kill you," Debbie was ordering a young customer who scrunched up his nose at the side of carrots accompanying his Chicken Sub.

"Yes, Mama," Brian said standing behind Debbie as she turned to leave the table.

"Brian! What a surprise! First Justin now you're here, too. What the fuck's going on with you two?"

"Coffee first, Deb and I'll fill you in."

Debbie poured, listening for the bell she knew would be coming soon. As always she was efficient at her job even at her age but Debbie was the Diner and even the cooking staff knew that. "So what brings you down here. How long has it been?"
Brian took a sip of the hot liquid, enjoying the robust flavor. No matter where he went he could never find another cup of coffee like Deb's. "About three years I think. Business keeps me going a lot."

Debbie nodded. Although she hadn't seen Brian, she still saw Teddy often and kept abreast of all the events of Brian's life. "Well I've missed you. Promise you won't stay away so long. I don't have anyone to yell at when you're not here and you wouldn't want to spoil an old lady's fun, would you?"

"Oh, Deb you're not old. You'll never be old," he said laughingly as he bumped her shoulder softly. "By the way, how's Carl? I'm shocked he's still letting you work here."

Debbie raised an eyebrow. "Carl doesn't let me do a fucking thing, thank you very much. Besides he understands my need to work. Meanwhile, he's enjoying his retirement and visiting his daughter in Arizona until after her baby is born."

Brian nodded while smiling. He was glad age hadn't changed Debbie one bit. "And everyone else, how are they?"

"Well you would know if you could take your head out of your own ass and visit or call sometime."
"Geez, Deb lighten up," Brian laughed outright.

"Look, I know you've been busy but that's no reason to forget your family."

"I promise, I'll do better especially now."

Debbie looked at him skeptically but asked, "Did you see Justin?"

Brian took another sip of coffee before answering. "Yeah, I've seen him."

"Lay off the fucking cryptic shit, Brian. What happened? Did you and he--"

Brian knew what she was asking. "Not unless I can convince him otherwise. He's back in New York for a few days but he's coming back to settle matters for once and for all. He's different now; so am I." He told her about the agreement between him and Justin and the terms.
Debbie nodded her understanding. "You're both older and have lived quite a bit since ten years ago. But Brian, I don't want either of you hurt—I never have. Are you sure this is the right thing for both of you now?"

"I'm not sure, Deb, but I have to try. It has taken a lot to get to this point. Meeting every two years for two weeks is not enough for me anymore and based on everything he's said, it isn't enough for him either. It wasn't enough in the first place but I couldn't do with never seeing him again then. I can't lose him now without knowing we gave it everything this one last time. Can you understand that?"

"Yeah I can. You two are the most stubborn sons of bitches I've ever known. I watched you struggle with your feelings and just when it was all coming together...but yeah you both deserve each other. What happens if it doesn't work out? What's next for you? Justin will go on with his life, of course, but what about you?"

"I refuse for it not to," Brian said determinedly. "Some things are just meant and Justin and I are one of them. I let him go once thinking I did what was best for him and maybe it was at the time. I mean he's successful and still young and healthy enough to enjoy it but I'm tired of sacrificing my happiness and mostly I'm tired of sacrificing his—ours. It's time, been time really. So this three months is for him to see what I already know—what I've always known from the first night."

"You didn't know it from the first night," Debbie laughed. "You found out you loved him a whole year later."
Brian laughed too remembering their conversation at the bar about a month after Justin recovered his memory. "Correction, darling. You pointed out what I kept denying to myself." Brian shrugged. "There were some situations that happened between us, things you nor anyone else knew about which confirmed just how special Justin was and it all began that first night. Michael didn't even know of them and back then there was very little I didn't tell him. Justin was just a persistent kid then but I always saw the man in him. It was easier to treat him with distance, to keep him from getting too close. The irony is that now I want him close. I want him here."

"You always treated him differently. You handled him like a man and a student who had to learn some pretty harsh lessons about life and life as a gay man. He was the only one I've ever seen capable of hurting the 'Indestructable Brian Kinney.' Everyone else was fooled but as always Brian, you can't fool me."

"No I never could," Brian said. "So you think I'm doing the right thing?" He smiled slightly at her, knowing she would tell him the absolute truth. It was what brought him to the Liberty Diner. Debbie was always more of a mother to him than his own and she didn't sugarcoat shit.

"Yeah, I do but Brian, don't fuck it up this time. If you can't give him what he needs long-term-or in Justin's case what he doesn't know he needs-let it go now. Don't keep twisting in the fucking wind. You both deserve better than that."

"I won't. I promise." And Brian Kinney never made a promise he didn't intend to keep.

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"Okay Amy, if there's anything else that requires my attention right away, just call my cell or email me. Even though I won't be in New York, I'll still be able to handle business from my end. If I need to, I'll fly back for a meeting but make sure they're all scheduled in the same week, okay? Oh and I'll take care of the meeting next week in Rochester personally next week. Miranda Miller and her staff wouldn't expect any less." Amy was Justin's assistant at the art studio and often handled his personal business as well as that of the company. "Thanks for everything and keep in touch. I'll expect an email everyday." He hung up the phone, while tying his hair back. Taking a deep breath to calm his nerves, he began moving about again.
it was just for ninety days. Justin walked around his home gathering things he knew he would need while away—his computer and art supplies among them. I must be out of my fucking mind he thought for probably the millionth time since setting foot on the plane leaving Pittsburgh. Brian had taken him to the airport despite his objections and kissed him "Later" in front of everyone. It was so like Brian to deliver a kiss so intense it sparked passersby to say "Get a room" in several different languages. It had also tempted Justin to consider ditching business and clothes for the duration of their agreement.

"Are you sure that's all you're going to need?" Daphne asked interrupting his thoughts.

"No but I'm sure what ever else I may need, I can buy in the Pitts," Justin answered. "I wish you were coming with me. When was the last time you saw your folks?"

Daphne smiled. "Oh no, Justin Taylor. You will not use me as your scapegoat. This is between you and Brian and should have been settled long ago."

Justin sighed. She was right. This should have ended the day he left Pittsburgh for New York...but it hadn't. "This is pretty stupid. I mean here I am putting my life on hold for a risk that may not yield in my favor."

"And exactly what would be your favor? To be let go or forgotten about? Freedom? Because since the beginning all you've wanted is to be with him and now he's offering you that chance, yet you're hesitant. Why?" Daphne fired off the questions in her usual rapid speech. "What exactly are you afraid of?"

Justin thought a moment. What was he afraid of? It wasn't being seen as a kid—they've long since crossed that bridge. Justin was just as financially stable as Brian was which was a huge part of why he'd left in the first place. Every time something went wrong, Michael would involve himself and bring Brian's money right along with him which was an argument Justin couldn't combat. The longer he thought about it, the more sure he became of the reason this seemed like a genuinely terrible idea. "I'm afraid to trust him, Daphne. Throughout the whole five years of our actual relationship there was always some issue or another in which one particular person or people involved themselves when they should have minded their own fucking business."

"You mean Michael and Lindsey?" Daphne asked picking the thoughts out of his head. At his nod, she said, "Well what the fuck do they matter at this stage, Justin? I mean he flew here to see you. That has to count for a lot."

Justin flopped on his bed. "I know it should but I'm not the same man I was when we parted ways before Daphne."
"Yeah, don't I know. In your own way, you've turned into miniature Brian Kinney." At his protest, she held up her hand. "Well you have. You're just as afraid of relationships as he was back then. Don't even think about denying it. I know you better than anyone except probably him. To prove my point, what happened with Giovanni?"

Giovanni Ramone was the first man Justin had dated two years after leaving Pittsburgh and after the first "meeting" with Brian. He was as blond as he was, a really nice guy and a dancer with the local ballet company. He should have been everything Justin wanted-artistic, flexible, stable, emotionally available—but there was absolutely no passion between them. Sure there was plenty of fucking but Justin always felt hollow and unfulfilled afterward. "It wasn't right to lead him on, Daphne," Justin said simply.

"And Frederic Marchand? It wasn't right to lead him on either, right? Shall I name the others, too? You couldn't move on from Brian so you stopped trying. That should tell you something." She asked smugly.

"Okay you win. So what I have compared everyone to him. It doesn't mean anything."

She crossed over to him, sitting on the bed and placing her hand on his shoulder. As his cerulean blue eyes met hers she said, "I think it means a helluva lot, Justin, and you owe it to yourself...to Brian to see this through. If it doesn't work out, so what you'll both know but if it does...You both could have this really amazing life. Don't throw that away out of fear and stupidity."

He hugged her. Leave it to Daphne Chanders, his best friend always, to put things in amazing perspective. "Alright, I won't, Daph," he promised. "But I'm also not going to make it easy this time. I may love him but he will either fight for me—for us or watch me walk out and not look back. I can't make him love me, Daph."

Daphne laughed confidently. "So should I put your place up for sale now?"

Justin shook his head and laughed with her.

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"And by the way, Vance hired some new hot shot. Kinda reminds me of you in your former years," Cynthia laughed.

Brian smirked. "That's impossible. There's only and always will be only one me. He's been trying to
replace me for years since I eventually won the core accounts that made up Vanguard. He's not going to be able to play catch-up even with this new guy. Besides my major source of inspiration should be returning in about two days."

Cynthia gasped. "So he's coming back?" She had been worried about Brian regarding Justin. Just as Ted had noticed Brian's habits, so had Cynthia—probably even more so than anyone in his circle. They were more than business associates and she was definitely more than his personal assistant. She was his confidant and had been for more than fifteen years. It was why she had no problem leaving Vanguard to help Brian kick off Kinnetik eleven years ago. She believed in Brian Kinney and he believed in her. "Is he going to stay this time? You know, you shouldn't-"

"He's actually here. Hey, Cynthia," Justin said leaning against the door to Brian's office.

"Nice to see you, Justin," she said embracing him. "How has business been?"

"Nice to see you, too," he said smiling. The last time he'd seen Cynthia was the night he and Brian called off their engagement. They kept in touch due to business needs—she was Brian's personal assistant after all—but never had a chance to see each other with his schedule. "Business is good. In fact I have a meeting in a few days in Rochester." Justin began to lay out all the details of his upcoming meeting with Miranda Miller, a client which came highly recommended from Cynthia.

"I'm glad you decided to help her out Justin. She and her business partner are really talented and deserve every chance at success they can get."

"I'm, can we talk about business later?" Brian interjected before Justin could respond to Cynthia. If they started talking business they would never get past it. Justin was just as driven as Brian and therefore Cynthia by default. "We have some terms and conditions to discuss with our own contract." He lifted a sardonic eyebrow daring Justin to gainsay him. Justin returned his gaze steadily. "Cynthia, has everyone else gone home yet?"

"Yes, everyone else has gone home. Shouldn't you and I do the same?" She laughed. They were often the last two to leave the office.

Brian continued to stare at Justin. "You go on. I'll lock up."

Cynthia leaned in giving another hug to Justin. "Welcome home, baby. See you tomorrow, boss." She chuckled on her way out. She knew how much Brian hated when his staff called him that.
"So you've returned," Brian said pushing off his desk, walking steadily toward the door to his office. He turned the lock on the glass door. The cleaning staff would be in later but he didn't want to be disturbed.

"I said I would be back," Justin said nonchalantly. "I won't lie and tell you I didn't have second thoughts about it."

"Why? What are you unsure of?"

Justin huffed out a breath. "You. Me. Us. You want an actual list?"

Brian smiled. "No, I actually don't need a list. I can probably pick every doubt out of your head right now and I can't say I blame you. I have my doubts, too."

"You? Brian Kinney has doubts? Hell must have frozen over while I've been away," Justin laughed humorlessly.

"Believe it or not, I have been known to have them every five years or so." Brian chuckled. Everyone always thought he was so sure. Mostly Brian calculated, gambled, took risks and refused to accept a loss. It was what made him successful.

"So what are your doubts about this?" Justin asked him.

Brian shook his head. "I won't list them for you if that's what you're asking. I like to live in the solution, not the problem.

"I remember that about you," Justin said softly.

Brian moved to stand directly behind him. He took notice of the rigid way Justin held himself. His spine was ramrod straight, legs slightly apart as if ready to fight, his fists balled the same way. Frustration and nervousness poured off of him in waves reaching Brian. "What else do you remember about me, Justin?" Brian asked just as softly.
"Th-That you don't consider a loss anything more than a learning experience and that you fight hard for what you want," Justin stammered over his answer as Brian touched him. He inwardly gloated in the feel of Justin trying to fight his natural instinct to lean back into him.

"That's right, Justin," Brian said as his body made contact with Justin's. He used his chin to push Justin's shoulder-length hair to the side, exposing the nape of his neck. The same fresh clean scent Justin always wore surrounded Brian as he leaned in to place a soft kiss at the top of Justin's spine. "I fight hard for what I want. My life." Kiss. "My business." Kiss. "My man." Justin trembled under Brian's lips causing a brief smile. "In fact there is something I've wanted to do for the past eleven years that I've owned this place."

"And that is?" Justin moaned breathlessly as Brian's tongue attacked the special spot again and again; his ass pressed against Brian shamelessly.

"Christen my office," Brian said, turning Justin quickly in his arms. He drove his tongue into Justin's surprised yet waiting mouth.

At first taste, Justin was addicted. Brian was always a master of seduction, knowing exactly how to touch him, how to tongue him and where. Kissing Brian was never dull or boring like some of his other lovers left him feeling afterward. His tongue felt like lava in his mouth-hot, wet and all-consuming. Justin settled into the kiss with urgency and with an ease which always surprised him. Brian caught his tongue, sucking it into his mouth causing his dick to jump and twitch incessantly. He pulled deep moans from Justin constantly and Justin couldn't stop them from coming if he wanted to, which he didn't. There was nothing safe or gentle about their exchange. It was raw and sexy and Justin had never felt more alive as Brian took the breath from him replacing it with his own.

His fingers pulled at Brian's hair urging him closer. Cool air caressed his skin from the vents but Justin felt hot. He felt Brian tearing at his button-down shirt; heard buttons pop and skitter across the floor. *Fuck!* Brian knew what he needed before he did. Brian shed the shirt from his body kissing his way down his newly bared torso. Roughly pushing Justin on the couch, Brian followed him down applying his tongue to Justin's ultra sensitive skin. He heard Brian groan as he licked the sweat from him, sounding like a man starved. He bit and sucked his nipples, biting down hard then laving the quick pain away. Justin felt his heart slamming hard against his ribs as Brian kept up the oral assault. Watching Brian work his way down his torso was beyond arousing. His dick felt like stone against the confinement of the cargo pants. Brian continued his descent, inching closer to where Justin wanted his mouth most.

Brian tugged and pulled until his cock spilled out into his waiting hand. The rush of cool air against the head caused Justin's pelvis to buck up of its own volition. Brian lapped the small bead of moisture while still helping Justin out of his pants. The picture of Brian fully clothed while Justin laid naked beneath him was almost too much for Justin to take. His cock leaked constantly at the images his mind conjured. He closed his eyes blocking out all but the sensation.
"Uh-uh. Open your fucking eyes, Justin. I want you to watch," Brian ordered, his voice deep with his own arousal.

Justin opened his eyes slowly. He felt the subtle wetness at their corners but refused to lift a hand to wipe them. It had always been much more than sex with Brian—always emotional for him. He didn't want to feel anything but his impending orgasm at that moment but Brian was determined for him to watch them together. Justin laid there looking Brian directly in the eyes as he quickly shed his clothes. He'd watched Brian undress countless times over the years but none had seemed as important as him watching in the place where they had first fucked in public. It was the Liberty Baths then and not the headquarters of a multi-million dollar company. Justin refocused his attention as Brian pulled a tube of lube and a condom from the drawer of the coffee table.

"Old habits?" Justin asked sarcastically, feeling the more emotional distance he could maintain, the safer he was.

Brian chuckled. "No, a new one since I never know when you're going to show up. We already know I'll want to fuck you wherever we are so I'm prepared for the who, what, when and definitely how. It's like this at home, too, in case you're wondering."

Justin couldn't help but laugh in response. "Ever the romantic."

Brian leaned in capturing his lips again, applying gentle pressure to coax them open. Justin wrapped his tongue around Brian's controlling the speed and depth. Sensuously Justin explored Brian's mouth as he felt the slick fingers caressing the outer ring of his entrance. He moaned heavily as he tongued the roof of Brian's mouth. Justin pushed back against the digits encouraging entry but Brian would not be rushed.

"Calm down, Sunshine. We have all night."

Justin continued to push into Brian's fingers. It had been so long, too long since he'd been fucked royally by Brian Kinney. He kissed him more aggressively when he felt Brian breach him, sighing in relief at the familiar sting of the intrusion. Justin worked himself on his finger, winding and grinding seeking more until Brian added a second finger. He gasped through the kiss, relishing the burn as he steadily pushed back. "Ugh God! Harder!" Justin demanded.

Brian laughed. "You haven't had anyone back here have you?"
Justin stilled, looking Brian into his passion glazed eyes. "How do you know I haven't? I've always had a tight ass, Brian," Justin taunted him but Brian smiled.

"Your ass is as tight as when I last left it and always has been. Feel that?" Brian hit his prostate gland hard causing Justin's body to jolt, his back to bow. "Now do you feel how strongly your ass is sucking on my fingers? It's starved and I'm the only one you let feed it, huh?"

Brian continued to massage the spongy gland reducing Justin to a quivering mass. He added a third finger eliciting the sexiest moan Justin had ever heard from himself. Brian's cock responded to it, too. He hardened further under his ass. Justin wanted nothing more than to swallow the nine inches getting longer and stronger beneath him. He made to do just that when he was held down and a fourth finger added. "Please." The single word tore from his mouth in pleasure and annoyance.

"Please what?" Brian whispered against his ear. "What do you want, Justin? The impending orgasm?" Brian bent his head quickly lapping at the dollop of precum. "Or do you want me in you? Over you? Fucking you?" Brian ground up into his rotating ass with each question driving Justin crazy. He tried to answer but didn't fast enough. Brian hit his gland again causing a soundless whoosh of breath to get stuck in his throat. Justin's eyes rolled back in his head from the sensation. "Your choice."

"Fuck me," he finally breathed out through clenched teeth. He felt light-headed and dizzy from the constant onslaught of excitement plus Brian's words.

"What was that?"

Justin grabbed a handful of Brian's hair, moaning into his mouth making Brian grunt from the painful-pleasure. "Fuck me, NOW!" Justin practically yelled.

Immediately the fingers were replaced with Brian's condom-clad cock, pushing against his well-prepared hole. Justin adjusted his position, bringing his legs higher to place on Brian's shoulders, locking his ankles behind his head. He used Brian's shoulders to leverage himself even higher; heard Brian utter his approval at the silent demand to move faster. He slid home easily within Justin and Justin closed his eyes at the feeling of fullness. I've missed this. God I've missed him. Justin worked his hips trying to get Brian even deeper. He grabbed for the only erogenous zone on Brian reachable in that moment—his ear which he caressed compulsively as Brian began to move strong, steady and sure within him.
"Open your eyes, Sunshine," Brian whispered. It was a struggle but Justin did as he was told. "Keep your eyes locked on mine and take what you want."

It was all Justin needed to hear as he pushed himself up into Brian's cock. He unleashed all of it from beneath him-the anger, the frustration, the loneliness and Brian replaced it with ecstasy, joy and the essence that was uniquely theirs. Mutual moans and groans filled Justin's ears while his eyes were filled with Brian. The same man who had rescued him and his sanity over and over again-the same man who was rescuing him now. A man who lived life on purpose and expected no less from the man he fucked and loved and wanted. Justin had never felt more intensely alive than when he was with Brian naked and sweating, racing toward climax.

He reached for his dick but his hand was captured and held by his head. He heard the momentary interruption in Brian's breathing as he slammed himself into Justin, readjusted to the right then slammed again. "Come now," Brian demanded, once again delivering a punishing thrust to the gland which brought Justin to the precipice of pleasure. He felt himself falling over it, head first into euphoria. His back bowed as he felt Brian's lips crush his, swallowing every yell, yelp; every gasp and groan and he tasted Brian's release in return. It was heady and addictive just like the man himself. His body felt sticky but free; his mind was wrung out but he'd never felt more present and aware. It was the *Brian and Justin* he remembered from the night they met to their last night in Canada; the Brian and Justin who had made love the night he left for New York ten years ago to the day he ran into Brian at the airport. Passion, love and yes-sometimes even a little hate but always, always electrifying.

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Chapter 11 The Return of Sin and Sex by Nichelle Wellesly

Author's Notes:

Okay... so you'll notice that the format is a little different this go round. Some will be like this but not all. I may be able to post up again this weekend but in fairness, I did promise more by March 1st when I began this on February 4th. And here we are...Eleven chapters later!!

I also would like to take this time to thank everyone for the reviews! They truly inspire me to keep going. Good, Bad, Ugly or Indifferent, I value them all so please feel free to drop a line! ♥

Lindsey Petersen-Marcus had finally had enough. After twenty years of being the proverbial punching bag, it was time to do what her heart had been telling her for many years. It was time to leave. She had endured her last critical remark and gesture from Melanie. For the first time ever-well almost ever- she felt like balling her fist and popping Melanie in the mouth. Brian often called her a yapping chihuahua and the description was certainly accurate. Lindsey would have killed for a muzzle a long time ago.

"Gus! Please, Gus hurry up," Lindsey said with tears in her eyes. There was no way she could stay
in the house another minute.

There was no doubt that Mel would always have an issue with Brian Kinney. In all the years they'd been together- and for the two short times they weren't- Melanie constantly put little in mental plugs for Lindsey to break off her relationship with a man who was both her childhood friend and child's father. Of course that was the main source of contention for Melanie. She had wanted someone else, someone amenable to have be Gus' father. The fact that Lindsey disregarded (or flat out rejected) everyone (And who really wanted to have a baby with a man name Hiram anyway? And so what if it was Melanie's cousin, the answer was still no fucking way) she suggested which included an anonymous donor from the sperm bank. Every time there was an issue between the two of them, Melanie would always find some way to remind her of all her faults--the biggest one was having Brian Kinney's only child. Although she had a problem with Brian, she certainly didn't have any trouble using the money he sent. Part of it went into the college fund for Gus. It was not meant to be helping out Melanie's cousin, Rita but it was. How Melanie thought that Lindsey would never find out that over fifteen-thousand dollars was missing remained a mystery. "Gus!"

For his part, Gus took on the sardonic smirk of his father. He had been through the histrionics of his two moms before and didn't believe for one second that his mom, Lindsey, was serious. Turning to his companion at the door looking on he said, "See ya later, J.R. I'm pretty sure it will only be a couple of hours."

The little girl laughed. "Are you going to try to work on them again, Gus?"

"What's the point? Do they ever listen to us anyway? Hopefully this will finish up relatively soon. I have a video game tournament scheduled for the weekend." Shaking his head, while looking down at the dark-haired girl, Gus sighed. If he didn't understand why his father would call their tantrums "Lesbianics" he certainly understood while standing there listening to yet another vase crash to the floor within the house.

"I really wish I was going with you," J.R.-whose real name is Jenny Rebecca- looked up at him. "I hate being here with her when she's in one of her moods. You think Mommy would let me go with you so that Mama can cool off?"

"Gus!"

He rolled his eyes again. God please... "No, J.R., I'd better talk to her alone this time. Besides since they're once again fighting about my dad, it's probably a given that if my mom scoops you up, this will take longer than it should for both of them to get some damn sense."

"Ooh you said a bad word," J.R. said laughing and Gus couldn't help but smile back. He really did love his little sister, although his mom explained to him they weren't really related.

At fifteen, Gus Peterson-Marcus had to have the weirdest family known on the planet. His mom was a lesbian and his father was gay. As if that wasn't enough, his other lesbian mother had a problem with the fact that he loved his father. From the bits and pieces he'd gathered over the years, Brian Kinney and Melanie Marcus- his mama- have never gotten along since the days when Mama met Mommy. Yet both of his moms owe him for meeting each other in the first place and for the commitment ceremony he helped plan when Gus was newly born. Weird. Based on the argument, Gus could only gather that Mommy got meaner than cat piss--something Grandma Debbie always said his mother needed to become to back Mama up off of her case.
He heard his name being screeched again. And Lindsey Petersen never screeched. Bending on his
knee to match J.R.'s height, he pulled her in for a tight hug. "Take care of you, Squirt."

"Take care of you too, Gussie." She pulled him tighter. She was the only one who called him that
especially in times when she was sad.

"Hey...don't worry. I'll be back soon."

"Promise?"

Gus thought a minute. The one thing is father taught him from the time he was six was to never make
a promise he couldn't keep. "I promise that I will do my best. Okay?"

She nodded her head understanding that it was all he could really promise her- and he was grateful
for that. All the lessons he'd learned he taught her as well. As a result she was turning out to be a
helluva soccer player and a Kinney by default. She wasn't shy about asking for what she wanted or
about speaking her mind considering it was hers to speak. He would miss her- be it hours or days-
but when he would be back was really up to their mothers. Lindsey was the calm one with the gentle
voice until she had had enough. Melanie was always aggressive; always shouting when she wanted
to get her point across. By the way Melanie was in the house yelling and the things coming out of
her mouth, it was not going to be as easily resolved as it was just last year when his dad and Justin
left. Before that, he couldn't remember when arguments like the one they were having had not
happened.

With that thought, Gus left J.R. in the doorway, turned gave her one last smile and got in the car
going God only knew where.

*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

"Whoa, Mr. Kinney, twice in the same month you decide to grace your club?"

Brian laughed. "Yeah, Tony it's shocking but let's just say I have a vested interest being here
tonight."

Tony nodded. "Yeah, he looks well. New York seems to have been great for Mr. Taylor."

"It has been. He's been back a week and already has clients he has to see. The kid's a genius but we
all saw that."

"To see what he was like after that awful incident and his hand trouble, then to see what he's
become...it's nothing short of a miracle. I actually own quite a few of his pieces. My sister sent them
to me down from Toronto after I asked her to attend his art show there. Cost me a pretty penny but
they were worth it."

"Wow, Tony, I didn't know you were a collector. Maybe I'm paying you too much," Brian said
laughing.

"Don't even think of cutting back on my salary," Tony said laughing. "No but seriously I own the
security firm you use now. Working here helped me to buy it and as a result, I get to keep working
here where I actually like most of the people and send the others on the assignments I don't want to
do."
"I'm glad it all worked out for you and congratulations on buying the business. I knew Frank Murphy was looking to retire but had no idea he was selling."

"It was a spur of the moment thing. A couple of guys were interested but I was the only one with the ready cash so I bought it. Do you think Mr. Taylor is going to do a show here?"

"I don't know but anything is possible." Brian shrugged.

Brian looked down on the dance floor from the top of his kingdom. Everyone was dressed in white for last holiday of the summer but then every night at the club was like a holiday. After rebuilding, Brian intended for Babylon to be a constant party and on weekends where a holiday was attached it became a poor man's White party weekend. Brian hadn't gone to one for many years, business kept him too busy but he'd had his share of them long since. Babylon was the place where everything was always young and beautiful and none was more so to him than the bubble-butt blond in the center of dance floor sandwiched between two other men. The sight of Justin grinding his tight ass against the man behind him sensuously and bumping pelvises with the man in front of him reminded of Brian of a cobra mesmerizing its prey before striking. His hand tightened against his glass as he continued to watch the man in back bend his head in the crook of Justin's neck; caught the movement of the man's tongue sliding up to the hot spot behind his ear. Justin's eyes were closed, the subtle look of his enjoyment creasing his brow, mouth slightly opened as the tip of his tongue caressed his utterly suckable bottom lip.

Before Brian realized he had moved, he stood to the side of the writhing trio, his pulse throbbing to "Let the Music Use You Up" while remembering the feel of Justin's bare ass pressed against him as he took all of what Brian dished out and begged for more. The sight of Justin's hands gripping both men's heads as they assaulted his neck and groped, caused more images to assail Brian's brain. He heard the small moan and gasp emitting from Justin louder than the deafening music which spurred Brian to action.

Matching his rhythm to Justin's, he brought his arms down effectively separating the interlopers' lips from Sunshine. Moving his forearms further down steadily he broke their holds on the lithe body belonging to him...only him. Snaking his arms around his waist, Brian roughly pulled Justin's body into his own. The tell-tale flush of arousal graced Justin's features and Brian knew it had nothing to do with the other guys but him alone. He held Justin's gaze, silently ordering him not to look away while he locked Justin's hips in place as he performed his own pelvic assault. He leaned in catching Justin's full bottom lip between his teeth, sighing at the contact. Justin Taylor was like air- wanted and vital. The crisp, clean scent of Justin overpowered the usual stench of sweat, sex, cheap cologne and alcohol which usually assailed his nostrils on an event night. His hand eased its way up Justin's side, stopping briefly to pinch the nipple he used to wear an earring in. He relished the sharp intake of breath he heard as his hand continued its ascension to Sunshine's crown and glory. He gripped it firmly knowing it would arouse Justin further. The subtle flair of his nostrils told Brian what he needed- the smell of his aroused male was intoxicating. He could feel Justin's length against his own; knew he was leaking and it was making his own mouth water.

"They didn't do it for you huh, Sunshine?" Brian asked smugly.

"They were alright," Justin answered, a little smirk on his supple lips.

Brian folded his lips to hide his smile. "So how do you want to play this out, Justin?"

"What do you mean?"
"You want to set the boundaries now or wait until..."

"Until when?" Justin licked his lips while still keeping eye contact with him.

The sparkle in those blue eyes confirmed Justin was just as dangerous to his sanity as he had been fifteen years ago and even more sexy, although Brian wasn't sure how that was even possible. He had been like a can of soda to a man who had been on a diet of water his entire life. He was refreshing, sweet to taste and effervescent; the magnetism that first caught Brian's interest had only gotten stronger with time. Everything about Justin Taylor screamed sin- he was always Brian's 'apple'. "Until after I fuck you so hard you'll be afraid to sit, to stand or lay down for a week."

"Oh really?" Justin teased and taunted him, worrying his bottom lip in the process.

In response, Brian spanked his ass quick and heavy-handed before squeezing the cheeks hard. The startled reaction from Justin caused him to chuckle at another memory from the morning after they'd met. He caressed the sting through the thin white linen pants Justin wore. "Want to test me and find out, Sunshine?" Damn! He looks fucking hot in white. A cheeky devil wrapped up in angel wear. Brian was even more turned on by the idea of Justin's innocent look when he knew a completely different side of Justin. No one else knew the side of him which liked to be tied up and fucked roughly or the side of him that could get off just by giving a blow job without requiring anything other than a twist of his nipple; the man he could make love to one minute as a bossy bottom but who was a demanding dominant with everyone else but him.

"What do you want, Brian?"

Brian thought about it. "Same rules as before but there's one other thing..."

"And that is?" Justin asked, raising an eyebrow.

"No one gets into this ass but me," Brian said, putting action to his words. "What do you want?"

Justin dropped his eyes momentarily as if debating with himself. Brian still held him close, waiting patiently for him to come to his own decision. They had separated all those years ago for the same reasons- for Justin to grow, to decide what he wanted and live with the results. It was what he wanted, what he needed and entering into this arrangement wasn't any different than that. "I want honesty. That's it. Full disclosure, no bullshit this time. No games or hiding what you think you know when you really don't but instead of asking..." Justin let his sentence trail off for a moment. "If you have a question about me and my life-ask. You think you can handle that, Brian?"

So that's what's been keeping him from me. He doesn't trust me. Brian's natural inclination was just to dodge the whole idea. If he didn't trust him by now after everything they had meant to each other than what the fuck were they doing? "Yes," he heard himself say instead. "I can handle that. You know that goes both ways, Justin."

"Really?" At Brian's slight nod, Justin released the breath he didn't realize he held. Brian Kinney does not do open book but for Justin it seems they both had some growing up to do and fleshing out to do. But if Brian was willing to try, why shouldn't he? With that realization, Justin relaxed a little. "Fine, Mr. Kinney. I'll give you what you're asking me for: three months to decide if what we had is still there or if not, if it can be remade into something real and better. And in return you give
me complete honesty."

Brian brought Justin into his body and kissed him, greedily drinking from him, tongue-fucking him in the middle of the dance floor without a care of who knows or sees...sealing the deal their way—with fire, passion and promise. Justin Taylor was his and had always been. Anyone who said otherwise be damned.

*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Michael walked into Babylon almost stunned senseless by the crowd and sophisticated decor on the upper floor. He hadn't been in the club except twice since its grand re-opening ten years prior. He and Ben had decided to venture out for Labor Day since their schedules allowed for some party time and relaxation. He spotted two familiar figures over by the bar. Taking Ben's hand they made their way through the crowd of writhing bodies and loud music.

Patting his prey on the ass and deepening his naturally high voice he said, "Hey Nellie bottom, how about a little fisting in that nice tight ass?"

"What the hell kind of...Michael," Emmett practically squealed as he turned with his Cosmo in hand. "Hey ya, Sweetie. Hey Ben. What brings you two out of your love nest to mingle with us single boys?"

"We finally got a free moment. The last few years have been kind of crazy with Ben's book tour and Hunter going off to college then graduating. It's weird actually having my box of Captain Crunch and cookies still be where I left them."

"Yeah and now when he forgets where he put them he blames me," Ben interjected.

Michael tapped Ben on his shoulder. They were still newlyweds by all accounts from Debbie who saw them more than any of the others. Michael had been dividing his time between trips to Canada to see his daughter, Jenny Rebecca and touring with Ben whose book "The Gift Giver" had sparked international interests about an underground group of gay men seeking out HIV-positive men to infect them. Ben had been living with HIV for almost sixteen years and despite a few medical issues had managed to stay healthy and continued to show little effects of the virus.

"So where's Brian? I thought for sure he'd be in the middle of the party tonight?"

"He is," Emmett answered vaguely.

"Okay so I should say 'hello' since I'm here, Em. Where is he?"

Ben and Emmett exchanged a brief look. Michael and Brian's friendship had drifted apart ten years ago and although they would always love each other, Brian had distanced himself allowing Michael to grow up and be the married man he was. Whereas Ben understood and was grateful, Michael had not. Friends since grade school it was difficult for him to process the different paths their lives had taken.

"There is something you should probably know before you see him, Mikey."

"What?" Michael shrugged. "He hasn't been hurt or lost his mind like he did when he tried scarfin..."
when he turned thirty, has he?"

"He tried what?" Emmett asked.

"Scarf- you know what-never mind that," Michael said quickly. "So what has he been up to? Is he in the backroom which is why you don't want to tell me where he is?"

"Actually he isn't in the backroom," Emmett said, taking another sip of his Cosmo. "He's dancing."

"Well that's a good thing. It means life is still normal for Brian Kinney. No matter what happens keep dancing," Michael said chuckling remembering when he and Brian had that same conversation standing where they were by the bar.

"Baby, I think what Emmett is trying to tell you..."

Michael looked past Emmett staring at Brian who had stopped by the bar with a little blond tucked under his arm. Not just any blond- the blond who had changed everything about Brian Kinney. Michael's eyes widened in shock then narrowed in contemplation at the fact that Justin Taylor was back in town and attached to Brian again. The siamese twins born twelve years apart. Bullshit! "What the fuck's he doing back here?"

"Well honey, last I checked it was a free country and people could live and move where they want," Ben said.

"That's not what I meant and you know it, Ben."

"Well what exactly did you mean? And why does it matter what you meant?"

"I mean isn't he supposed to be in New York. Melanie said his career was doing really well. Why come back to the Pitts if he's such a success?"

Emmett cleared his throat. "Brian asked him back, Michael. For your information it was never really over between those two and if I have my way it never will be."

"What are you talking about, Emmett? We all had to pick up the pieces of Brian Kinney when Justin left. You saw him."

"No. What we saw was workaholic, fuckaholic Brian Kinney. Had you been around you would have seen a lot more," Emmett said holding up his hand at Michael's protest. "That wasn't a dig at your schedule but a lot has happened with Brian these past ten years. You didn't pick up a phone to call him and based on your reaction he hasn't called you. The bottom line is Justin and Brian make
each other happy. Without each other they're fucking miserable. Justin is back at Brian's request. Anything else you want to know, you'll have to ask him yourself.” He looked over at the two smiling into each others' faces, bodies so close a quarter could fit between them. "My God. Would you look at that? They look like sin and sex personified." Emmett couldn't help but smile. He looked back at Ben and Michael, the latter looking decidedly not happy.

"They always have. Babe come on, let's dance," Ben said throwing Emmett an ‘uh-oh' look. "That is why we came out tonight, isn't it?"

"Yeah...sure. See ya, Em." Michael and Ben headed off to the dance floor with Michael's head still at the bar with a vision he'd thought never to see again...Brian Kinney with Justin Taylor.

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To say Michael Novotny was not happy was the understatement of the fucking year. Admittedly, he and Brian had never fully resolved their issues from ten years ago in which they both were at fault. It was during the custody battle of his daughter, J.R., which in retrospect was fairly pointless since after the bombing of the club he stood in, Melanie and Lindsey had sought to move his daughter and Brian's son to Toronto, where they could grow up feeling loved and safe. The thing that hurt Michael was Brian had taken Lindsey's side when in reality the problems within her marriage to Melanie was her fault. There was never a good reason to be unfaithful but Brian had seen nothing wrong with what happened. To him it wasn't any of his business and he'd advised Michael to mind his. When confronted about hiring an attorney, Michael had explained he was just trying to protect his rights when the truth was he was not happy being raised in single parent home and thought he and Ben as a committed couple could do a better job. So after hearing Lindsey's side, Brian had decided to hire a lawyer for her. Michael confronted him about it, accusing him of not taking his ‘best friend's' feelings into consideration in favor of Lindsey who he had known for a shorter time. Brian nonchalantly pointed out that Lindsey had a right to be there too since technically she was there from conception to birth and in actuality more than Michael; that he was being judgmental and sanctimonious. It wasn't until the hearing that he had learned Melanie had cheated on Lindz back in his David-Pre Ben days, when he had been basking in the glow of snobbery and high society. Still that didn't make up for them lying to him about who was going to care for their daughter. What Michael had learned the hard way was that in a custody battle, no one stays clean- not even him and that was the harshest lesson of all. But that whole debacle was the least of his worries.

Justin Taylor was back...and at Brian's request.

Of all the people in the world, the one person Michael would never want Brian to hook up with is Justin Taylor. The cool blond trick had sunk his claws into Brian when he was just seventeen and apparently had not relinquished his hold on him. Okay, okay so they were pretty well matched- both beautiful, both brilliant in their own ways and both liked butt-fucking- either pitching or catching. Both were the bosses in the Backroom and their exploits at the former Liberty baths were legendary but that wasn't the point. The point was that Justin was a user who took from Brian and all he gave was heartbreak in return. He had admitted long ago that he was jealous of Justin but he also he didn't want to see Brian hurt. But admitting it was one thing, accepting it- another and no matter how out of touch they had been in recent years, Brian was still his best friend. It was his job to protect him the same way they always protected each other.
His mind flashed back to the Rage party fourteen years ago. He recalled the look on Brian's face when Justin walked out with his fiddler, leaving Brian standing there looking...broken. In all the years they'd known each other, he had never seen Brian look so dejected. Sure he'd found shirtless boy wonder number four-thousand-four-hundred-eighty-five and went back to being cock of the walk but Michael had seen the hurt. Later when Michael had voiced his opinion about Justin and the way he had treated Brian, he got punched in the eye. Admittedly, he deserved it for suggesting that Brian should have let Justin die when he'd gotten bashed. Although he didn't mean it the way it sounded, he meant the venom in every word. Michael was pissed off for Brian who apparently didn't have enough sense to be pissed off for himself. Saying that was the only way to get a reaction out of Brian who insisted that Justin didn't do anything wrong. He didn't mean for everyone to get up in Brian's face about it but he said nothing about why they disagreed and neither did Michael. For them it was just another episode in the 'Brian and Mikey Show' and it blew over with time but the fact still remained that Justin was responsible. Even years later when they called off the wedding by all accounts it was Justin's fault.

Michael remembered walking into Brian's loft the day after the little asshole left for New York. It wasn't exactly a good time for Pittsburgh with the bombing that happened a few weeks prior but Michael had been worried anyway. It wasn't like Brian to sit at home working when there was drinking to be had and beautiful boys to do. So Michael had dragged him out to the very first place they danced in public...Babylon. As they danced around in the rubble Michael, who had spoken to Ted prior, had suggested he rebuild. At first it was a way to get his mind off the fact that Justin was gone and not coming back. Secondly, Babylon was the place where Brian Kinney could become Brian Kinney-Wonderfuck again. Michael had always thought that Brian and Babylon went together like Batman and the Bat-cave-one was incomplete without the other. So Brian had reopened the club and rebuilt his life equipped with barb wires and fortified electric gates around his heart. Brian was once again as emotionally strong as he was physically- a strong tower who they could all go to whether in need or not. He had survived. Michael would be damned if he'd let Justin Taylor come in and destroy the house that Brian Kinney built....again.

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Groggily, Brian cracked open his eyes, blinded by sunlight peering inconsiderately through the blinds. He'd forgotten to close them last night before leaving for the club. He couldn't even remember how or what time they'd gotten in from the White party at Babylon but he remembered the single kiss which turned into a raging fire. It always had been and would always be that way with them- a claiming and reclaiming, possession and obsession; a resultant act of occupying the same space and time. He had never felt more worshiped than when Justin kissed him from head to toe or when he had returned the favor to the endless horny and satisfied sounds from his lover. Brian smiled at the memory as the pleasurable aches coursed through his arms and legs, a result from having the most insatiable man he'd ever known in his bed.

Brian shifted minutely, leaning over the shoulder of the man he loved beyond all reason. Justin's hair partially concealed his face, his full lips slightly parted; one hand cradled his face as the other clutched the pillow as he would a lifeline. *He looks undeniably peaceful, beautiful even in sleep.* Rolling over briefly, Brian rummaged through the bedside table looking for the small digital camera he kept there, an old habit from when the loft was robbed. Every time he bought something new, he took a picture of it in the unlikely event it would happen again. Settling himself as he was behind Justin but not to stir or wake Justin, he raised the camera high and right in front of the sleeping man's
face hoping for the perfect angle. The first click caused Justin to shift a little but hadn't awaken him fully. The second and third didn't bother him at all. Few knew or understood his love of photography but the man in his arms did. It was another thing in a long list of Kinney-isms that only Justin Taylor had intimate knowledge of. Even though he didn't know everything about Brian, he knew more than most.

Justin stirred again, blindly feeling around for the hand gripping his waist. Brian moved it a little out of reach to his thigh but decided to let him catch it. Justin gripped it, eyes still closed and slid it up his thigh to his package settling it over Brian's hand. The small whimper which escaped him made Brian go from morning hard on to raging hard on. Unable to resist the temptation, Brian kissed the exposed shoulder before him, trailing his tongue up to the sensitive spot behind Justin's shell-like ear. He gained satisfaction when the Justin unconsciously pushed back against him. Brian continued his assault on Justin's slumber-addled senses; kept reaping the rewards of the subtle movements and sighs asking for more of the warring sensations.

"You should really expand the business to giving personal wake-up service," Justin moaned, pushing his hair back. "HM...so much better than coffee."

"Well you're kind of a hard temptation to resist." Brian kissed the exposed nape of his neck, nipping gently at the sleep-warmed skin. "Do you really have to go to Rochester today?"

"Unfortunately, yes I do. I told Cynthia's friend I'd drive in today. Besides you have to go into the office, too," Justin rolled over to face him smiling into his hazel eyes. Not for the first time, Brian understood why Debbie had given Justin the name ‘Sunshine.' He was fucking picture perfect-eyes the color of a cloudless, cerulean blue sky, and a smile as bright. "Emmett and Drew told me you guys have a meeting today. You can’ blow them off especially since you aren't going to New York indefinitely this time."

Brian reached up, pushing the long blond strands which momentarily shielded Justin's eyes. He always had an incurable fascination with it even when he'd cut it all off years ago during the Pink Posse days. It was soft as the finest silk and smelled of the lemon verbena shampoo he always used. "How long will you be gone this time?"

"I'll be back by Friday."

"Friday? Why so long?" Brian buried his nose into the stubble under Justin's chin, inhaling the scent that was uniquely his. It was just many of a thousand reasons he'd missed waking up next to him.

"Hmm," Justin moaned as he raised his head to allow full access to his throat. "Yeah. According to Miranda, there are some others who may be interested in my work and are friends of hers. You've heard of ReadMo Publishing?"

Brian nodded. "Yeah I've heard of them. Damn gutsy broads who have managed to compete with the top pub agencies in NYC even though they are remotely located and I hear they're expanding."
"Which is why I have to go to Rochester today." Justin finished with that superior smile Brian always found comical and adorable.

"Okay, okay you've made your point Mr. Business. I'm almost tempted to offer you a job to remove the competition."

Justin leaned in giving a quick lick to Brian's bottom lip. "You couldn't afford me."

"You're sure?" Brian deepened the kiss until it left them both breathless.

"What did you have in mind?"

"This..." And he proceeded to show him all the perks and advantages to having Brian Kinney as his boss.

*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

After five years of being stuck in a Federal prison in another state, former Police Chief Jim Stockwell was happy to be back in Pittsburgh. The trial itself was long and drawn out. It had taken five years from the time they indicted him for all the evidence to be collected. They began from the time he was a beat cop, questioned all his promotions-every single case he'd ever been involved in was brought before the committee and thoroughly examined. Unfortunately his high-priced attorney couldn't legally object to any of it because of his standing in the community. He was supposed to be a pillar of the community, not the criminal in question. It didn't help that Mayor Deekins wouldn't let any stone be left unturned. Something could be said for the good "upstanding" mayor, although Jim couldn't think of anything other than that he's a hypocrite who didn't understand his place within society's hierarchy.

Although none of his peers wanted to convict him, they realized to not do so would result in chaos within the city and expose their own shortcomings and jeopardize their own standing within the community of "entitlement by birthright." So Stockwell became the sacrificial lamb since he was born on the wrong side of the tracks. He had been in touch with many of them who apologized for disassociating themselves with him during his botched campaign but they were still in support of him and his agenda...yada, yada, yada. They would have ample time to prove their loyalty to the cause after he settled some old scores. He lost his wife and kids; his career but most of all he lost his respect. And that could never be tolerated.

Jim took a deep breath, allowing the familiar smell to fill his lungs. He'd always loved the city of his birth. He missed the sight and stench of the Susquehanna River. He missed having his pick of the best restaurants and his suits. Hell he even missed his barber but most of all he missed his sense of purpose. It was time he regained that and he knew exactly where to begin.
Cynthia had never been more tempted to punch someone in the throat as she was looking at Michael Novotny. But in her position as Brian's assistant for more than fifteen years, she kept her features neutral as she responded to his inquiry. "No he isn't in yet, Michael and I'm not sure I know what time he will be. He has meetings all day. Why not just go by his place?"

"I went to the loft. He wasn't there."

*My God. Can't he do anything other than whine?* She had the immediate urge to laugh. Brian hadn't lived full-time at the loft for the better part of nine years but had neglected to tell his closest friend. In fact, Cynthia didn't think anyone outside of her and Emmett knew and she wasn't about to start divulging information just to set anyone's mind at ease- especially his. "You can always leave him a message, Michael. Other than that I don't know what to tell you. We have visitors regarding two of our major accounts in town and I know he'll be spending a great deal of time with them. It's the best that I can do."

She watched him debate with himself over what he'd been told and sent up a silent prayer that Brian would stay out of the office until she could handle him. Cynthia had been silent for many years about her feelings regarding Michael Charles Novotny but she wasn't about to remain that way. She stood still as he and certain other members of the group Brian called family took and abused his kindness repeatedly or blamed him for their misfortunes. She'd watched as they constantly meddled and interfered with his relationship with Justin.

She looked up at the painting hanging in the lobby of Kinnetik. The passion, love and optimism Justin displayed in it was evident in every line and brush stroke; the vivid colors reaching into the voyeur who looked upon it regardless of its intended subject. Cynthia remembered when Brian had ordered the painting removed from the loft to be hung in the lobby. When she had asked why not in his private office, she understood the blank stare he'd given her. It was too painful to be in such close proximity of the work without remembering the exact moment of its creation. Justin's work was always brilliant but even more so when things went right between he and Brian.

"Okay, Cynthia," Michael said. "Will you tell him that I was by and to call me as soon as he's free. I've missed him and feel like we haven't been around each other since forever."

"That's because you haven't been, asshole. "Sure, Michael," she answered noncommittally. If she had her way she'd never tell him but there was a good chance that he'd found out Justin was back and now felt the need to run interference. Some people were just so fucking transparent.

Watching him leave, Cynthia realized that if two of her favorite people (although she would always be more loyal to Brian) were going to have a real shot at finally getting it right, she needed reinforcements. She raced back to her office, closing the door behind her. Snatching her phone off the receiver, she punched in the code to the security desk advising them to make sure every time Michael Novotny came by the office she was notified and Brian was not in. Since Michael had decided to put the friendship which had meant so much to Brian at one point in their lives on ice, Brian should have the option to defrost it or not. She was tired of watching Brian be on the shelf until needed. The second phone call would take a lot more time and patience than what Job had when being afflicted and tested by the devil. The mental picture created by that thought sent a shiver up her
spine which she promptly shook off. Dialing the number carefully since it was an international call, she tapped her foot in impatience for the phone to stop ringing.

"Hello."

"Hey Colby, climb out the pussy for a minute," she said by way of greeting causing a resultant laugh on the other end.

"You do know me well. What can I do you for, my beautiful cousin."

She smiled broadly. "How soon can you be on a plane?"

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The drive to Rochester from Pittsburgh wasn't nearly as bad as Justin had anticipated. In retrospect the four-and-a-half hours it took was less tedious than having to endure a layover in Philadelphia since there weren't any direct flights into Rochester International. He parked his car on Route 104 and decided to grab a bite to eat at a restaurant Cynthia had recommended called Goode's.

Bordering the Genessee River, the restaurant served as a diner, catering hall and a place where power lunches or romantic dinners could be held. Cynthia had said that the owner Paul, was Rochester's answer to Emmett Honeycutt which was kinda hard to believe. Emmett was one of a kind who could cook people happy. She'd also mentioned that she called ahead and told him to expect Justin. The view from the inside of the restaurant offered a pristine, unobstructed view of the river and Justin wished so badly that he had his brushes with him or that he'd thought to bring Brian's camera. Brian would have loved it.

The events of the past evening and the morning were puzzling to a degree and Justin had an awful lot to think about. He knew Brian had changed in a sense and it had nothing to do with age or their situation. He was always settled in himself and self-assured but for a man who didn't believe in caging Justin, he was a bit more possessive than he'd been previously. Almost like he was no longer afraid of the other "C" word...commitment. That was the problem with them as a couple. Justin smiled at that "C" word. A lot of those seemed to be applying to Brian and Justin lately. Perhaps their definitions had changed over the years which was entirely possible since they had both grown and lived more apart than together. One thing Justin was sure of was that he had at least a piece of Brian's heart whereas Brian owned his whole one. Could he just settle for the piece?

"Mr. Taylor. Your table is ready," the hostess called.

Turning away from the magnificent view and his wayward thoughts, Justin followed her to the back of the restaurant. The view was still of the river but from a different angle and Justin found himself in awe once again. Unlike the view in the front of the building where there was a noticeable bend in the waterway, his new view allowed for nothing but water as far as the eye could see. The sun glistened
off the gentle waves and Justin found himself once again wrapped up in its beauty.

"Justin? Justin Taylor?"

He turned slowly toward the familiar voice in both shock and disbelief. What the fuck was Jason Dumas doing in New York...Rochester of all places? "Hello, Jason. It's been a long time." And if I had my way it would have been forever.

Jason Dumas was God's gift to a gay man if one liked that sort. Athletic, smart, tall, funny with a damn good cock and dick-sucking lips. Storm gray eyes, wavy black hair and a smile that screamed 'bend over.' They had met on Justin's last night in Hollywood while he was doing a last run of the club scene before boarding the flight back to Pittsburgh the next morning. At the time, Jason was there to interview with one of the top real estate agencies on the west coast. They became fast friends, had a one-night stand and Justin boarded his flight and never looked back. A few years after Justin relocated to New York, they ran into each other at one of Justin's art shows in an NYC gallery. Although Jason wanted to resume things, it wasn't possible as he had a date and Justin didn't believe in getting in the way of a relationship although Jason was a tempting piece as he always was. He'd had too much of that with the Brian/Mikey show. The last time they met Justin was involved with Frederique who wasn't into open relationships- another detour from what Justin was accustomed to. That was the last time he and Jason saw each other. Justin later admitted that the only reason he was thoroughly attracted to Jason was because of his similarity to Brian Kinney.

"Yeah it has. What are you doing in my town? Tired of L.A. already?" He took a seat without waiting for an invitation.

"Business. As far as L.A. goes, I missed home."

Jason nodded. "I can understand that which is why I came back here. By the way, I heard your shows have been doing really well. The Toronto showing sold out so congratulations are in order."

"Thanks."

The silence was a bit telling. Jason of course was completely comfortable whereas Justin wasn't sure what the hell was going on with him. The only time Justin experienced visceral reactions was within close proximity to Brian which was impossible. Maybe what Brian said was true about him...that he was attracted to power. Looking back over most of his interactions, Justin thought some truth could be applied to the theory especially considering the very real attraction he felt looking at the man in the Boss suit across from him.

"Have you met Paul yet?" Jason asked smiling.

"No. Not yet. My boyfriend's assistant set the reservation for me. After that I have a meeting to get to." Justin was glad he'd decided to change into his suit an hour ago at the rest stop along Interstate
490. He knew the navy blue Ralph Lauren was perfect as opposed to looking like a high school kid on his first job interview.

"Boyfriend, huh?" Jason asked with a sardonic smirk. "Anyone I know."

Justin laughed. "I doubt it even though considering how much you fuck that might be impossible."

Jason returned the laughter. "Yeah well it's better than becoming a mass murderer, right?" Jason took a peek at his watch. "Tell you what. I know you're going to be in town for a few days, how about we have dinner tonight and then I'll show you my city. There's not much to see but plenty of bars to hop. Sound good?"

Truthfully, Justin would have declined the offer and just gone to bed. Between reconnecting with Brian and the constant travel of the leading up to visiting the Pitts, he was tired as hell. But it was nice of Jason to show him the town since he would be designing logos and getting a feel for the environment was definitely a plus. "Okay, I'll meet you back here. What time is good for you?"

Jason flashed that million-dollar-smile many men (and women) lauded him for and Justin felt a little flip in the pit of his stomach. "How's five-thirty?"

"Great," Justin answered. The sooner I get this over with, the sooner I can get some fucking sleep. Brian wore me out. "Should I make the reservation on my way out or will you take care of it."

"No need for either," Jason said rising from the table. "Hey Paul."

"You're hitting on my guest already, Jason? Have you no fucking decency? The man just got into town and he's here on business. I swear your dick is always twitching."

Jason laughed loudly. "Calm down, dude. Justin and I are old friends and for the record you already know how I feel about decency- it's a fucking waste of time. As far as my dick goes, I would offer to show it to you if LaShawn wouldn't kick my ass."

"You're damn right his pretty ass will kick yours. Now take your ass to work and ask Monique if she wants me to send lunch over to her."

Justin sat there listening in awe. They really did sound like Emmett and Brian. "Monique McRae?" Paul answered, "Yeah. You know her?"

Justin shook his head. "Not yet but I have a meeting with her on Wednesday, I think. I have to double check with my assistant but I'm meeting with Miranda Miller later today."
"Well then you'll probably get to meet LaShawn today as well," Paul said. "They're business partners."

"And a prettier motherfucker you'll never meet," Jason added. "That's why we call him 'Shine'. I really think we should have ‘Sexy M.F.’ t-shirts made up."

"You know what Jason....if I didn't love Jeremiah so much, I would throw your ass in the oven and cook you," Paul said laughing.

Justin laughed too. He'd often thought that Jason would land himself in a heap of trouble one day. "Who's Jeremiah?"

"I thought you said he was an old friend, Jason."

"He is but he doesn't know about Jer. Jeremiah is my twin brother, Justin," Jason said smiling at the look of shock on Justin's face.

"Holy shit, there are fucking two of you? Identical?"

"Yeah only difference is that his eyes are blue and he's a professor at the local college. Hey I'll bring him with me tonight, okay?"

"Sure. After knowing you, this is definitely something I have to see," Justin said disbelievingly and shaking his head. That was like Brian Kinney having a twin. Justin suppressed the urge to shiver.

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Daphne was exhausted, not just physically emotionally. On an ordinary day, being a trauma specialist wasn't easy. But then there were the days when, she wished she could hide, crawl under a rock, sleep or die- it didn't matter. She'd just saved Drew Boyd's ex-wife, Ciara and her unborn child which she felt good about. That would have been devastating for Drew even though he was with Emmett. By all accounts they were still friends even though they had moved on with their lives after Drew came out ten years ago. That wasn't what had Daphne upset although the car pile-up was not easy to deal with. After she finished the surgery for Ciara and it was time to talk to the family to let them know she would live and so would the child.

"Hey Jan is the family here for Ciara Marshall?"

"Yes, Dr. Chanders. The family is here but there's something you should know," Jan answered Daphne.

"What is there more information that wasn't included in the chart?" Daphne grabbed it and began scanning through it making sure she hadn't missed any pertinent details.
"Not exactly but-"

"Daphne! How's Ciara?" Dr. Steve Marshall came up behind her, eyes wide and frantic.

"Honey she's fine. I was just about to call for her husband. Obviously you would know who he is so can you point me to him?"

The nurses station instantly got quiet. Daphne noticed a few sharp intakes of breath and a sense of foreboding settled into her stomach as she looked at Steve who would not make eye contact with her. Daphne couldn't believe how guilty he looked before he actually said the words.

"You're looking at him, Daph."

"You son-of-a-bitch," Daphne growled low at him. "In fucking five years it never occurred to you to tell me you were married?" Realizing they had an audience, Daphne pulled on the cloak of her professionalism and delivered a complete list of issues, concerns, the prognosis and the surgical procedures performed. "If there is anything else you need to know, you should ask Dr. Blake. Other than that I have nothing else to say to you now or ever."

"Wait, Daphne. I don't want Dr. Blake. I would rather you take care of her. I trust you."

"What you want is no longer a factor in what I choose to do. Professionally, I'm handing your case over to Dr. Blake because I have a conflict of interest now. Personally my view of the situation and what you want is that you can go fuck yourself with a giant syphilis-infected dick and that's as far I can go right now."

With those parting words, Daphne found Dr. Blake in the break room and advised him that she had a personal stake in the patient's health and although she did her duty as the trauma specialist on duty, she could no longer continue with the case. Changing from her scrubs, she showered quickly in the Doctor's lounge and redressed in her t-shirt and yoga pants-suitable for the over-warm September night- and left the hospital. Only then did she allow her tears to fall.

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"Thanks for agreeing to see me on such short notice, Craig."

Craig Taylor poured himself a scotch and a glass of water from the bar area in the living room of his home. "No problem, Jim. I had heard you would be home any day. Where are you staying?"

He accepted the glass of water gratefully. It had been forever since he'd had bottled water. "I'm staying with the Hobbs family for right now. After my trial, my ex-wife cleared out the joint account, sold the house and moved. I don't know where she and the boys are now. Thank God, I had the forethought to set up an injured reserve so I wouldn't be completely broke when I came out. Which
brings me to my reason for wanting to see you."

"Oh?" Craig sat up straighter still nursing his drink. "How can I help you?"

"I need to know everything you know about your son and his partner."

"The only son I have is my youngest."

"You still don't acknowledge the other?" Jim took another sip of water.

"As far as I'm concerned, he's dead to me. I wish him nothing but the best in his life but he's no longer a factor in mine. As far as his partner is concerned: I heard they parted ways ten years ago but Brian Kinney is still a big, fat fucking success. In fact, his firm is the most successful in the eastern part of the country and is still growing constantly. They've just moved over into international territory. His power base has expanded greatly within the last five years alone."

Stockwell sat silently, absorbing all he heard and what Craig Taylor hadn't said. "You're remarkably well-informed, Craig."

Craig laughed. "I still do business with Vanguard so it pays to pay attention." Craig sipped his scotch again. "But you still haven't told me what you have in mind." "I'm not sure yet but when the time comes I need to know whether you're in or out."

"Tell you what, Jim, there's nothing I would like than to pay Kinney back for costing me my family. Everything was fine before he came along. So you let me know what you have in mind and I'll let you know what I can contribute to it. Fair?"

Jim nodded. "That's fair. I'll be in touch."

Brian was knee deep in storyboards for the latest Kinnetik campaign which just happened to be Emmett's. Between his clothing line and the new campaign for his catering service which is constantly expanding, Brian wasn't sure if he'd have the patience of Job to deal with yet another domestic partner dispute between the mother of his child and the woman who thought she was everyone's mother, including Lindsey's. "I don't feel like dealing with 'Smelly Mellie' today, Cynthia. Can you just take a message?"

"Yeah, I can although."
"Although?" Brian looked hard at Cynthia but she wasn't intimidated. He let a small smile form on his lips as he realized she never was even when he roared his demands. She would just stand there looking as calm as ever until he came back to himself. He sighed deeply realizing that until she spoke her piece she wasn't going to do what he needed. "What is the actual problem this time, Cyn?"

She smiled at him then understanding that the same way she was capable of reading him, he was able to read her determination as well. Theirs was a rare employer/employee relationship but then that was to be expected after so many years. "I'll get rid of Melanie although I think she's calling because of your visitors in the lobby. Ted needs the go ahead to send O'toole's account to collections- even though he knows you'll approve it, he wants the memo anyway for legal. Then there is the deadline for the art department and what you want done for Em's company." She finished with a small smile on her lips at the stunned look on his face. "Oh and you have a meeting in an hour with the new head of security for Kinnetik. I'll have Tony meet you for the introductions."

Brian nodded finally being able to process all the information Cynthia shoved into his brain. How the fuck did she keep up with all that without a PDA? "Who's in the lobby? I didn't have another appointment this afternoon before security, did I?"

"Nope," she answered smiling. "This was a complete surprise and yes I know how much you hate them but humor your guests anyway will you?" Brian sighed deeply again. He was missing Justin already but it was business as usual for both of them. He briefly remembered the kiss they shared before Brian left the house. He knew if he didn't leave then that both of them would have still been holed up in the house, fucking multiple times in every room. Brian was instantly grateful he was behind his desk and could adjust himself without Cynthia noticing. "Show them in, Cyn and it better be worth it."

She chuckled softly. She noticed where Brian's thoughts took him and of whom he'd been thinking of at that moment. It was the same way with Justin. Brian's eyes would always take on a subtle, dream-like quality although the rest of his handsome face would stay stoic in comparison. It was something no one would ever notice unless they knew Brian Kinney well and Cynthia knew him very well. She left the office returning with Gus and Lindsey.

"Dad!" Gus threw himself into his dad who had by then stood up from behind the desk. It was amazing to see the two of them together-identical except for the eye color. Gus looked exactly as his father had at fifteen-beautiful. Same hair cut, same nose, same skin tone and angular chin. He smiled at Brian and Cynthia's breath caught in her throat. Lindsey did the same thing. Watching Gus grow up, they all knew he would grow to look like Brian but they had not anticipated how much. The only differences was that Gus' voice was in the middle of changing and sometimes it causes a little squeak which Lindsey found adorable and that he was still a little shorter than his dad.

"Sonny-boy! What are you guys doing here? I'm fairly certain I know since your wife has been calling my phone all damn day but I want to hear it from you."

"I'll leave you alone to have your visit," Cynthia said and was backing out of the room when Lindsey stopped her.
"If it's all the same to you, I would really like you to stay," Lindsey said quietly and Cynthia could feel the slight tremor in the hand that held onto her arm.

"Sure, Lindsey. I guess it would be better than trying to remind Brian of what he was supposed to tell me later anyway."

That earned a watery chuckle from Lindsey as Cynthia led her over to the plush cream colored sofa near the conference room of the massive office.

"Lindsey are you sure you want to discuss this now with Gus here. I mean there's always later when-" Brian let his words trail off at the faint shake of her head. "He knows everything, Brian and may even be able to fill in the blanks for you that I am unwilling or unable to."

"Okay, so what's going on? And why is Melanie calling my office phone every sixteen minutes?"

"I don't give a fuck if she calls every three second, Brian, I'm not going back-to Toronto or to her," Lindsey said more forcefully than either of them had ever heard her. Lindsey's WASP upbringing frowned upon high emotions and foul language.

Brian and Cynthia exchanged meaningful looks as Gus rushed over to sit with Lindsey, throwing an arm around her stiff shoulders. She literally vibrated with anger.

"Alright, Lindsey, you don't have to go back. You're a grown woman so the decision is completely yours." Brian crossed his arms over the front of his chest, his ankles one over the other and made himself reasonably comfortable on the front of his desk. "Now what could have happened in a year's time that has you ready to throw twenty years of your life out the fucking window?"

He stood there almost afraid to move—to breathe for fear that Lindsey wouldn't tell him. She was one of his oldest and dearest friends. The subtle graying at her temples which had not been there when he and Justin arrived at her doorstep a year ago and spent two weeks in their home didn't add up to the frayed woman who sat before him. Every couple had their share of problems...Justin and his non-relationship proved that fundamental truth if nothing else. But he also knew that two people had to be willing to work at it, to move together towards a common goal and if one party wasn't willing then it went to shit. He folded his lips to prevent the smile forming remembering when Justin had said those words to him ten years ago right before the bombing during one of their break-ups. It was a lesson which stuck and he could see the wisdom in his young lover's words that he couldn't see then.

"I just can't endure any more, Brian. Can you understand that? Melanie," she sighed deeply. "Melanie is never satisfied. She wants all of my time and attention and if she doesn't get it she feels slighted. She makes a difference between the children because—"

"Because I'm Gus' father," he supplied wishing it was a different argument but used to constantly
being the focus of disagreements between the munchers even when he had absolutely nothing to do with their situation.

"Yes," she confirmed. "You know as well as I do what she really wanted but I wouldn't give her that decision as I had so many others. That's what it's been like you know. Compromise is just me sitting idly and agreeing with her in order to keep the fucking peace. Well not anymore. I want a divorce."

"I'm sorry but you didn't marry me," Brian joked which actually brought a smile to Lindsey's lips and caused Gus' shoulders to relax a little. There was more to the story which he would dig up eventually but first he needed to calm Lindz down and make sure she understood what she wanted. "Lindsey are you sure? You two could work it out, you always do. Justin and I used to joke that if you two couldn't make it no one could."

Lindsey shook her head emphatically. "I used to think so too, Brian but Melanie has gone too far this time. And I am no longer in the mood to be complacent in my own life. I should have listened to you a long time ago about standing up for myself."

Brian strolled across the office and sat next to Lindsey who had begun to cry softly. "What the fuck do I know. I've never been in a relationship so I'm not an expert."

"Never, Dad? What about Justin?" Gus asked ingeniously causing both Lindsey and Cynthia to snicker.

"Sonny boy, I'll explain Justin and my situation-ship when you're older," he said laughingly. Leave it to his brilliant son to bring up the crux of the matter between him and his lover. "I want you to take some time and think carefully about what you want to do, Lindz. Divorces are not only expensive but do a helluva lot of damage to both individuals which can't be undone. But first things first. Where are you staying?"

"I already took our stuff to the house, Dad."

Brian's eyes widened briefly. Well this is one conversation I hadn't planned on having with Justin so soon. "Okay, not a problem. You put your things in the far wing?" Gus had been trying to find out what was in that wing of the house since he'd first visited.

"Gus thought a minute and Brian's blood pressure spiked immediately. "No I put our stuff in the west wing. I can't remember why I wasn't allowed in the east wing of the house but I didn't go there."

Brian let out the interminable breath he was holding and Cynthia couldn't stop the cackle that came out. As she tried to regain her composure he spoke to Gus, "Good job, Sonny Boy and remember that that section of the house is completely off limits." At Lindsey's puzzled look he shrugged. "Another one of those conversations that will happen when he's older."
Lindsey looked at Cynthia who very slightly nodded her head causing Lindsey to burst out in her customary high-pitch laughter. Brian and Gus couldn't help but smile at her, each inwardly feeling like a king for restoring the Lindsey they knew and loved even if it was just for a little while.

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"Emmett you have to calm down," Drew said patiently.

"I don't have to do anything."

"Fine don't." Drew shrugged his broad shoulders. The truth was he agreed wholeheartedly with Emmett about Michael and the situation regarding Justin and Brian. Lord knew the two of them had endured so much at the hands of others but it wasn't Emmett's business. It was up to the two of them to set things right and until they did, there was only so much the rest of them could do.

"Am I supposed to sit here and watch while he destroys Brian's chance to be as happy as we are, Drewsie?"

"That's exactly what you're going to have to do, Em honey." Drew took a deep breath. "Oh I know it's tough and it's only going to get more difficult watching the plays from the sidelines but you can only show them what to do. You can't make them take your advice or make their decisions to fight for what they deserve. Those actions have to be Brian and Justin's and no matter how much you root in the stands for them to make it, they'll never score the touchdown if they choose not to run the play."

Emmett smiled wide. "I love it when you put life's situations in football analogies."

"You do?" Drew grabbed him around the waist, pulling Emmett into the warm shelter of his body.

"I find it incredibly sexy, Drewsie."

"You do, huh?" He leaned in for a kiss, deepening it when Em's full lips parted slightly. Kissing Emmett was one of the greatest joys of his life; fucking Emmett was the other. "How about you play center for me and let me ream your tight end." He smiled at the quick intake of breath from the love of his life.

They stood in the middle of the house Drew bought them five years ago. Floor-to-ceiling bay windows overlooking the mountains and overlooking a small section of the Susquehanna River. It was peaceful and everything Emmett could have dreamed of. Brian and Justin-especially Brian deserved happiness after the shitty life he lead early on. After many years, Brian had confided in Emmett and he had kept Brian's secrets. All of them. Perhaps that was why Emmett could not just watch from the sidelines while people deliberately set out to hurt the one man who had always
accepted him without question and coached him through the difficulty of Ted's addiction. He owed Brian Kinney so much but he would deal that later.

"Should I run upstairs, Drewsie, where you can throw your balls at me or will right here do?"

He let out a loud whoop as Drew put Emmett over his shoulder and carried him up the stairs where they would go indulge in the superbowl of sex for the remainder of the afternoon.

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Michael felt a little funny going into the diner after the argument he'd had with Emmett about Brian and Justin but it couldn't be helped. He needed advice and help and the one person who he could always count on was Debbie. It wasn't that he didn't want Brian happy. It was that Justin was the source of so much unhappiness for Brian and that could not happen again. So even if Brian would hate him for it later on, Michael could live with that as long as he saved him from the blond clutches of Justin Taylor again.

"Hey, Ma."

"Hi, Honey," Debbie said, giving him a hug in the process. She felt him up as she always did when he'd been gone for an extended amount of time. "What the fuck. You feel like skin and bones."

Michael laughed. It was always the same and it was comforting to know she would never change. "I've just been eating a lot healthier these days."

"Uh-huh," she murmured noncommittally. "Geno, stack of jacks, two eggs and a side of bacon for the prodigal son, here." She grabbed the coffee pot and settled him into the same booth within the Liberty Diner she always did when he was a kid. "So honey, how have you been? How was...where were you guys this time?"

"London. We went to London, Ma."

"So how was it? Did you guys meet the Queen? God, I just love her. And how's Hunter?"

Michael smiled at her. She always rattled off questions. "London was great. I got to attend the Comic-Con there and Ben met a lot of great authors based there. There's a writers convention happening there soon and I think Ben may try to go back for it. Unfortunately, we didn't meet the Queen but we did do the palace tour which was wonderful. You can't even imagine how amazing that was. We did hear from Hunter. All A's and a B for the summer session. He's trying to graduate a year early. He said he'll be back home for the holidays."
"That's good, honey. So what brings you by?"

"What? I can't come see my own mother?"

"Uh-huh," Debbie said again and sat staring at him as he tore into his food. "I'm prepared to sit here until you tell me what the real reason is that you're here just after the others would have been in here and gone off to work by now. Anything I should know about?"

Michael took a sip of coffee trying to formulate his thoughts. He certainly didn't want to offend her the way he'd clearly offended Emmett. But if he was going to know what to do to prevent Brian from repeating mistakes and making the biggest mistake of his life, he had no choice but to forge ahead. "Why is Justin Taylor back in Pittsburgh."

Debbie's smile had not shifted out of place at all. She couldn't possibly approve, could she? "Why are you asking me that? Shouldn't you be asking Brian?"

"I tried but Cynthia said that they had quite a few new accounts and he would be in and out of the office over the course of the next few weeks. I asked Emmett who told me to mind my own business but you know Emmett. I haven't spoken to Ted yet. When I went over to Kinnetik it was literally in an uproar so I know he must have been crunching numbers somewhere in there. So are you gonna tell me?"

He watched Debbie ingest all he had to say as she refilled her coffee. When she spoke he could tell she was choosing her words with care-something his mother never did, at least not with him. "I think you should ask Brian why he asked Justin to come back to Pittsburgh for a time. As for the rest and whatever his answer may be when you ask him, I think you should mind your own business. You and Ben have a beautiful life and family; Brian and Justin deserve to have the same."

"Wait. You said he was back for a time. That means it's not permanent right?"

"Again, Michael whatever you want to know, you should ask Brian. However, what I will say is that you really don't have a right to know since you ended the Brian and Mikey show a long time ago. You've moved on with your life and are living the type of life you want to lead, honey. Let Brian Kinney find his way as you have yours." Debbie heard a high-pitched ding just as she finished refilling Michael's coffee. "Hey lay off that fucking bell. This isn't a prize fight unless you want two black eyes. I'll be right back."

Michael watched her shuffle off to pick up the order for the couple in the far corner of the diner. His mind flashed back through all the laughs they had within their gathering place of many years. Emmett, Ted, Brian and Michael gathered and laughed, talked about the basic things in the lives of almost thirty year olds. Even Melanie and Lindsey would drop in from time to time to complete the circle of friends-their family. All that changed after Brian Kinney met Justin Taylor and although they had managed to have some good times even with the twink around, things were never the same. Michael missed the closeness and camaraderie they shared in their quest for fun, friendship and fulfillment and he was determined to get that back by any means necessary.
I would tell you that I love you tonight
But I know that I've got time on my side
Where you going?
Why you leaving so soon?
Is there some place that's better for you?
What is love, if you're not here with me;
What is love if it's not guaranteed?
What is love if it's just obsolete?
What is love if you're not here no more
What is love if you're not really sure?*

After several days of being in Rochester, Justin was glad to be going home. Home. Home where exactly? On the one hand, he missed his home in New York but he hadn't realized how much he missed waking up to Brian until he'd returned to his arms. Arms that felt like home, kisses that heated his skin and made him ready for sex faster than a microwave popped popcorn. If it had just been about the sex, Justin could have handled that. But it was more-so much more than what he thought it would be or could be and that was the problem.

On the night he had returned from his apartment and after he and Brian had the long time christening of his office; after they arrived home and Justin fucked Brian to sleep, he took a walk through the house. The house named Britin, that was both of theirs and was supposed to be a wedding present although that never happened. Everything in the house spoke of them though at the time he hadn't realized how much. Justin made his way up to the third level, mentally taking note of which steps creaked in protest under his weight. He slid his hand along the polished wood paneling constantly for the light switch. The faint scent of orange assailed his nostrils indicating the wood was newly polished, evidence glistening on his fingertips when he pulled back his hand after he found the switch. The room was instantly and magnificently bathed in the brightest light imaginable next to natural sunlight. Justin caught his breath at the visions before him. All of his basic pieces from when he first started out in the city as an artist limned the walls. The sketch he'd done for the Gay and Lesbian Center of Brian naked and sleeping stared back at him. He grabbed his chest not knowing how to process the information that Brian had believed in his talent so much, he had bought the ones which told their story.

Walking hauntingly to the room in the far corner, Justin pushed open the door and again the breath left him as he gazed upon more work he'd done which cataloged their time together, including the one of two portraits he'd done of the last time they made love before he had to catch his plane and reluctantly begin his new life. It was a painting awashed in shadows, rich midnight blue sheets and
the matching duvet. Brian knelt over him as one leg rested over his shoulder, the other draped across is strong forearm. Sweat dripped from his forehead falling onto his broad chest making Brian seem as if he was glistening while moving smoothly into Justin. It had been a struggle to keep his eyes open but Justin hadn't wanted to miss a single moment as the man he loved labored over him for what could have possibly been the last time. Looking upon the portrait, Justin heard the gaspy moans which had escaped his lover and his own answering groan in response to the rightness of their fit; the bittersweetness of the moment. In Brian's eyes was Justin's body and a depth of unspeakable emotion-- things Brian would never say. Justin's hand rested over Brian's heart as the culmination of their relationship had been summed up in one unforgettable moment and captured on canvas for eternity. He had titled it Until Then as an acknowledgment of Brian's comment just before they joined one last time in the place where it all began.

Justin closed his eyes in remembrance as he heard footsteps making their way to the kitchen. What possessed him to stay at Jason's for the week he would never understand but it did save him the hotel fee. He almost laughed aloud at the memory of Brian's reaction to Justin penchant for clipping coupons. "I had no idea you were so tight," Brian said. Justin responded, "Sure you did." They had a lot of great, comical moments but was the promise of more worth the risk of autonomy?

"Good morning, Justin. How'd you sleep?"

Justin shook himself out of his revere. "The bed was a fucking wonder. I'll have to get one for the nights I fall asleep in the studio."

Jason smiled in response. "So you were telling me about the Brian/ Justin saga. Where do you guys stand now?"

"I really don't know," Justin answered honestly. "There's still that has to be talked about and decided. Nothing that will happen fast or overnight and that's the part that sucks the most I guess."

Jason nodded. "The good thing is that money- or lack of it- is no longer the issue. So what's really holding you back, man?"

Justin shrugged not wanting to examine all of the issues just then. "Let's just say that we both had a lot of growing up to do and I don't know if I've grown enough. He never wanted to wrap me up before and I suppose he still doesn't. He always believed that I should be free to soar. The question is how do I want to do that. Do I think I can fly with him or is it better to save the heartache and fly away from him now?"

"Well little bird, sounds like you have some major thinking to do. Mind if I give you some advice?" Justin shook his head and Jason took a deep breath. He could well understand Justin's obsession with Brian but in turn he could understand what Brian must feel waking up to such beauty every morning. The disheveled blond locks that screamed to be pulled gently or yanked hard, the clear and intelligent blue eyes which could go hard in anger or soft in passion in the blink of an eye, and the soft, sensual full lips. Brian was a lucky man to have his 'Sunshine' all the time. Maybe he needed a reminder of how fucking easy it would be to take his sunshine away. "Don't wait too long to decide, Justin. Don't listen to your mind because all it will do is catalog all the reasons you shouldn't take the chance.
Don't listen to your heart because it's fickle and both love and hate can be painted with both sides of the same brush. Listen from the same place you paint from, Justin. Listen to your soul. It will never steer you wrong."

"Wow. Behind that pretty face is a philosophical mind. And just think there are two such pretty faces running around the earth."

Jason laughed. "Yeah. You may blame Jeremiah for that portion of me. The downside of having a twin is that sometimes you have more in common than you wish to. I'd rather spend my days in drinking and debauchery. Speaking of which--"

"Don't even think about it pretty boy. We already talked about the reason I won't fuck you again. It's a throwback rule but it still means a lot, even if we're just starting over."

"Oh alright, Blue eyes. But I will be admiring the merchandise as you shower." Jason laughed. "It was rare back then to find a twink with your...attributes. It's even more rare here."

It was Justin's turn to laugh. "So why not venture out of the Rochester area?"

"Oh I do, make no mistake. In fact if I have my way, I'll be getting the exact ass I want very soon." 

"What's taking so long? Straight guy?"

"No. Well not exactly. He's bi but refuses to admit it. Currently he's in a relationship with a bi-woman and a lesbian."

"Poly? You're fucking kidding! You might as well hang your dick out the window, man. He's never leaving," Justin laughed.

"I wouldn't be so sure," Jason said smugly letting Justin know that something was already in the making and if he knew Jason, the guy's knees were turning to jelly whenever they were around each other.

"Well handle that ass with care, will you?" Justin laughed.

"Oh, never fear Justin, I intend to."

An hour after his morning conversation with Jason, he was back onto I-490 heading back into Pittsburgh with a whole lot to digest.
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This story archived at http://www.midnightwhispers.ca/viewstory.php?sid=3187
HAH!!

TIME'S UP VOLUME II: SHARE MY LIFE by Nichelle Wellesly

Summary:

TU VOL II

Categories: Alternate Universe, QAF-U.S., Family, Angst, Bds, Brian/Justin, Canon, Could be Canon, Drama, Humor, Jealousy, Justin/Ethan, Justin/Other, REAL LIFE ISSUES, Romance, Toppy! Justin, Unsafe Sex, What If Characters: Brian, Cynthia, Daphne, Justin, Original Character(s), Other Canon Characters, Ted Challenges: None Series: TIME'S UP SERIES Chapters: 40 Completed: No Word count: 215094 Read: 52889 Published: February 04, 2015 Updated: October 03, 2015

Chapter 13- HAH! by Nichelle Wellesly

Author's Notes:

Chapter 13 is intentionally missing from this story...These two need all the help they can get without having to worry about the jinx of the number 13!!

Chapter 13 is intentionally missing from this story...These two need all the help they can get without having to worry about the jinx of the number 13!!

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This story archived at http://www.midnightwhispers.ca/viewstory.php?sid=3187
Chapter 14- Two Wrongs Trying to Make One Right by Nichelle Wellesly

Author's Notes:

Mikey/Lindz Prude Alert!!! As promised, you've been warned!

Justin arrived in Pittsburgh in record time, possibly breaking every traffic law imaginable. His trip to Rochester, New York had been more productive in more ways than expected; his renewal of his old relationship with Jason Dumas, yielding unexpected results. The problem wasn't that Brian never told Justin about Jason-they had their own lives after all-but that Jason never said a fucking word about Brian. He'd known who Justin was to Brian Kinney even back when they'd first met while he was in Hollywood and he never said a fucking word. He had never felt like such a fool in his life.

While on his way back to the Pitts, he'd made what he termed a mistake of the first order by checking his messages while stretching his legs.

The first message had been a frantic one from Daphne advising that she quit her job and was moving back to Pittsburgh. Although he was tempted to call her right then, he knew the conversation would take more time than he had right then if he was going to reach Pittsburgh by nightfall. So he'd resolved to call her the minute he reached the house. The second message was two-fold and both of them thoroughly and belatedly pissed him off. The first was from Brian, asking how far he was from
home and that he had something he wanted to discuss with him. Okay- although it was a little ominous, it was still fine. Nothing possibly detrimental to Justin's sanity stood out in Brian's voice immediately. The problem came with the email and the attachment which chose to make an appearance. Fucking Jason Dumas had sent quite a few photos of Justin sleeping at his house, some of which featured Jason behind Justin as he slept. Then there were the pictures of Justin in the shower. It wasn't that Brian would have a problem with Justin sleeping with Jason- it was the implication of in the positions. Fuck! It didn't help that Justin, who never wore cologne smelled suspiciously of Jason's. The subject of the email was: Now we've both had him. WHAT?!?!?! The next time he ran into Jason Dumas it was going to be with a huge fucking fist leading the way.

There was no question at all that Justin needed to release some steam before facing Brian. As always his relationships-or non-relationships- were beyond fucked up. It wasn't the first time Justin found himself in the middle of one of said fucked up situation concerning Brian's exploits. There was the time he'd had sex with Adam Lyons after his first art show in New York. When Adam had joked afterward about the prowess of Pittsburgh men and Justin had asked what he meant, Adam had mentioned Brian's name. It turned out that he was the ad executive who had suggested Brian go for the job in New York. How ironic that Justin only royally fucked Adam's bottom to forget Brian. Adam had publicly called him the "young blond twink with the porn-worthy dick" and from then Justin had never lacked for companions. He was like a magnet and ass had never been hard to come by. It was easy to fuck his way through the five boroughs remaining aloof and mysterious. No one knew just how broken his heart had been.

Pulling into the parking garage across from Babylon, Justin sat a moment processing the events which led him to the den of sin. There was no doubt or question that he was going to feature in the backroom. It would be the first time in a long while he appeared in there. He was usually in the company of the Infamous Top Brian Kinney but Justin had his own reputation to live up to. He went through his mental catalog of who he'd fucked although there was plenty in the club who he hadn't but he didn't want to be guilty of fucking a person more than once. It was how he and Brian operated and he'd broken that rule back when he was young, dumb and full of come with Ethan. He didn't want a repeat performance.

Finally deciding on the type of fuck buddy he wanted, he made his way into the entrance bypassing the line as he always did.

The inside of the club was as it always was on most nights- filled to capacity with half-naked, sweaty men and a few fag hags or lesbians who just didn't want to be in the dyke crowd for the night. Stopping by the bar briefly to grab a double JB, Justin moved through the grinding throng, smiling at some while assessing others. If he was honest with himself he would have looked for a man about six-foot-two, auburn hair and hazel eyes but at that moment he needed something completely different from the man who had occupied every facet of his life. Gripping the hand of the man who happened to be grinding his dick into him while at a standstill in the thick crowd, Justin looked up into eyes as blue as a summer sky housed in a tall, bald and handsome package of caramel skin. Yeah...He'll do. Maintaining eye contact, Justin tossed his head subtly toward the back room. He didn't give a shit what the strangers name was; he just wanted to ream him, not build a relationship.
Finally reaching their destination, Justin lead him to one of his favorite spots- a narrow corridor under blue lights with the clear heavy strips usually found in meat packing buildings. For some reason, Justin always found that area of the Backroom appealing and erotic. It catered to his exhibitionist tendencies and vaguely reminded him of the time Brian had fucked his mom's minister. Justin dodged the bald guy's attempts to kiss him as he settled him face first into the corner.

"I always do the fucking, Blondie," he said. His voice was gruff but in a seductive way.

"Well then we have a problem, Baldy because so do I," Justin responded softly while dropping his companion's pants. He applied a hard smack to the firm ass in front of him eliciting a deep groan from the stranger. "Yeah. I know you like having your ass smacked so bend over," Justin taunted.

Anyone looking on wouldn't have believed sweet little Justin could be so forceful and command instant obedience. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out the lube and condom he habitually walked with- a lesson he had learned early on in his dealings with Brian Kinney. He took his time preparing the guy, whispering all manner of nasty things in his ear; seducing him within the brink of orgasm. Justin positioned himself , gripping one of the most broad set of shoulders he'd ever held onto and plunged himself halfway in. He heard the breath leave his companion and held himself still although it was a struggle to do so. He wanted to fuck, to take out his frustrations in the tight ass encasing his cock but he didn't want to put the guy in the hospital. He eased himself out a little but not completely then pushed in again, working his hips more forcefully until he was buried deep. Once again Justin held himself in check allowing for the man to adjust to him. He was not small by any means or stretch of the imagination and he knew it. He only moved again when his partner of the hour began begging and moving himself back and forth onto Justin. All Justin could feel was relief at that point.

He settled into an easy rhythm, enjoying the flux and flow but listening for tell-tale signals to tell him when to back off. He didn't want his trick coming too soon. Justin closed his eyes to fully enjoy the feel of the tight ass meeting him thrust for thrust, losing himself in the mindless sensation of fucking. "Don't come yet," he whispered to his partner who was beginning to moan steadily.

"You neither, Sunshine."

Justin's eyes snapped open, thinking he'd imagined that sex-husky voice. He hadn't. Brian stood behind him watching at first, then moving behind him. Justin felt the cool air on his neck which was quickly replaced by the feel of hot breath and sensual lips. Justin closed his eyes again, letting out a little gasp at the nip Brian applied. He felt his rhythm falter momentarily; heard the little chuckle from behind. Justin reached into his pocket and gripped the lube knowing instinctively that Brian was wordlessly demanding it. He pressed it into his lover's hand continuing to fuck the man in front of him. He groaned at the first contact of Brian's fingers rimming his hole, preparing Justin in earnest for his entry. He pushed back into the slickness silently begging for them to plunge into him. He was never such a butt-slut unless it was for Brian Kinney and Brian knew it. He heard the tear of a foil wrapper as his excitement continued to increase and he continued to plunge into the tight ass in front of him. Draped across the trick's back, he nearly creamed as he felt Brian entering him.
Brian saw when Justin had rushed through Babylon in search of a trick and finding him rather quickly. Watching him underneath the blue lights, he was reminded of when Justin had first broken up with Ethan and he needed to regain his equilibrium. Back then, both of them were just content to indulge in eye-sex, each wishing the other would make a move. Brian remembered Justin biting that luscious bottom lip while visually and mentally trading places with the trick who was sucking his dick. In return, Brian was thinking about being enclosed within Justin's hot channel. They both came simultaneously as they often did but not with each other. So when Brian followed him to the backroom debating on whether to seek his own comfort in advance of the argument he knew was bound to happen later, he was surprised Justin had picked the same spot he'd been years earlier with a trick who looked similar to the other- only this one was taller and leaner than the last.

Justin was so absorbed, he hadn't known that Brian was behind him. He only knew he felt his presence which always happened whenever they occupied the same space but he wasn't sure where.

He stood in the shadows watching the tension drain from Justin, noticed the little wrinkle in his forehead as he concentrated on receiving pleasure and giving it in return. Justin moved smoothly, knowing when to go hard and when to back off. He always gave Brian credit for teaching him to become a memorable top but Justin was a natural. All Brian did was help refine his skills. While continuously watching Justin's ass pump back, forth and around into the trick, the harder Brian became. There was no question he enjoyed fucking Justin but he'd always found the dominant side of Justin an aphrodisiac as well.

Brian entered Justin forcefully, not allowing time for him to adjust until he was seated fully within Justin's tight ass. He relished the gasping moan that escaped his man as Brian unerringly hit the nub at the bottom and held himself still right there while Justin kept fucking his partner of the hour.

"Oh God," Justin moaned out.

"I'm flattered but no- not God. Just Brian," he said chuckling.

"Smart ass," Justin gasped out. "Just fuck me already."

"Why, Sunshine? You seem to be doing just fine all on your own. My cock sure appreciates your efforts," Brian whispered on the heel of a little escaped moan. No matter how many times he had Justin- no matter how many ways, he would never get tired of him.

Brian couldn't stop his hips from pumping into Justin's, nor could he stop the groan from feeling Justin clench around him. Every time Justin contracted his abs to push into the nameless guy, he felt the movement on his cock. It was a skill Brian had never taught him- not even from their first night together- but no bottom had ever satisfied him the way Justin had because of it. It seemed to be uniquely his and if Brian had his way, no one would ever find out about it again. Connor James was one thing and that happened many years ago but that was then...
The trick had come advising Justin he couldn't take anymore which was just as well since he no longer had a purpose. He stood off to the side watching Brian and Justin, who began fucking hard and fast. Brian gripped Justin's waist so tight he knew there would be bruises but Justin hadn't uttered a complaint. Instead he kept challenging Brian, pushing his ass back harder causing Brian to go deeper inside him. Justin extended one of his hands to the front wall the trick had just vacated while the other reached back pulling at Brian's hair. Justin pulled his head down kissing him ferociously. Brian responded in kind, shoving his tongue into the hot cavity of Justin's mouth. All the world around the two of them had gone silent; nothing else mattered except how hard they could come and the connection that stayed with them long after they finished fucking. Brian plunged again, snapping his hips at the forward motion. He swallowed Justin's gasp and repeated the action, striking the prostate every time.

Detaching his lips from Justin's, he stared into blue orbs daring Justin to break the connection. "You'll remember that this ass is mine, won't you?" Brian punctuated each word with a twist of his own hips causing a deep groan to escape Justin. He did it again and again until Justin's sounds of satisfaction became soundless gasps and moans. He kept up the hard and fast rhythm feeling himself get closer to the brink. *Goddamn, there was no one like Justin.* "Come for me." The command was softly spoken but forceful in every way that mattered to the man he was holding. He watched Justin, felt the deep breath taken in and held; the tremors wracking the body pressed so tightly to him and the answering quake coursing through his own.

"Fuuuuucckkk," Justin wailed as Brian threw his head back and released himself in the tight ass which belonged to him.

It took all of Brian's strength to hold Justin upright as well as himself. Sliding off the condom but not relinquishing his hold on his partner for a lifetime, Brian dropped it into the garbage can and buried his nose in Justin's neck. It wasn't until the world stop shaking for both of them that they heard the applause and shouts around them. With his forehead still against the wall, Justin began to laugh causing Brian to burst out laughing as well.

"Looks like we had an audience," Justin said, beginning to adjust his pants and trying to control his mirth.

"Looks like," Brian said. "But we have matters to discuss, don't we?"

Justin nodded and Brian noticed the shadows in his eyes. There was something more to what they needed to talk about but Brian would wait until Justin was ready to say what it was. He owed him that. "I'll meet you at the house."

"Home," Brian corrected. "It's home."

"Yours," Justin said.

Yeah...and that was the very first thing they had to straighten out.

*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*
Ted sat silently listening to all of Michael's list of complaints regarding Cynthia and the fact that Brian hadn't called him. Business wise, he and Cynthia disagreed rarely; he wasn't so sure about the case regarding Michael. Cynthia wasn't aware of all the events which led to the estrangement between Brian and Michael- well at least he hoped she wasn't. But Michael hadn't seen Brian after Justin left nor after Brian had been in Justin's company only to have it snatched away by fate repeatedly. It was devastating to watch and even Ted couldn't ignore its effects on his boss and sometime friend.

"I'm going to tell you one more time, Michael. Leave. It. Alone," Emmett said through clenched teeth, in a tone Ted had never heard from him before.

"Why should I listen to you, Em? You don't know him," Michael said angrily.

"Look Michael, you don't know him anymore." Ted tried for diplomacy staving off the inevitable scathing tongue-lashing Emmett was about to deliver. Emmett Honeycutt was the most even-tempered person he'd ever known but Michael was pushing him to a place where only Ted had seen him once. The results would not be good.

"I know him a lot better than the two of you. Brian's always been blinded by Justin's charm and libido; always blind to that kid and his machinations. I'd always warned him that Justin was fucking trouble."

Ted nodded understanding what Michael was not saying but needing to hear his response anyway. "Let me ask you something Michael. Is the problem that Justin brings Brian happiness in a way you can't or aren't allowed to? Or is it that you're still jealous that Justin takes first priority in Brian's heart over you?"

"That's ridiculous, Ted," Michael said indignantly.

"Is it?" Ted questioned quickly. "Because honestly Michael it sounds a lot like jealousy. Why is it so hard for you to accept that he has changed and that the part of Brian you thought you knew- the part we all thought we knew- may have just been a facade? Brian Kinney has always been a man of many faces but he was never a liar in words or deeds."

Emmett listened carefully to what Ted said to Michael, carefully gauging his reaction to Ted's phrasing. "Why is it acceptable for us all to grow and evolve while it's forbidden for Brian to do so?"

Michael sighed. "Look I understand what you two are saying but we all know that Justin is after Brian's money. He's always been a golden-haired gold-digger."

Ted and Emmett laughed loud and uproariously causing nearby people to stop dancing and look.
"So that's what's bugging you, Mikey?" Em sneered. "You think that the Bank of Brian will be closed now that his favorite bubble-butt is back on the scene. I never thought that I would be saying this but...Brian really needs to keep your friendship dissolved if you think him so fucking brainless. For the record, it's Brian's money to do with as he pleases—not yours. So you really need to mind your own damn business where he and Justin are concerned." Emmett turned away from them then finding Drew and leading him out to the dance floor.

"What's eating him?" Michael asked semi-shocked that he had just been spoken to that way by Emmett.

"You are," Ted answered matter-of-factly. "Look, Michael, I understand your concerns and normally I would agree with you. However, I happen to know for a fact that this thing between Brian and Justin has absolutely nothing to with their individual net worth but it goes much deeper than that." Ted took a deep breath. "And whether you want to admit it or not, you know that, too. Theirs is a love that will not die or be silenced anymore. It was what the three of us-you, me and Em- were looking for and finally found. In Brian and Justin's case, they both fought it to a degree. When Justin was ready Brian wasn't."

"And now?" Michael asked impatiently.

"And now I think it may be the other way around to an extent. But make no mistake, Michael, they will end up where they were supposed to be which is together. It has always been inevitable from the night they met fifteen years ago. It was a surety even when Justin went off to New York and it is concrete now. They will find their way through whatever tries to tear them apart and won't be separated again but it will be on their own terms—not yours." Ted lifted his drink and moved off in the direction of the dance floor, leaving Michael to mull over the information.

"You think it will work?" Emmett asked him.

"I really don't know, Em, but let's hope my words got through to him. Otherwise Brian and Justin are in for another plot worthy of Puccini making an appearance in the form of Michael Novotny."

*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Hold on, What's the rush?

We're not done are we?

Cause I don't need to change this atmosphere we made

If you can stay one more hour.
He walked into the house. Flames leapt from fireplace casting an otherwise dark house in a soft
glow. The sounds of Coltrane filling the space told Justin much about Brian's mood. He only listened
to it in extremely quiet moments when he needed to think or when he needed soothing. Based on
what Jason did and said, Brian would definitely need soothing. It wouldn't matter to Brian that Justin
hadn't slept with Jason, the implication was there through an email no less and all for the sake of a
revenge Justin had nothing to do with directly; just because he was the one time mate of Brian
Kinney. Justin tried to hate Jason all the way back to Pittsburgh but he honestly couldn't. He
understood better than most how alluring Brian could be. He was an enigma but at the same time a
powerful charisma rolled off of him like water off a duck's back. He was a man of contrasts and it
hurt when one wasn't allowed to delve deeper to see beyond the legend to get to the man underneath
the layers. No one understood that pain better than Justin.

Sprawled on the sofa was Brian, well-defined arms thanks to the black wife-beater. Justin allowed
himself the luxury of taking in his subject from an artist's eye. The 501s were open at that waist,
hanging low on his hips and one of his bare feet hung negligently off the couch. A tumbler of Beam
dangling from his hand but it wasn't in danger of falling onto the hardwood floor. He could tell by
the rise and fall of Brian's chest he was awake.

"You just gonna stand there?" The question came sardonically from the sensual lips he wanted to
kiss in greeting but refrained from doing so.

Moving further into the room, Justin stood behind the couch. His eyes couldn't help but drink in the
sight he'd studied close up. "You want to talk now or wait?"

Brian turned the twisted the tumbler with nimble fingers causing a sensual reaction deep in Justin's
stomach even though they were in a situation much like the one they'd found themselves in before
with tragic results. Fourteen years ago, it was a glass of wine as Brian sat at his desk working. Justin
had come in from picking up promo posters for the comic book. Brian had surreptitiously checked
his watch due to the lateness of the hour. When he moved in for a kiss, Justin had pulled away citing
that he got all sweaty working over a project. That project was Ethan Gold. And as he stood over
Brian taking in his appearance, letting the sounds emitting from the stereo wash over him, he was
conscious of the smell he carried from Jason Dumas.

"Mont Blanc smells good on you, you know." Brian said.

"How did you know?" Justin could still smell Jason's scent on himself from their hasty good-bye
which would have seemed awkward not to have because of their known history among his friends.

"Oh you mean aside from the very informative email I received, today? I only know two people who
wear the original Mont Blanc-one is dead and the other is Jason Dumas. I was with him when he
picked it as his signature scent." Brian breathed deeply before continuing. "So you see, Justin, I've
known him a lot longer than you and I also know what type of person he is..."
Justin laughed bitterly then. "You should since you two seem to be the same fucking people born just a few years apart."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?" Brian pushed himself off the couch to face Justin.

"Just what the fuck it sounds like. Secretive, closed off human beings if you could call yourselves that. More like fucking robots. Do anything, say anything, fuck anything," Justin taunted.

"Why does it matter, Justin since you've been doing the same thing?"

"Hey I learned from the best, didn't I? The top graduate of Father Kinney's school for Runaway Boys." Justin regretted the words as soon as they left his mouth. "Look, Brian I-"

"Save it. Sorry's bullshit," he cut him off. Brian narrowed his eyes slightly although his face was as stoic as it always was."Is that how you really feel, Justin? That I was closed off...to you of all people?"

"I'm not doing this with you, Brian." Justin turned to leave the room but was stopped by Brian's words.

"That's right. Do what you always do, Justin. Walk. Run. Leave. You should have fucking t-shirts made up since you corner the market on avoidance tactics."

"I never..."

"What-leave? You're sure? Because from where I'm standing it's always been that way, Justin. You don't hear or see what you want, you leave."

"Well when you push someone away enough times, the message to leave is pretty hard to ignore," Justin sarcastically spewed as he turned for the door again.

Brian laughed. "I see you still haven't grown a set of balls?"

Justin turned back then. He noted the sardonic lift of Brian's eyebrow, the small smirk on his lips; his stance completely casual although Justin knew he was anything but. "You're right, Brian. Happy now? You're fucking right, I leave. Care to know why?" At Brian's slight nod, he continued. "Because I am never sure of you. Your actions say one thing, your lips say another thing or most of the time nothing at all and I got tired of it. One minute it felt like I knew you, then it felt like you were a fucking stranger and I got tired of it. You always wanted to know what drove me to Ethan so I'll tell you...YOU! All the signs were there, Brian. I was lonely, my self-esteem still wasn't quite back from having almost lost my fucking life and potential career..."
"You knew who I was, Justin. I didn't make a secret of it."

"No you didn't but I needed you and it was always something else. It was business-which I can kind of understand-but then there was Michael and the countless tricks and everything else. You took me for granted. Then Ethan came and regardless of his bullshit, I felt wanted, Brian. I felt desired and like I mattered. And for the record, it's not that Michael told you although he should have minded his own fucking business. It's that he knew the whole truth of what I was going through, the stuff that I couldn't tell you myself, and yet he just decided that the only thing...the only motherfucking thing worth knowing in the whole goddamn situation was that I was fucking around with Ethan. And you bought it, playing your twisted game of Tom and Jerry even knowing that something was wrong. You could have asked. I tried to tell you in the shower but I couldn't and the look on your face told me that you knew something was fucking wrong but you said nothing until after your game. Then let's talk about what the fuck happened at the Rage party, shall we? The one night-one fucking night-that should have been mine with you, you were fucking motherfucking Rage. That's what drove me into his arms, Brian. I had made my decision, I was there with you where I wanted to be and you couldn't keep your dick out of someone else's ass for one fucking night!" Justin was breathing hard from the anger.

The details of that night still haunted him. It wasn't that he'd expected Brian to change. He didn't. It was that the hurt stayed with him and made him leery of all subsequent decisions regarding him and Brian. It was the core of his disbelief in them and that things would be and could be different.

"And are you tired now?"

Justin stood there not knowing the answer to the question-or more accurately-not knowing how to answer the question. Their entire relationship, he'd felt like a piece on a chessboard. At first it was a game of Kings and Queens with Brian-a game where Brian moved and Justin counter-moved. Ultimately, Brian kept breaking his own rules where Justin was concerned so the Queen had checkmated his King-to a degree at least. Then it became a game of the Rook fighting the Queen, where he always felt like he was fighting Michael for Brian's attention and affection all the while having to deal with the other fucked up elements of his life. It felt like he was always defending Brian and fighting for Brian by turns. Finally toward the end, he'd felt like a pawn-moved around, shifted and maneuvered to fit everyone's purpose regarding Brian but his own. And what was his purpose regarding Brian? That was the main question to be answered.

You know I'm going to find a way to let you have your way with me

You know I'm going to find the time to catch your hand and make you stay*

Brian stood silently watching the various emotions of hurt, anger, pain and finally insight play across Justin's face. He wanted nothing more than to confirm what he'd figured out ages ago but didn't want to influence Justin in any way. It had to be his choice. He had to choose Brian. By all accounts, it should have been an easy choice but it wasn't. Even Brian wondered at times if too much time had passed between them. He had given Justin the opportunity to fly, to soar under his own wind and it had cost him dearly. But if they had any hope of working, Brian knew that it had to be on Justin's terms and his alone. Sure, they both had bought into the bullshit the others said but ultimately it was
Brian who held the door open and Justin who chose to walk through it. Brian stiffened his body as Justin finally answered.

"Yeah, Brian, I'm tired." Brian mentally slumped but still held his limbs in rigid check. He waited patiently knowing there was more. "But not for the reasons you may think. First let's get a few things straight."

"Should we sit down?" His feet were actually cold standing on the floor.

"I would rather stand but you can if you want to," Justin responded quietly, a slight smile on his lips. "You need a throw rug."

Brian shrugged as he settled on the sofa, pulling his knees up to his chest. "You can pick it out."

When Justin opted to stand by the windows instead of sitting next to him, he was disappointed but understood. "Continue."

"Understand this Brian, I wanted a commitment, yes, but at the time I was young and thought it meant one thing when in terms of you and I, it should have meant something else. The whole syphilis episode scared me into thinking that monogamy would have suited us. It wouldn't have which I learned later after you turned into a pseudo-heterosexual Step-ford fag."

"I thought it was what you wanted."

Justin nodded. "So did I at the time."

"Is that why you balked at my use of the 'C' word?" Brian couldn't stop the bright smile which sprang forth. Justin had been just about to treat him to another Rage blowjob when he'd asked if he would rather just cuddle.

"Yeah. You would never mention the word cuddle much less do it. We never had before, it just wasn't our style. We rimmed, rammed, sucked, fucked and came until we passed out on top of or next to each other but we never cuddled. You'd changed and I didn't want that. I wanted the Brian Kinney I fell in love with-fucked up flaws and all-not Michael and Ben or God forbid Teddy." Justin shivered earning a sharp bark of laughter from Brian. "So at the time parting ways seemed the right thing to do; to regain our equilibrium so to speak."

"And did you regain your equilibrium?"

"Did you?" Justin shot back.

Brian knew Justin wanted honesty but the question was much too personal. Justin was the center of his life, the person that brought the balance. The funny thing was that Brian in his own way had
always been the balance for their extended family, even though in recent years they barely saw each
other. Although they didn't see him, he was still taking care of their needs behind the scenes. So the
times he'd met with Justin, he felt restored, renewed—he gained strength although no one knew that
but him. Telling Justin that though... "Yes."

"I haven't," Justin said. "Only every two years or so I felt balanced."

Brian tongued his cheek at the reply. It was the same way he'd felt but Justin unknowingly gave him
an out to keep it to himself. "And now?"

Justin smiled back. "The jury is still out on that."

"Well you've had your moment to deliver some truth, so here is mine: there are things about my past,
things I've never told anyone—not Lindsey nor Michael although both know bits and pieces. I don't
believe in the institution of marriage. You know that but you really don't understand why. My father
was a drunk—that you know—but he was also a lying, cheating son of a bitch. St. Joan didn't help
matters with her being absolutely frigid. Colder and harder than any fucking statue, it was no wonder
my father drank as much as he did but it doesn't excuse the hateful home—if you could call it that—which they created. I never felt safe in it which is why I spent a lot of time at Mikey's." Brian took a
deep breath before continuing. "Because of that, I never believed in keeping someone who didn't
want to be kept. Now that's not to say, I didn't want to but I believe everyone has the right to live
their lives as they see fit. Just because I may have wanted you to stay, I wasn't going to chain you to
me. That's not living; that's entrapment. Each time we were ending, I knew and I let you go. But
each time you came back it was because you thought you had no choice or out of some misguided
notion of a debt owed when you don't owe me a fucking thing."

"That's not true," Justin protested.

"Yes it is," Brian said with conviction. "Fuck Justin, think about it. A month after the fiddler's lies
caught fire, where did you come? For the record, I wasn't going to tell you that you were making a
mistake because it was your life. You had to know and understand what the adage "Actions Speak
Louder than Words," really meant and it was a lesson that I couldn't teach you. You had to see for
yourself. Then there was Stockwell and my subsequent almost poverty. I always credit you with
helping me to start that firm, you know." He smiled slightly. Although it was one of the darkest
moments of his life, Sunshine had helped him keep his spirits up and dream a new dream for himself
even if he did turn into a Jewish mother sometimes. "Then cancer came knocking and I tried to kick
you out because I didn't want you there out of some twisted sense of obligation. You stayed anyway
and I didn't like it but I was too weak to fight with you. To you it was a 'commitment' but to me I
was tying you down. Then Hollywood called. You went, saw and almost conquered but then you
came back. You began to want more than what I was prepared to give, so you left. And the rest is
history. We have always been on a fucking see-saw, Justin."

"Maybe, Brian but you always called the shots."

"That may be true but you held the gun, Justin. The decision to stay or go has always been yours to
make." They were silent for a time, each lost in his own thoughts about the revelations of the evening. "Look, the good thing is we're pretty much on equal footing now. You have your success which is still growing and I have mine. It wasn't an issue for me when you didn't have it but I can understand now why it was an issue for you. So the question now is, what do you want to do? I know what I want, but do you?"

Brian walked toward Justin, in no hurry to get to him but still needing to be near him. Taking Justin's right hand in his, he massaged the stiffness from muscles as he used to when the hand gave his lover trouble. Brian continued his ministrations feeling Justin's gaze on him. Hazel met blue and he could see that Justin really did want to trust him- wanted to believe in them again but Brian wasn't going to tell him what to do. That was part of the problem in the past. Justin would ask for guidance instead of searching within himself for his own answers. The results had cost them years...so many years and yeah they were both successful but they still stayed stuck within the box the people who supposedly loved them put around them.

"Right now, I want a sandwich, a shower and sleep," Justin said smirking. "The rest we can deal with later."

Brian nodded. Pulling Justin to him hard and fast, he kissed him thoroughly relishing in the sounds his tongue pulled from Justin. The one thing that would always be clear was fucking was never going to be an issue between them.

I don't care what clothes you wear, it's time to love and I don't care

You know I'm going to find a way to make you stay*

*Find a way- Doug Brown

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This story archived at http://www.midnightwhispers.ca/viewstory.php?sid=3187
Dr. Daphne Chanders was home. No doubt she loved New York but Pittsburgh was home and part and parcel of who she was. She opted to stay in a hotel although she informed her parents of her relocation. They immediately offered for her to stay there and she unequivocally declined. If they knew the nature of her hasty detachment from her job and new life, they would coddle and emotionally suffocate her-no matter how well meaning. She couldn't allow that. She would of course tell Justin and Brian the real reason for her coming back but it was no one else's business but hers and she intended to keep it that way.

The first thing she did upon renting the hotel room was call Drew Boyd. Although she couldn't give him all of the particulars surrounding Ciara's case, she was able to provide him the pertinent information so he could see for himself that she was alright. She advised him to stop by the hotel and get the keys to her house, which was in walking distance of the hospital. It would save on the astronomical fees to rent a hotel room spur of the moment if he could find one at all. Daphne then put in a call to Dr. Harris Blake, the surgeon who she handed Ciara's file to. As the chief surgeon and
her boss, she knew Ciara was in the greatest human hands possible. The rest would be up to God and she acknowledged that. When Dr. Blake told her that Stephen was looking for her she requested that he not divulge her whereabouts to him. It was a favor- not asked as a fellow doctor but as a friend and he had given his word that he wouldn't. She had asked the same of Drew and he'd also sworn to keep her confidence. She also informed Drew and Dr. Blake that the movers would be in and out of her house to pack her belongings and have them shipped. Her house mate would see that everything which should be coming to Pittsburgh would get to the city within a week. Because of the nature of her departure, Dr. Blake called in a favor to Allegheny General and set up an interview with the chief of surgery for her along with a personal statement of recommendation from him, His generosity had taken a lot of sting out of her situation.

The next order of business would be to find a house but she honestly did not want to live in the heart of the city. Most of all, Daph craved as much peace and quiet she could be afforded. Outside of the few tears she'd shed when first discovering Stephen's duplicity and deceit, she hadn't cried. She was more determined to get past it, leave it behind her and begin anew. Picking up the phone, she dialed the familiar number of the man who was her best friend for all eternity.

"Hey you," Justin answered. He sounded tired but still he was comfortable and familiar.

"Hey. Are you busy?" she asked remembering Justin and Brian's penchant for sleeping in and early morning (meaning noon) sex. She nearly laughed remembering the times she'd called and gotten an earful.

"No. What's up and where are you? I called your house and the machine hadn't been set."

"I'm actually here in Pittsburgh," she said as cheerfully as she could muster.

"I thought you were joking when you left me that message about you moving back here. So what's wrong, Daph?"

She sighed a little. Leave it to Mr. Almighty Hearing. "Nothing's wrong. I'm staying at the Staybridge. Feel like catching a bite to eat?"

Justin laughed. "When have you ever known me not ready to eat? I'll be there in....give me a half hour?"

"Wait, where are you?"

"I'm at Brian's," he said quickly.

"Uh-huh," she said. "I haven't been gone so long that I don't remember the geography of Pittsburgh and according to my calculations, Brian's place is literally seven blocks away."
"Yeah...about that, Daph. There is so much to tell you. Tell you what, I'll send a car for you in about ten minutes and it will bring you to where I am okay?"

"Fine, Secret Agent Man," she said laughing. "But hurry up. I'm hungry and anxious to catch up." She hung up the phone, feeling somewhat better than she had before she talked to Justin. Somehow just hearing his voice always made her world a little bit brighter.

Daphne grabbed her jacket and made her way down to the lobby to wait for her ride to meet the one person in the world who would always make her feel special.

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Justin was happy Brian wasn't there when he woke up earlier in the day, already having gone to the office. A lot had been said between them—even more left unsaid—and Justin needed time to process all of it. He'd gotten out of bed, taken a leisurely shower and decided to spend some time in peace and solitude by the lake. The conversation with Jason before he did the most asshole-ish thing possible was beyond informative and it really gave Justin food for thought. Jason could be like that sometimes and it awed Justin while it pissed him off at the same time. He had advised Justin not to think with his head nor his heart but to make the decision from his soul.

He ambled lazily toward the benches surrounding their private lake determined to take Jason's surprisingly wise advice. There were a couple of things Justin was sure of immediately. He loved Brian Kinney from the top of his head to the soles of his feet and every inch in between—that was never a real question. He was everything beautiful, light and passionate in Justin's world. The other was that no one could engender such strong and intense emotions in Justin, especially the fine line between love and hate. He was pretty certain he'd inspired the same currents in Brian as well. The ultimate question was could he live without Brian. He'd done so admirably for the past ten years but there were times in the quiet moments—often in the middle of the night—when he felt like he was merely going through the motions and existing for everyone else but not living for himself. He wondered if Brian felt that way, too. Sure, he could ask Brian. After all there was a full disclosure rule in place but he didn't want to force the answer by asking the question. Being with him was as effortless as it always was but what if he was wrong? That was the core reason Justin had wanted to break it off in the first place. There was fear of course—fear of people coming between them again, of life happening and getting in the way. But even deeper was the fear of not having his feelings returned completely. He didn't want Brian to tire of him and discard him like yesterday's fuck—a motto they lived by in the land of their open non-relationship. Justin reasoned that he was as complete a person as he could be physically and mentally. He had money, success and a business which just kept growing; his artistic ability was improving with every work even with problems he still had when his hand got tired. However, the place where he painted from felt incomplete without Brian. His soul felt hollow sometimes and prior to being with Brian full-time, that feeling was occurring more often than not. Could he really spend the rest of his life without the fire—the passion—Brian brought into it and more importantly did he want to?

He was glad Daphne had called when she did because his head was literally hurting from trying to puzzle out the world's most enigmatic male. As he made his way back to the house, walking carefully through the leaves which were already lying on the ground, the questions he'd been asking
himself created a running tape in his mind. He raced toward the kitchen, since Daphne would be expecting breakfast upon her arrival. He yanked the fridge open and was actually surprised to find food in there instead of just poppers and guava juice. Brian Kinney actually went food shopping or more accurately had the shopping done. Hands impossibly full, he turned toward the stove which was opposite the fridge. He'd nearly dropped everything when he saw Lindsey sitting there with a slight smile on her face. Her long blonde hair was pulled back away from her face and he noticed a few gray strands at her temples which had not been there a year before.

"Well aren't you going to say 'hello'?"

"Of course, Lindz," Justin said laughingly. "I was trying to figure out if you were a ghost or not." He went around the counter to pull her in for a tight hug. "It's great to see you."

"You too, although I'm surprised as well. What are you doing here?"

"It's a long story," Justin answered shrugging slightly.

"Well I have time." Her smile was warm as it always. "And I'm hungry so if you're going to cook, I'll listen."

He smiled brightly as he moved back into the kitchen area to begin preparing breakfast. "Bacon, omelets, and waffles okay?"

"Sure, Wolfgang. Any coffee up?"

"Brian usually sets it before he leaves if I'm still sleeping. I'll brew some."

"Speaking of Brian...you want to tell me what's going on now? He didn't mention that you were here when we spoke yesterday."

"I should have known. We had a rather long... discussion last night."

"A rather loud argument more like," Lindsey said laughing. "I was amazed the windows didn't rattle out of the panes."

"How much of it did you hear?" Justin looked down chagrined as he was mixing the eggs and cheese in the bowl.

"I heard enough, Justin. The question is, did you?"

"What do you mean?"
Lindsey chuckled. "Well at least the reasons you left are out in the open now but there's more to it, isn't there? Based on Brian's responses, you asked for honesty and openness. So don't you think it's fair to give him those things in return?"

Justin nodded. It was what he'd been toiling with before he came in. "Let me ask you something, Lindz and I need an honest answer."

"I'll do my best," she said as he poured her a cup of coffee.

"Why did you really encourage me to go to New York? Based on my success, I could have painted anywhere and you and Mel had moved to Toronto. Basically, Brian was left essentially alone."

"But he wasn't alone was he, Justin? You were still with him. If not physically then emotionally and for lack of a better term, spiritually. But to answer your question, I encouraged you to go to New York so you could grow into the man you are now and know that it was by your own efforts and not Brian's. I know that was a sore point with you because I've heard Michael essentially throw Brian's wealth in your face repeatedly at first as a stumbling block to get between you and Brian; then as a roadblock to pull you away from Brian. You needed to experience life on your own terms. Also, it was a way for me to live vicariously and to know a famous artist," she said chuckling briefly. "As for Brian, he needed to grow into appreciating your place in his life. It wasn't that he took you for granted in as much as you were... the surprise he never expected to find in his life. And we both know how Brian feels about surprises. He's not used to them and he fights hard against the feelings they engender--pride, possession and their purpose. For Brian, you represented the thing he ran away from constantly and the one thing he never dared to hope for. But sometimes, Justin, an alternate route in someone's road to happiness at the wrong time, can do much more damage long-term when taking a short cut."

Justin nodded. He'd always known that Brian was the type of man who loved only once and completely. Hearing Lindsey confirm it helped Justin decipher what was they'd left unsaid during their argument. Brian never said that Justin's leaving had hurt him. It was something they never talked about and they quite possibly never would. Their "full-disclosure" pact didn't cover that subject unless Justin would ask it directly and he wouldn't-not because he didn't know the answer but because it would hurt too much to hear it. "So what do you think about this mess we're in?"

Lindsey shook her head and laughed. "Oh no. You've been making decisions this long and this far without my guidance and truthfully you don't need it now. You already have the answers you're seeking, if you would but look. But for my part, I'm going to enjoy watching this play out. It's been a long time coming and with the way my life has been lately, I'll enjoy the diversion fully."

"What's going on with you and Mel, Lindz?"

"Let's just say, I'm also ready for change and at this point it does not include Melanie Marcus. Sadly, it's unlikely to change." She dismounted from the chair at the breakfast bar and crossed over to Justin. Looking him straight in the eye, she said, "I know you love him, Justin, with all your heart.
and soul. But if you can't give yourself to him completely and trust that he'll do the same, then it's best to cut your losses and move on. You've already discovered what life without Brian in your face, place and space was like. The question is how eager and prepared are you to resume it?"

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"Alright you little blonde vixen, Colby is here to rescue that sweet arse of yours once again."

Cynthia jumped up out of the chair and raced around the desk to embrace her favorite cousin and the only family she'd bothered to keep in touch with. From the time they were six, she and Colby Butler had been inseparable-no matter they lived on opposite sides of the world. He and Brian were two men cut from the same cloth- devious and willing to challenge her opinion of herself no matter what her own thoughts were.

At six-foot-six, the Irishman was the complete opposite of Cynthia's small petite frame. Jet black hair and Emerald eyes with a goatee and an earring in his left ear, he looked more like Captain Hook than his whimsical nature allotted for.

"It's great to see you, Colby but can you put me down now? Your height makes me dizzy," Cynthia said smiling into his face. He gently lowered her to the floor but would not relinquish his hold on her. She took comfort in his presence as she always did.

"Well what's going on, Elf, that you would drag me all the way over here, first class- thanks for that by the way- to cause trouble. And what the hell kind of trouble can I get into in Pittsburgh anyway?"

His booming laughter filled the room.

"Well have a seat and we'll get right down to business."

"Wow that sounds serious." He said as he pulled the chair from the massive desk and back to give his long legs enough stretching room within the confined space.

Cynthia resettled herself behind her desk, folding her hands to calm her ever present nerves. She and Colby had engaged in subterfuge before but never was it as important to her or as touchy as this entire situation was. Taking a deep breath, she began speaking detailing the entire story of Brian and Justin- how they met, what separated them and how many times they had; the others in the family who had been instrumental in tearing them apart and the Brian/Mikey saga. "So you see why I needed you, Colby?"

Colby nodded. "So if Ben and Michael are legally married, what do you expect me to do?"

Cynthia smiled. Looking at her cousin, no one would ever guess that he was bisexual. "How about renewing your old acquaintance with your former lover for starters? As insecure and territorial as Michael is, the fact that you and Ben Bruckner had a relationship should keep him pretty busy, don't
Colby laughed. "What Ben and I had was a situation-ship, which began pretty much as your Brian and Justin. We were out partying with women and the next thing we know, we're fucking. Yeah we tried to make it work but there was no way. He wanted commitment and I was hell-bent on fucking everything that wasn't dead."

"Did you guys part as friends?" That was the one thing Cynthia hadn't considered when calling Colby. She knew all about the situation-ship as Colby called it, from beginning to end but had never bothered to ask the for the pertinent details.

"Of course we did. He's a really nice guy, Cynthia and not into a whole lot of drama. He took life as it came even back then. So how does Ben feel about his Mr. Whiny Woman pining after his best friend?"

"He's never liked it but he's accepted it. There was a situation at a White Party some years before Michael and Ben met in which Brian fucked Ben."

"Whoa! Your boss sure gets around," Colby said laughingly.

"That he does or I suspect, did- although he hasn't said. But in any event, it caused some tension between all three of them. Brian never intended to tell Michael but Justin figured it out. The story Brian told me was that he, Emmett and Ted were comparing partners or something like that and Michael came up bragging that Brian had never slept with anyone he had been with. Brian still hadn't said anything because of the gay-etiquette rules you all subscribe to. Besides, Brian is one of those people who allows others to tell their own news. He may know what the reality is but it isn't his place to say anything. Anyway, Ben told Michael that he and Brian fucked few years before they met. When Michael confronted Brian about not telling him, Brian figured out what Michael was really upset about."

"Ah," Colby said, "The unrequited love that would never be returned in the way the petulant child wanted. If Brian is everything you say, I almost feel sorry for the lad....Almost."

Cynthia laughed. "He's all I say and more. He's the first man to ever make me wish I was gay and Justin is the second." She relaxed back into the high-back chair. "So do you see now, Colby? Brian and Justin has suffered the slings and arrows of fate long enough. If they don't make a go of it this time, it should be because they choose not to. Not because of a spoiled, whiny little man whose idea of 'protecting his best friend' means keeping said best friend on a shelf until he's ready to play with him. The reality is that Michael is just selfish enough to want Brian available at his beck and call while he is able to enjoy his life. I'm not willing to sit idly and see Brian and therefore Justin, suffer anymore at the hands of those who supposedly love one, the other or both of them."

Colby listened to his cousin with patience and he could tell where here loyalty was and why. He was a firm believer in love, even if he would never achieve the phenomenon for himself. He still held out
hope that someone somewhere would magically appear to rescue his heart. *Must be the Celtic in me,* he thought while shaking himself out of his revere. "Alright, Elf, how do I get started?"

"Alright Daphne, are you ready to tell me what's really going on?" Justin asked.

"No I would rather tell you and Brian at the same time, so I only have to speak of what happened once. But hey, you seem like you guys are doing okay. You are doing okay, right?"

"I honestly don't know, Daph. I mean we got some things out in the open but there is still a lot left unsaid."

"Well then fucking say them," Daphne snapped at him.

"Whoa! What the hell is wrong with you? You and I know things are not so cut and dry between he and I as all that."

"Look, I'm sorry, Justin but honestly you know he isn't going to answer the questions lurking in your eyes if you don't ask them. You know that better than anyone. He may see them there but he is never going to intrude in a place you don't invite him. Don't be stupid or ignorant. Or in your case stupid and ignorant."

"Geez, Daph let me know how you really feel. Don't hold back anything," Justin said relieved to here her burst out laughing. He really was worried about her. It wasn't like Daphne to just pick up and drop everything without good reason. He parked pulled into the parking lot across the street from the bank. First National was as crowded as he remembered. "Come in with me. You know you're dying to know what's in my bank account since you always ask," he said jokingly.

"Nah. Not this time, Justin. I think I'll sit here and have a little doze. After the breakfast you fixed, I really need to be hitting the gym but I don't much feel like it today."

Justin placed his hand against her forehead as he dodged the other which was trying to swat it away. The days Dr. Daphne Chanders did not feel like hitting the gym stood solidly at only six times- yes, he counted- within the past ten years and it only happened when she came down with the flu. It wasn't cold enough for that to start happening yet. "Come in with me. You know you're dying to know what's in my bank account since you always ask," he said jokingly.

"Wait what do you mean yours? I thought that was Brian's house."

Justin took a deep breath. He still couldn't believe Brian had kept the house but- "According to Lindsey, he never changed the deed over on the house. So although he's been living there for the last
nine years, it's always been my house, too. He kept the loft which he uses sometimes when he has early meetings and doesn't feel like fighting rush hour traffic." It had surprised Justin to learn all that while he and Lindz waited for Daphne to arrive. "So are you going to buy it? There's two new constructs, identical to Britin, only a mile down the road but it's going to go fast from what I understand from the agent."

"When did you look into it?" She asked.

"When I first got back to the Pitts. I thought it would be best if I lived someplace else while Brian and I got our shit together. I was just going to rent it at the time. I think Lindsey is going to look into the other one for her and Gus, which is also how she'd known so much about the housing in the area including the deed on my house."

"So she's really not going back to Melanie and Toronto?"

"She seems determined not to," Justin said, shaking his head. "Well come on. It's time to get you settled into your new beginning and honestly, I need an escape route," he said laughingly.

Daphne laughed in response. "Why? Are you trying to use me as a scapegoat again?"

Justin shook his head. "No not this time, Daph. There's just some things you can't escape from as I'm learning with regards to me and Brian. But honestly, I would feel better if you were near me. A man can only live off of love so much before he gets antsy and besides if I'm at your house, I won't have to cook so much at mine." He dodged the jab she threw at his arm as they walked across the busy street into the bank.

Because of the nature of Justin's business venture and the amount in his personal accounts, he sought out his banker Daniel Quinn who rushed forward to greet him.

"Mr. Taylor, long time-no see." A short, rotund man, he'd first met Mr. Quinn through Brian twelve years prior when they were setting up Kinnetik. He came highly recommended by Theodore Schmidt who worked with him at Wertschafter's some years ago.

"Hello, Mr. Quinn. This is my good friend Dr. Daphne Chanders, who I would like to include in our meeting. She's recently relocated back to the city and I believe she can use your services on a certain property."

"Sure. Wonderful to meet you, Dr. Chanders. Let's go into my office." He moved them into the office, closing the door and shutting the blinds as was customary when addressing their more wealthy clients. "Now what can I do for you?"

"First, I need to place Mr. Kinney as a co-signer on the account I know you've been sending
messages through Mr. Williamson at the New York office urging me to do it as soon as possible. I'm ready to do that now."

"If you don't mind me asking, what changed your mind?"

Justin didn't hesitate in answering. "Brian, other than Daphne, would be the best person. I would choose, Daphne except she's not familiar with the ins, outs and day-to-day of my business ventures. Mr. Kinney is so he seems the logical choice.

Mr. Quinn nodded his approval. He was well-versed in the story of Brian Kinney and Justin Taylor from the incident of the young man's bashing and also from the time Mr. Kinney started Kinnetik. "Are you ready to deal with the will and all those details now as well?"

"In the event it's needed you can contact my attorney, Myrna Singleton." Justin grabbed a post-it from the corner of the desk and a pen. Writing the name, address, phone number and email address, he handed it all to Mr. Quinn. "I'll call her while you speak to Daphne, to make all the arrangements for the copies to come to you but I think it's best that she retain the originals since my business is still based in New York."

Quinn nodded. "Very good, Mr. Taylor. If you'd like you can just enter the door on your right and it will give you the privacy you need to complete your call. With the amount of money in your accounts and Mr. Kinney's, it wouldn't do for you to be overheard especially regarding your benefits."

Justin agreed, leaving the door cracked just slightly for Daphne's benefit. Something was not quite right with Daph and although he knew Mr. Quinn wouldn't try anything that would make her uncomfortable, he was still concerned for her. He dialed Myrna's cell phone, knowing she was in the office but not wanting to deal with her overprotective, pain in every part of his ass assistant, Jacob.

"Hello."

"What's happening, Hot Stuff," he said.

"You know, Justin. One of these days, I'm going to hold you down and show you just how hot I really am," Myrna said in the smooth, honeyed voice she reserved for those she liked.

"Don't count on it, Myrna. Brian would probably tie my balls so tight, they'll ache for a year," responded laughingly.

"How is that going by the way?"

"I'll let you know. In the meantime though, I need you to fax and email copies of my financial
distributions and a copy of my will and the living will to Mr. Quinn. I already told you'll be keeping the originals to all the documents in your possession."

"So you'll be staying there for awhile. That's good, right?" Myrna asked.

"So far, yes. Also, Amy has full control of the business aspect of things in my absence. Although, I'll be handling the accounts from here and fulfilling the contracts, she speaks for me in reference to the business and if I become overwhelmed with projects, she's just as good as I am and will know how I want things handled. She is my voice and please let everyone who matters know. If she's unavailable, then Brian and his assistant Cynthia is. As far as the other matters, you're my voice. The four of you are the only ones able to speak for me in reference to anything. If there's a financial matter, Quinn and the accountant both Brian and I use, Theodore Schmidt are the people you speak to. No one else, okay?"

"Yes, Mr. Taylor. Geez- you think you're my only client or something?" Myrna said sardonically but Justin wasn't fooled. Myrna lived for this stuff.

"I'm only laying it all on you because I know you can handle it all, Foxy Lady," Justin said, smiling brightly. "By the way, Daphne has moved back to the Pitts. I don't know why yet but it looks to be permanent. I'll shoot you the info when she has a permanent address."

"Okay. Anything else?"

"Yeah. Please handle all of this personally. Your assistant makes my dick twitch. And not in a positive, life-affirming way."

Myrna laughed. "You know there's a shot for that. I'll be in touch, Justin."

He hung up, still smiling at the phone. He'd interviewed what seemed like hundreds of attorneys before Myrna came to him after one of his art shows three years after relocating to NYC. After having Melanie do all the requisite checking, he and she had entered a business relationship which gradually turned into a lasting friendship. He knew he could trust her implicitly to see to his interests. Stepping back into the room, he heard Daphne concluding her business.

"Now before I sign these papers, Justin, you're sure you want me living that close to you? I might have a nightmare and happen up at your place in the middle of the night."

"You'd better not otherwise I won't be responsible for what you hear." He laughed at the look on Mr. Quinn's face. He was probably the most enlightened heterosexual male he'd ever met but always had a tough time getting over what happened between two men.

Daphne signed the stack of papers which allowed her to put a bid on the house providing it passed the inspection. "All set, Mr. Quinn. When will we know?"
As she handed him the signed papers, he began inputting the information into the system in the event there was another bid to contend with. Quinn was familiar with the property in question and its private park and if was anything like Mr. Kinney and Mr. Taylor's, Dr. Chanders would be making a very profitable investment. "In about a week or less. The good thing is that you offered for it at full value which was a smart move because unless someone offers the same or more, the house is yours and the inspection a mere formality. In the meantime, is there any other business you need to conclude, Mr. Taylor, Dr. Chanders?" When both shook their heads, he ushered them to the door. "I have to say, Justin. Your attorney is very efficient. As you were on the phone with her, some of the paperwork was already appearing in my email."

"I only work with the best, Mr. Quinn-a long standing habit which has paid off in more ways than you can possibly imagine." Mr. Quinn nodded understanding whom and what he was talking about. Even though he'd opted not to go to Dartmouth, choosing to follow his heart instead, Justin had learned his lessons well and his business acumen was more sharp than many who had paid to sit in a classroom to learn it. "Have you faxed the information to Cynthia yet?"

"Not yet although it would be better if he came in to sign them. I could always send it by messenger."

"No need. I'll take them to him since we're supposed to meet for lunch." Quinn handed him the over-stuffed envelop and Justin burst out laughing. "He's going to groan and grumble but they'll be back tomorrow. Ready, Daph?"

"Thank you, Mr. Quinn for everything," Daphne said as they moved toward the front entrance of the bank.

Many of the customers were still standing in line but Daphne looked for the source of her uneasy feeling. She scanned the interior of the bank, landing on a pair of blue eyes the same cerulean as her companion's. His eyes were wide at first, then narrowed. Daphne had seen that look on Craig Taylor a million times before when he was angry; the last time had been the day he'd had Justin arrested for trespassing during a Stop Prop 14 protest in front of Taylor Electronics. She debated telling Justin but he was in a wonderful mood having concluded all he'd set out to do and as usual, he was hungry. She reasoned the war he already waged within himself about Brian would only be compounded if he knew of his father's presence in the same place where he was signing papers to make things more permanent with Brian. She wasn't sure if Justin realized that he had already made up his mind about Brian but she wouldn't push that issue either. It all had to come from Justin or it meant nothing...but she would certainly speak to Brian about the Craig Taylor sighting. Somehow she knew that seeing him did not bode well for Brian and Justin.

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"Sorry I'm late, Brian," Lindsey huffed as she practically threw herself opposite him in the restaurant.
"It's alright although Justin called and will be late as well," Brian said. He took a long sip of the Merlot from his wineglass. "So where's Gus?"

"He's back at the house. We probably won't see him for the rest of the day." At Brian's puzzled look she said, "Video game tournament. In fact that's all I heard on the way down here. Thank God you had the forethought to install it."

"Yeah well I promised that next time he came down he'd have access to it. It just so happens you came down a little earlier than expected. So the question of the hours is: what have you decided?"

"My stance hasn't changed at all, Brian. I want the divorce. There is no way this can be worked out."

"Especially not with over fifteen-thousand dollars hanging in the balance," Brian said, taking another sip of his wine. "Don't tell me you're shocked that I found out?"

"I am a bit surprised. How did you find out anyway?"

"Your wife's accountant works for me," he said smugly.

"Ted? Ted told you?" Lindsey asked incredulously.

"Relax, Lindz. Theodore doesn't even realize I know. I was passing by his office when I heard 15K and Mel mentioned in the same sentence. I've been accused of being a lot of things in my life but stupid was never one of them-my father notwithstanding but he was a drunk so it doesn't count. Although I don't hold you completely responsible for the dissolution of Gus' college fund, you are partly at fault.

"You think I don't know that, Brian," Lindsey answered him indignantly. "I hold myself completely responsible and I don't need you to fucking tell me that."

Brian issued a blank stare. Lord the Lesbianics! "You finished Joan of Arc?" At her slight nod, he continued. "Good because I wasn't. And for the record at least you're not trying to be Anne Boleyn claiming innocence." He was relieved that her moment of martyrdom had passed, indicated by the quick chuckle she gave. "I only mentioned it because we're now past blame. The money is gone but I'll replace that and keep Gus' college fund in my care with my attorney. The account can be added to but can't be withdrawn except by one of us or Gus, upon maturity. In the meantime, we have other matters to discuss. Now you are absolutely, one-hundred-percent positive you want a divorce. There is no way you're willing to work this thing out between you?"

"Brian, you know me. I never act impulsively-well not since the days of our youth and midsummer madness- but I have really had enough. Let me explain to you what it was like since we left Pittsburgh. You know the house we live in? Melanie picked it out, it was not my choice. The interior design of the house...that was my choice with stipulations. The job I have- Melanie's choice because
the job I really wanted wasn't conducive to the kid's schedules and Melanie wasn't willing to compromise on her work schedule so I bent and worked out a schedule with my boss which had me working part-time. So essentially she was the bread winner and the income which you sent outside of your contribution to Gus' college fund, went to mine and Gus' share of the household expenses which included J.R.'s school admission. Now I know you well enough to know that you sent extra for J.R. because somewhere along the lines, Michael forgot he had a responsibility beyond six-hundred dollars a year. Perhaps if he wasn't chasing Ben around the globe, maybe he would be able to send more. Who knows?" Lindsey took a sip of water and deep breath before she continued. "The problem with Mel and I, is that I am unwilling and unable to give up my friendship with you and denouncing your place in Gus' life, while taking advantage of your generosity."

"Jesus, Lindz you're making me sound like a saint or something. I never looked at it as you taking advantage. I always promised you that you wouldn't want for so much as a paper airplane. I would never go back on my word."

"I know that, Brian," she said. "But that was only one reason that Melanie and I can't make it. The other is that somewhere in all of the years, I've been with her, I've lost my voice and I feel like I've stifled and suffocated the part of me that is intelligent and a fighter for the sake of keeping the peace-but not my peace, or Gus', or J.R.'s- it was for the sake of giving Melanie peace. I no longer choose to suppress what I want for her benefit or anyone else's."

Brian was silent for a time, taking sips of wine as he processed all she'd said. He understood what she meant in reference to Melanie. She was obstinate and a bully but at the same time she was a good person when she could stop commanding things to go her way. But if Lindsey was sure... "Did you look at the house a mile west of ours?"

"I did and that's what took me so long. It is identical to yours but so different at the same time. Instead of the east, west and south wings yours has, this one only has the east wing for bedrooms which have three in all with their own bathrooms. The other end of the house has a library, game room and a place I can use as a studio should I feel like painting again. The kitchen is amazing and identical to yours and there's a basement. The pool deck is great but I would like it enclosed so it can be used year round if I'm going to pay the additional for it. The private park is amazing as well with nature trails and a small pond. I think it's perfect."

Brian nodded. "You know, Lindz, you and Gus could stay with us. There's definitely enough room."

Lindsey shook her head. "No we can't, Peter." she said invoking her personal nickname for him. "You and Justin need your time together. Most importantly he needs his time with you without distractions." At Brian's protest, Lindsey held up her hand. "I had a long and informative talk with Justin this morning and although I won't tell you what was said and I didn't give him any advice one way or another, it helped that I listened. But I got the distinct feeling that although you guys argued last night, he said some things that you needed to hear. Furthermore, those things need to be puzzled out between the two of you and that can't happen with Gus and I underfoot. Look, I know you want him and I apologize for any part I played in splitting you guys up years ago but ask yourself if he hadn't left would we be sitting here now having this conversation or the one we were having regarding Mel and I."
"You have nothing to apologize for, Lindsey. It was his decision to go."

"But you held the door open, Brian." She reached across the table taking his hand in hers. "What do you supposed that looked like to a twenty-three year old young adult- young being the operative word? The only thing that you both had fault in was not fighting hard enough for what you both wanted but that wasn't necessarily a bad thing from where I'm sitting."

"It's up to him, Lindz. I won't influence his decision in any way. You know how I feel about that. I want him to be with me because he wants to and for no other reason than that."

"And if he chooses to go...are you going to sit idly by and watch him walk away this time? I know how you feel about him having choices, Brian and I even understand where it comes from. But just like you're giving him the choice to leave you, you're making the choice not to fight for what you want, wrapping yourself in pain, loneliness and mindless fucking and drinking. Is that how you'll choose to spend the rest of your life?"

"Sorry to interrupt."

Lindsey closed her eyes in brief annoyance at the voice she'd know anywhere. Michael Novotny. Putting on her best WASP face, she uttered. "Hello, Michael."

"Hey Lindsey. I'm surprised to see you here. Is Mel and J.R. visiting with you?"

She and Brian exchanged a quick look in which she noticed his lips were folded and a single eyebrow arched. *Fucker!* "No they aren't. They are still in Toronto. You should give them a call. I'm sure they'd love to hear from you."

"Okay. I will." He then turned to Brian. "Can I talk to you? Alone?"

"Well that's my cue. Brian I'll see you-"

"Stay here, Lindsey. We're not done."

"But Brian, I really need to talk to you," Michael said.

"Oh? About what?" Brian asked, his tone light and conversational.

"Things. To catch up. I've missed you and it's been such a long time," Michael said.

"Yeah it has, hasn't it. Well pull up a chair. Lindz you don't mind, right?"
"Not at all," she answered with a slight smirk gracing her lips. She knew what Brian was up to even if Michael-his best friend-did not. *What a fucking joke.*

"So Mikey, how are things?" Brian asked, taking another sip of Merlot and signaling the waiter. "Another bottle please and a bottle of Sauvignon Blanc. Mikey would you like wine or a Pepsi?" Brian knew he couldn't look at Lindsey or he would die laughing. She was already close to tears trying to contain the silent chuckles wracking her slim shoulders.

"Pepsi, please," Mikey answered.

Brian nodded to the waiter who scurried off to fulfill, Brian's order. "Isn't this cozy, Michael? Do you remember the last time we were here in this restaurant together?" When Michael shook his head, Brian supplied the answer. "It was right before you were to give a speech as to why Prop 14 shouldn't pass and about a week before my wedding that didn't happen." The waiter returned with their drinks. Pouring carefully, he asked if they were ready to order. "Not quite yet, Calvin. There are two more in our party we're expecting." The waiter nodded and left the table.

"Speaking of your which," Michael began. "I heard Justin is back in town."

*SX we're getting to the real of it, are we Mikey?* Brian blanked his features and shrugged nonchalantly. "Yes, he is."

"Why?" The question was asked whip-sharp and Brian quirked an eyebrow. Lindsey had actually jumped. Michael adjusted his tone, remembering where they were. "From what I heard, his career is going well so why come back here?"

"Pay close attention, Mikey because this answer is going to astound you." Brian took another long draught of his wine. He leaned toward Michael causing him to lead forward in return. "The answer is: None of your fucking business." Brian leaned back smiling sardonically.

"Why isn't it? We've always protected each other, Brian. That hasn't changed you know. I still love you."

"The feelings mutual, Mikey. *Always have, always will* but let me ask you something though-just out of curiosity. How much did you know about the first time Justin and I broke up?" At his silence, Brian continued. "Did Justin confide in you, Michael? And think carefully before you answer. It's been a long time, after all." Brian thought back over the argument he'd had with Justin picking out several key points.

"I can't remember," Michael answered low and Brian could tell he was lying because of how timid he'd become. If he really didn't remember, Michael would have stayed belligerent.

Brian nodded instead. "Well let me ask you this...why was it every time you and Justin disagreed about anything, even things which had nothing to do with me, you managed to make it about me and my finances?" Brian leaned forward putting his hand up under his chin.
He was really interested in finding out the answer because as he told Justin, it was never an issue for him as it was for others like Michael and Melanie. Even Ted made reference to it some times but it wasn't done with malice or out of spite or jealousy. Only Lindsey knew of the agreement between Justin and Brian about his schooling and the only reason she asked was because Daphne had gone to her about Justin dropping out of Pittsburgh Institute of Fine Arts. That was how Brian ended up writing a check for Justin by the time he made it to the Registrar's office in the company of Ethan. He'd heard about that too. He knew Justin had gone to his father because Daphne and Lindsey informed Brian that Craig Taylor wouldn't lift a finger to help his son. No one knew that Justin tried to reject the tuition—that was their personal business—but Michael kept involving himself. Everything Justin had said in anger to Brian, kept playing on a running tape in his mind even as he'd conducted the business meetings throughout the morning.

"Look, Brian. I stand by everything I believed of him then and I stand by it now. He took from you and used you and never gave back anything but his body and heartbreak in return."

"And how exactly do you know that, Michael? Were there hidden video cameras in the loft? Did you hire a PI to follow us around? Oh wait-you had people from the FBI in your back pocket to tap our phones. That must be how you knew so much about Justin and I. But you also knew what he was feeling that time I had to choose between him and my job, right? You knew everything, everything and you just thought to tell me- or better yet drop hints- about Ethan Gold but nothing about the events leading up to it. If you had maybe I wouldn't have been so inclined to black your eye...sort of how I'm feeling at this moment."

Lindsey reached across the table to grip Brian's hand. "Michael, I think you'd better leave."

"No. If he's going to do it, then let him if it will make him feel better. Justin was trouble from the moment you met him. You got rid of him and now he's back to cause you more trouble. What is this time? He ran out of money or doesn't have a place to stay? Are you just so fucking desperate for younger ass than yours that you'll put up with anything to get it? Are twenty-somethings now off limits? What the fuck is wrong with you? You can have anybody you want but you would rather settle for the scheming blond, good-for-nothing trick of your past. Move the fuck on already!"

Brian was rising out of his seat when he saw who stood behind Michael. He hadn't heard or seen him approach but he could tell by the look on his face he'd heard every single word spoken. Fuck!

"Brian, sit down," Justin said very softly. He stood behind Michael listening to every word spoken against him. "Here you look these over. I have to return them to Quinn by morning. In the meantime, I will address, Mikey. After all, it's my character he's disparaging...again."

He handed the large packet to Brian who immediately began to pull out the stack of papers but he didn't look at them right away.

There were a few things people never realized about Justin Taylor. The first was he had a damn solid left hook which Brian had found out about during a naked wrestling match in Justin's Pink Posse days. The other was when he was feeling murderous or close to it, he didn't yell... a lot. He mainly just talked softly. He yelled when he was moderately pissed off but the quiet moments were usually where one should get concerned. Brian always thought it amazing that pissed and angry never meant the same thing in Justin's world. Daphne understood that and Brian understood it. Lindsey and
Michael were about to learn it; one through observation, the other through occurrence.

"Better watch your back, Brian. He may be looking for a good place to stab you in it," Michael continued satisfied that the object of his scorn stood before him so he could speak his piece. "What the fuck are you doing here, Justin? Shouldn't you be in New York looking for a Sugar Daddy? Why don't you leave him alone?"

Brian shifted in his seat as Justin began to speak again; partially in preparation in case he had to pull Justin off Michael, the other reason was a very inconvenient bulge forming in the front of his pants. Dominant Justin was always a major turn-on.

Justin laughed and shook his head. "Here's a little something you may not be aware of..." Justin leaned closer to Michael's ear. "You ready? You whine when you talk. It annoys people and makes them want to punch you in the mouth especially when you're assassinating their character. Instead, I probably should just sue for slander and defamation of character which would land you and your hubby- who really wouldn't be very happy with Lil' Mikey- in the poor house. That's the only warning you're going to get."

"Listen you little shit..."

"No you listen," Justin shot back. "I have had enough of your jealous griping and then pretending to really care when it was evident you didn't. Believing you was my stupidity but I'm not that kid anymore, Michael."

"And what the fuck's that supposed to mean?"

Justin lowered his voice as he bent at the waist to look Michael in the eye. "It means that you should really watch your mouth when it comes to me, Michael. Brian stopped at blacking your eye. I won't." Justin left Michael sitting there with his mouth open in stunned silence as he moved toward Brian.

Things weren't anywhere near resolved between he and Brian but Justin knew they would be one way or the other and sooner rather than later. He slid onto Brian's lap, positioning himself where his outer thigh caressed the bulge between Brian's legs and kissed him, slowly at first-then with speed and building intensity. Justin parted Brian's lips with his tongue and delved in controlling every millisecond of the exchange. He pulled gasps and moans from Brian as if he was playing the finest instrument. Justin deepened the kiss again, changing the landscape and Brian had no choice but to follow his lead. He moved his thigh subtly in time with his tongue as Brian became wilder underneath him. A loud clearing of the throat interrupted the exchange but not the connection. Justin stared into Brian's eyes which were passion-glazed but something else was there, too. Justin smiled as he named the emotion. "You love me," he whispered. Brian nodded. "Not good enough. Say it."

"Later."

Justin nodded but leaned in Brian's ear and whispered. "Still love you, too."
"Enough to..."

"Later," Justin said, while reluctantly unseating himself from Brian's lap. "Come on, Daph." And he left the restaurant. Yes, he definitely had some thinking to do....

Lindsey was relieved in a sense because she had just avoided having to explain to the waiter, why the table was flipped over and the CEO of Kinnetik, Corp. and his- for all intents and purposes- husband was rolling around on the floor and fucking in public. The passion ignited between Brian and Justin was immediate and searing hot; so much emotion visible that she was tempted to let it go on so she could watch. She heard the whispered words from Justin as if he'd spoken them directly to her and saw her friend of many years almost give into the temptation to lay his feelings bare in front of everyone, including the sour-faced person still moderately stunned into silence at the exchange. She decided she wanted that for herself and it solidified her resolve not to go back to the lackluster life she'd just fled. She watched as Brian settled in to read the paperwork Justin brought in word for word before he began signing each document with care and precision. Turning to Michael she asked simply, "Will you leave him alone to run his own life now?" and laughed as, looking as petulant as she'd ever seen him, he fled the restaurant.

*L~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Shit! What was Justin doing back in Pittsburgh? Seeing him at the bank was a shock but... What the hell was he doing back in Pittsburgh? To see him smile, being happy in the presence of Daphne Chanders reminded me of old times when the two of them were inseparable. When they didn't have a care in the world besides homework, before.... Before Justin made the announcement which would wreck the happy home Jennifer and I built. 'It doesn't matter what you do, Dad. I'll still be your queer son.' It was said with conviction and smugly. He wasn't willing to hide for anyone, not even himself. Part of me admired that kind of determination. It was the same kind of determination I had when the naysayers said I couldn't make a success of the Electronics store instead of becoming the Investment Banker my father wanted me to be. He'd turned down Dartmouth because he couldn't be what I wanted him to be...and because he hadn't wanted to leave his lover, Brian Kinney. Were they back together? Was that the reason he was back? Despite what I told Jim, I kept abreast of Justin's career and knew he was doing exceptionally well. If he was straight I would be proud to call and claim him as my son. Jennifer had no problem doing so but she was his mother-she wasn't supposed to have a problem with it. It was different for a man and his boy. The dynamics were always different especialy in our upper crux of society. There were many things that were just not accepted and homosexuality were first amongst them. We are God-fearing Christians and it goes against everything natural and good and right. Yet seeing Justin today... I miss him, I love him but I hate what he's become and I know who to blame for it all...Brian Kinney. So if Justin is the way to get to him, so be it.

"Craig how much did you find out at the bank? Was Townsend able to access the records?" Jim asked.

"I couldn't find out much with the exception that Quinn handles Brian Kinney's numerous accounts
and they are all on a separate network. Mark Townsend is only able to access information as basic as ours. Kinney was smart in having the codes to his accounts hidden. There are only two people within the bank with access to those files. Quinn is one of them; the other remains a secret. It could be anyone but it's definitely not Townsend."

"What makes you so sure it isn't?" Samuel Hobbs, Senior asked. Although almost eighty-five years old, he still wielded power and authority as natural as breathing.

"I sat there as he tried code after code, Senior, and nothing worked. I know that his access was not blocked through the usual methods because he was able to pull up all of our records in succession and that of our businesses. No, there is another way to access the information but it isn't through the main network and Quinn won't give it up."

Samuel Hobbs, Jr. nodded. "We know that above all his integrity means the world to him. We could torture him and everyone he knows but he still wouldn't give up the information we want. Since his wife died, there's no one he cares about enough to threaten especially since they didn't have children. Well, how do you suppose we get into his finances? From my research his major accounts are not willing to part with him and admittedly he's done fabulous work for them. A butt-fucker should not have so much power and influence over God-fearing people, yet they're willing to overlook where he sticks his dick as long as their bottom line meets their expectations. It's shameful! Christopher is still struggling with what he did to Taylor fourteen years ago although he's managed to make a substantial living for his wife and family but he's no longer welcome in our circles and that's bad for business all the way around."

Craig grew extremely still and silent at the reference to Christopher Hobbs and the bashing which almost took his son's life. Although he couldn't blame Hobbs because of Justin's perverted lifestyle, he was still angry because the occupants of the room, including former Police Chief Stockwell, had allowed him to get away with it using their money and connections. Craig felt at the very least, Chris should have been privately and sufficiently punished but he hadn't been. Instead he was allowed to continue with life as he always had with the exception of being admitted into their social club. He was even taking a more active role in his family's multi-million dollar construction business.

"So what can we do," Jim asked. "If Kinney has amassed the funds and buying power you say he has, how can we get to him?"

"Bombing Babylon again is not an option. We almost didn't get away with it the last time. The only reason we did is because Joshua decided to go underground with the money we paid him before the bomb even went off. He could have betrayed us with everything we did to him prior. Furthermore, how were we to know Kinney wouldn't be in attendance at that benefit. He arrived later but as the intended target, the whole episode was a debacle. We could call Joshua back but to what purpose? No. I think there has to be more thought put into this if Jim and all of us are to have our revenge on this interloper," Junior adamantly stated and with good reason. Junior has the most to lose in the entire situation if anyone ever discovered the connection between Joshua Markham and Samuel Hobbs, Jr. "And what are your thoughts on this, Craig? You've been silent with the exception of providing the details."
Craig had been still and silent since he imparted the information, knowing he had to make a definite
decision about telling his companions about Justin's sudden arrival in Pittsburgh. Yes, he wanted
Kinney to suffer but was he willing to put Justin at risk? He couldn't ask Jennifer about Justin's
involvement with Kinney without looking suspicious and Molly was away at Dartmouth. The only
viable option was to attack Kinney from within his company but how? "I'll agree with whatever you
plan to do but again it has to be well-planned. I have a wife and young son to consider now and will
not put them at risk. In the meantime, none of this conversation leaves this room and keep your ears
open. There's something we're missing but I don't know what it is."

"I still have contacts and supporters within the police department," Jim said. "Now that Horvath is
gone, they shouldn't be too hard to access."

Craig nodded. "Well, I suggest we adjourn until we all have something more than speculation to
speak on." Putting down the half-full glass of vodka tonic he held, he exited the house through the
doors of study in which they all sat. The revenge on Brian Kinney was just too good to pass up.

Christopher Marc Hobbs was leading a double life and he knew it. Part of him was ashamed because
of an incident which happened many years prior to entering the bar he sat in. The other part of him
felt free because in the setting of Boy Toy, he could be exactly who he was. To the outside world, he
was an upstanding family man with a wife and two children. He went to church every Sunday and
ran his family's construction company. He was a known homophobe especially after bashing Justin
Taylor with a baseball bat fourteen years ago. He had never bothered to correct the assumption that it
was because Justin made a pass at him and he was in fear of his asshole. The truth was that after he
allowed Justin to jerk him off in the equipment room and the teacher walked in, Chris panicked
thinking that Justin would reveal his secret... Justin did on Liberty Avenue months later after Chris
had provoked situation after situation including a verbal contretemps between Mr. Dixon and Justin
resulting in him being suspended.

As Justin and his friends were about to enter Woody's Bar, Chris remembered being confronted by
Justin about his presence on Liberty Avenue. Allison had only been his girlfriend back then instead
of his wife. Chris had pushed Justin when he was confronted with an older man who looked as if he
would kill him if he touched Justin again. It was then that Justin revealed the secret Chris was
determined to keep hidden; the memory which he'd jerked off to every night since it happened. Of
course no one believed him but Chris knew the truth...and so did Justin. A few months later at the
prom, watching Justin and his lover gaze at each other as if no one else existed while they danced
and kissed, made Chris feel enraged and disgusted by turns. Many thought it was just because of the
implied outing on Liberty Avenue but it wasn't. They thought it was simply because he was a
homophobe; it wasn't. According to the judge and his attorney, Chris did the right thing because of
his fine, moral upbringing which in truth Chris couldn't give a shit about at the time. That long ago
fateful night had been about one very important thing: all-consuming jealousy. Chris was pissed at
Justin for bringing his lover to the prom and having the courage to be openly gay, whereas Chris
could not be. Justin Taylor was everything the football hero couldn't be: smart, courageous, out,
proud, unabashed and most of all loved.
As he sat in the bar window remembering all the events leading up to visiting Boy Toy for the first time, the object of his thoughts passed by the window walking aimlessly. Once again panic set in. What if he saw me? He hopped off the barstool as if bitten, backed up slowly away from the window still focused on the outside view.

"Chris honey, why are you so pale?" his companion, George asked him. He had been seeing George for over a year secretly under the last name Jacobs. George was sweet, mild-mannered and had a bubbly personality—everything his wife wasn't.

"No reason, baby. You ready to get out of here?" Chris asked feeling like gravel was stuck in his throat.

"That depends, lover. Are you staying the night this time?"

"Sure babe." He was gratified that his answer made George happy and since Allison and the kids were out of town, there wasn't a reason to turn George down. But he had to get off of Liberty Avenue before...no he wouldn't think of it.

He ushered George out the door of the bar, linking his arm with his and hurried toward the alley where his car was parked hoping with every fiber of his being that he hadn't been spotted.

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Justin walked in the house, his mind automatically picking and visualizing where the furniture was so he wouldn't bump into anything. His ears perked up at the sound of Sam Smith singing "Stay With Me," the words penetrating his mind. He needed a shower even though he hadn't fucked anyone. Brian didn't need to know that. After dropping Daphne off at the Staybridge Hotel, he'd parked it down on Liberty Avenue and just... walked around for awhile. He didn't feel like visiting the old haunts, Woody's or the Diner and after the last few nights spent at Babylon, he was over it. He needed time to clear his head—to figure out if what Brian was asking of him was worth the risks. There was never an easy choice with Brian but he was right...it was all or nothing. Either Justin was in it for the long haul or it was time to cut and run. He thought about the events of the afternoon. The magnitude of leaving his livelihood and basically his life in Brian's hands was symbolic in the most fundamental way. He trusted Brian implicitly to see to his best interests no matter what their personal relationship was. He'd always considered Brian his best friend, the only one who could surpass Daphne and he was a whiz at business. That had been enough reason to sign the papers leaving everything Justin owned to him. He instinctively knew Brian would make sure his mom, Molly and Daphne were taken care of. He even left a codicil in his will for his father and baby brother. No matter how estranged he and his father was, Justin still considered him "Dad" even if they would never speak or acknowledge each other. Craig had been selfish in making his love for Justin conditional; he could not do the same.

The stunner of the afternoon was hearing Brian actually berate Michael on his behalf. It was something he never thought he'd see in a million years. He and Daphne had just stood there and listened as Brian asked—no, he demanded—answers for what he did to Justin. Michael was finally being held accountable for playing both sides in order to get what he really wanted which was...
Brian's unconditional affection and unobstructed attention. Even though Michael had Ben and Hunter, it had not been enough for him. In Michael's mind it was okay for him to be happy as long as Brian didn't change. Justin was the thing which changed Brian, therefore he had to be removed. In one instance, Justin actually felt sorry for Michael. He understood what it was like to love someone and it not be returned. He smiled to himself. *That didn't last for years though.* However, Justin couldn't and wouldn't absolve Michael of wrongdoing as many others had done constantly during his relationship with Brian. Justin wouldn't even absolve himself for his culpability in letting them tear apart the one worthwhile relationship he'd ever had; a relationship which was as vital as air. When he'd heard enough, Justin stepped in to defend himself in a way that was unexpected but no less potent than if Brian had done it, as he had many times before. He'd never felt stronger within himself than the moment he'd kissed the man he loved. He'd lost himself completely and immediately, feeling something inside him fuse together- a part of himself he'd never realized was broken before. There were no questions, no indecisions; his mind was silent and the ever-present restlessness was still.

He was just about to sit down on the couch when the light switched on.

"You're home early," Brian said, his raspy voice causing an involuntary shiver deep within Justin. They hadn't spoken in depth again since the night before. Brian was gone before Justin awoke which was just as well since he didn't know what to say about their argument or the subsequent events. His dick contracted involuntarily at the thought of being at Brian's mercy again. It had been many years since he'd been dominated like that-or better yet allowed it.

"Yeah- the action wasn't what I thought tonight." He said flopping down on the couch next to Brian. "So what's up? Why were you sitting here in the dark?"

"Just thinking."

"About?" Justin was genuinely curious. It wasn't like Brian to get introspective except only on few occasions in their long and varied relationship. The last time he'd really seen him ponder anything as deeply to have frown lines in his forehead was the night Brian decided to give up his parental rights fifteen years ago. "Seriously, what's wrong, Brian? You're scaring me."

Brian chuckled a little, shaking his head. "I remember a time I told you the same thing a little over ten years ago."

Justin thought back to their conversation in the loft-really his conversation in which Brian just stood and listened by the refrigerator while he told him he was leaving. And there they were at the crossroads all over again. "So what have you decided?" Justin asked the same question Brian asked him.

"I want you but then you already know that," Brian said simply. "What you don't know is how serious I am about permanently having you... not just in my bed, but in my life."

Justin's heartbeat sped up. It was what he'd asked himself as he'd walked around-if he was just Brian's mid-life crisis and if he was, what he was going to do about it. "And?" Justin needed to hear what he had been thinking sitting there in the dark. *Nothing else.* It was not about sex; it was about them period. So much needed to be done, spoken- Justin needed clarity, reassurance that if he picked his life up and moved it again there wouldn't be a reason to regret or look back.

Brian took a deep breath, letting it out slowly. His fist tightened and Justin could tell he was nervous although he gave no other outward signs of it. He raised his eyes to meet Brian's. Love shown through them and filtered outward to Justin, warming him- thawing the ice he encased his heart in.
where Brian was concerned. Hurt looked back at Justin and he knew just how deeply he'd hurt the one person he loved more than his own life. Yeah he wanted Brian to feel what being with him was like for years but at what cost? Brian opened his palm slowly revealing two precious metals Justin instantly recognized.

"You never returned them?" Justin couldn't believe what he was seeing.

"No. I never returned them and now I'm going to ask you the one thing I should have ten years ago. Stay with me?"

The words of the song reached Justin again and how appropriate the words were for them and their story; their history. What started as a one-night-stand evolved into their house, their non-relationship which in fact was everything to them both and Brian held the evidence of it in the palm of his hand. The answer to Justin's questions stared him in the face as clear as a beacon from a lighthouse over dark waters. Justin smiled at the analogy. There really wasn't any guarantees- just small leaps of faith and confidence in the decisions made and the person chosen to make them with.

"Yes."

"Yes what?" Brian smiled that sly, sexy smile at him.

"Okay," Justin said returning the smile, remembering when Brian had proposed to him the second time.

"Okay? Say it." Brian inched closer to Justin, his nearness making Justin feel light-headed and giddy as always but magnified by what Justin was agreeing to.

Justin reached out, hands diving into Brian's hair. He leaned in, placed a gentle kiss against his lips feeling the slight push back returned to his own. "Yeah, I'll stay with you," Justin whispered before swooping in to kiss Brian fully.

*Heaven knows,*

*I'm head over heels and it shows*

*I've played every field, I suppose...*

He took Brian's breath, gave it back-that languid feeling and the rightness of his decision transferring itself into their exchange. Brian took control of the kiss, tilting Justin's head at such an angle where he could plunge deeper inside. Over and over Brian kept control of Justin not letting him catch his breath, relief and love evident in every swipe of Brian's tongue over his. His fingers tangled in Brian's hair trying to bring him even closer; he didn't want any space between them ever again. Brian shifted Justin again, tongue sliding to the special spot just behind his ear. Justin had no choice but to moan in response as the word mine floated through his thoughts. As if Brian heard him, he uttered the sentiment causing an animalistic groan to escape Justin.

"Upstairs now," Justin whispered against Brian's lips.

"Here," Brian answered back.

"Uh-huh. Lindz and Gus don't need to see what I'm about to do to you," Justin growled against his lips. "They don't need to hear how loud I'm going to make moan, or hear me making you say my
name over and over. Do you want to explain to your son why his dad became a whimpering, blubbering idiot?" Justin pulled his head back to stare into Brian's eyes which held a hungry, predatory look and almost made Justin cream right then.

"Upstairs now," Brian said.

Justin laughed. "I thought so."

But there's something about you

When you're around, Baby I have found...*

They raced up the stairs, pausing ever so often to exchange heated kisses and caresses along the way. Practically falling into the doorway of their private retreat, Justin wasted no time undressing Brian. The popping and ripping sounds of the shirt being torn from his lover's body and his own incited Justin further. Taking charge he turned, kicking the door closed and attacked Brian in one smooth motion. He kissed Brian hard and heavy, following him down onto the king-sized bed. His fingers tangled in Brian's hair, trying to bring him into him even closer. He swallowed the soft moans emitting from Brian as he continued his assault. Justin realized they would never last at their frenzied pace so he slowed down but still kept the intensity of the exchange. Reluctantly releasing the sensuous lips underneath his, he kissed his lover's eyes, ears and the tip of his nose while enjoying the feel of the hands which held him close. Justin arched his back at the feel of Brian's nails scraping softly down his back as he tongued the spot on his neck which always caused Brian's dick to twitch. Justin sat astride him bringing their crotches close as he began moving softly against him.

"You still have too many clothes on, Sunshine," Brian whispered followed by a deep moan as Justin continued to kiss his neck.

"So do you. Switch places with me," Justin murmured back. "I want to watch you take the rest of yours off."

Brian laughed softly. "Oh, you want a show?"

"Yep. I've earned it."

Brian palmed Justin's ass, squeezing the cheeks tightly holding Justin in place as he ground his hips upward. "And what are you going to give me as a reward, if I do what you say?"

Justin chuckled softly enjoying the subtle tremor that raced through Brian. "Would you rather know? Or would you rather feel what I'm going to do?" He tongued Brian's ear briefly as he felt himself being lifted and tossed unceremoniously on the bed. He couldn't help but laugh and was gratified to hear the love of his life's laughter as well.
Yeah...he is the love of my life and always will be. The thought sobered Justin as he accepted what had always been inevitable no matter how each of them tried to fight fate or let others decide their fate for them. Brian was a man who only loved once and so was Justin- he understood that as he watched Brian slowly and tortuously slide his pants and brief down his long legs. Brian Kinney wore clothes like a boss but without them he looked like a golden-skinned god. Justin's mouth went dry at the sight of his long limbs- not overly muscular but well-defined broken up only by the small thatch of hair on his pubes. The rest of Brian was as smooth as it ever was and the years seemed to not age him or diminish the power of the man he'd met all those years ago.

Justin crooked his finger for Brian to come closer. Settling himself on the edge of the bed, he caressed every inch of Brian's body he could reach; first with his hand and then with his tongue. He took his time rediscovering all of his lover's erogenous zones, paying attention to Brian's change in breathing when he ghosted his lips over them. He laid back, letting Brian remove the rest of his clothes then urging Brian down on top of him began to make love to him in earnest. Rolling Brian over to his back, Justin went straight for Brian's cock, deep-throating without warning. He licked up, allowing his tongue to wet all surfaces before taking Brian fully down his throat again. He felt the hands on his head massaging his scalp as he continued painting Brian's dick with his tongue. He changed speed and rhythm frequently never allowing his lover to get comfortable with any motion. When he hollowed out his cheeks and lapped at the head creating a suction to rival any vacuum, Brian's back bowed of the bed as Justin watched what his actions did to him. The hand on his head gripped tighter and he could tell Brian was close to coming but Justin wasn't ready for him to. He began an easy motion until the hand entangled in his hair gentled. As soon as it did, Justin began all over again.

"Fuck! You're killing me, Sunshine," Brian gritted out.

"I know," Justin replied, smiling before swallowing Brian again, burying his nose in his groin inhaling his arousing scent.

Justin allowed his throat to open and close as Brian continued to moan and groan and curse his satisfaction and his agony at Justin's hands. Goddamn! There was nothing on earth that could take the place of bedding Brian Kinney. He opened his jaw long enough to wet two of his fingers. Removing them when they were sufficiently saturated, Justin began preparing Brian even more. The digits of one hand penetrated little by little while the other reached up to squeeze and torment Brian's ultra-sensitive nipples. Justin smiled remembering the time he'd almost made Brian come just by sucking and biting the flat disc which adorned his chest. Justin released Brian's cock momentarily to swipe at the sac beneath it. He sucked and licked at it, applied a little nip which make Brian convulse in pleasurable pain before moving lower. His tongue traded places with his fingers which began to jerk his lover off. Justin rimmed the puckered opening allowing his tongue to enter slowly.

"Oh God- Justin," Brian moaned.

Justin chuckled and blew softly against the wetness. "No. Just Justin will do." He heard Brian chuckle. "So how do you want me? Face down, ass up? Riding you? " Justin bit the inside of Brian's thigh while enunciating every word. His breath caught at Brian's next words.
"Fuck me," Brian groaned out.

"How?" Justin asked. There was no question who the top was in their relationship but ever so often, the roles reversed. It was always best to have clarification before Brian changed his mind.

"I don't care, Justin, I just need..."

"I know what you need," Justin answered. He eased himself on top of Brian bringing their bodies flush against each other. Looking into his eyes, Justin understood exactly why Brian was asking it of him. The very first time Brian allowed it was a short time before the whole "Ethan" episode of their lives. Prior to that, things were good and solid between them. It was the ultimate act of trust for Brian and never to be taken lightly or for granted. Justin leaned in and kissed Brian gently while reaching for the lube and condoms by the bed. Justin lubed his fingers and began the process of preparing Brian for his entry. Since Brian wasn't used to being a bottom and he knew that the only other person Brian had ever let into him was his long-gone gym teacher, Justin knew Brian would be beyond tight. "Relax, Brian. Let me in."

Brian nodded as Justin gained the first ring and the second, pushing in gently but firmly. He held the finger still until Brian began squirming against it on his own. He repeated the exercise with the other fingers in succession, scissoring his fingers to aid in the stretching of the muscle. He smiled when Brian pushed back harder and faster against his fingers even though he kept his responding movements easy and light.

"No more waiting, Sunshine. I'm ready," Brian groaned in earnest and Justin hurried to oblige and relieve his lover.

Placing Brian's legs over his shoulder and rolling on the condom, Justin applied a steady pressure against the opening while watching Brian's face. Once gaining entry, he held himself steady allowing Brian to take as much as he could before stopping so his body could adjust to the intrusion. With anyone else, Justin wouldn't have cared so much, but this was Brian...his lover and his best friend-the man who knew him better than anyone and the man he would spend the rest of his life loving. He had no choice but to care. Finally Brian was seated fully on Justin's cock, a look of pure, unadulterated pleasure emblazoned on his perfect features.

"Open your eyes and look at me, Brian," Justin said softly.

When Brian did, only then did Justin begin to move. He rocked into Brian gently taking his cues from the body beneath him. He sped up when Brian's body demanded more-a word the ecstasy on Brian's face wouldn't let him say. He kept up the rhythm, plunging in deeply taking care to pass over the prostate. He was gratified further with each gasp that escaped Brian as Justin adjusted himself and rotated his hips smoothly causing deep ripples within Brian's core. Each tremor that wracked Brian, Justin felt just as strongly. He let one of Brian's legs slip down to his forearm and then finally wider which changed the fit inside of Brian's tight channel-it made it tighter. Justin shivered at the sensation and Brian chuckled through a groan. He knew what happened because of how many times he'd done that to Justin. In retaliation, Justin began to jerk off Brian, causing warring sensations within his lover's delicious body.

"I never...taught you that," Brian panted as he moaned.
"I know," Justin answered smugly while building the speed of both his hand and cock.

Brian became frenzied under Justin's touch and he kept up, drilling harder and applying a snap of his hips. He smiled wide when Brian bit his lip to keep from yelling loudly. He did it again and again until the tell-tale change in breathing occurred and Brian's body began moving faster of its own accord.

"Oh fuck yeah," Brian bit out. His gaspy moans coming in rapid succession.

"You're close, huh?" Justin teased, his voice low and seductive.

Brian reached up, pulling Justin down fully on top of him. "Shut the fuck up and make me come," he demanded through gritted teeth, trying to delay the eruption—Justin knew. Then he kissed Justin hard, who in turned plunged his tongue in fully. Brian moaned against his tongue and Justin's orgasm was bearing down on him. Brian ass clenched around him as he got closer, triggering Justin's hips to move faster.

Justin tore his mouth away, panting and groaning. "Goddamn, how the fuck did. You. Just. Get. Tighter?" Oh God, he's.... Justin couldn't finish the thought as Brian continued to clench and release around him.

Brian couldn't answer for the sensation beating at him...they were the same ones battering Justin as he ushered them toward climax. Brian had thrown his head back and Justin watched as the release happened as if in slow motion. He had never seen anything so beautiful and fulfilling as Brian coming undone at his hands. The sight triggered his own release, his movements becoming disjointed and jerky with the force of the orgasm. He fell forward, burying his head into Brian's neck, felt Brian's arms tightly close around him and Justin felt it...he had finally, finally come home.

...I get lost in you*

*Lost in You- Garth Brooks as Chris Gaines

End Notes:

Okay....So let me know what you all think!! And remember with these two guys, Getting together was always easy; staying together...well now that's the tricky part. Also bear in mind, that not all of the villians nor supporting cast has been introduced yet. So you all are in for many more moments of CRAZY!!! I sincerely hope you all are enjoying this work and that the 10 year gap is beginning to make sense. At core they are all still the same people, but life has had a way of coloring them just as it would many of us!! Love Y’all! Nichelle

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Pass Interference

Time's Up Volume II: Share My Life by Nichelle Wellesly

Summary:

Chapter 16 - Pass Interference by Nichelle Wellesly

Daphne was just finishing up a ten-hour shift. Exhausted beyond anything she'd ever felt-bone weary, hair limp from being under a surgical cap and the sparkle usually found in her eyes gone, she stared at herself in the mirror in the doctor's lounge. God, I feel forty years old. The ten car pile up, which happened thanks to the driver of a tractor trailer who fell asleep behind the wheel, kept her hopping from procedure to procedure. As the lead trauma surgeon on duty, she had to make her round to each operating room after tending to her own patients. Sometimes, she was very grateful for her vast knowledge and experience but there were other times when she wished she'd chosen another profession altogether.

Sighing deeply, she removed her scrubs as steam from the shower clouded the mirror she'd been staring in a moment before. She was supposed to meet Justin at the Diner for lunch. She knew that she could call and cancel but with the way her work rotation was set up, she really didn't know when she would get another chance to get out and just be Daphne. Since she'd left New York a month ago, it seemed the opportunities to just be herself and not worry about being everything to everybody disappeared entirely. But hey she was happy, sane, had a beautiful home but most of all she was in the company of true and loyal friends. Even she and Lindsey had become closer, both overjoyed over the reunion of Brian and Justin. The area in which they all lived gave them much needed
privacy but also a feeling of family since all were literally right down the street from the other.

Stepping into the shower, she remembered showing up at Brian and Justin's place the morning after they made things between them official. The secret smiles that wouldn't stay hidden, the quick but intimate caresses- every time they looked at each other, passion ignited thick and palpable. It was wonderful to watch two of her most favorite people openly in love and acknowledging what the feeling was for a change. She wanted to be jealous, wanted to be envious but she couldn't bring herself to. They had endured much and deserved their happiness. She picked up the lavender scented soap and began to scrub herself. She could still smell the scent of the operating room long after she'd finished up, an unavoidable occupational hazard. She had thought to tell Brian and Justin the reason she'd moved back to the Pitts but didn't want to ruin their moment in the sun. Knowing Brian he would have probably hired a hit-man to kill Stephen and with the way Daphne still felt about him, she wouldn't have been adverse to the idea. She laughed lightly remembering when she told Brian that her name wasn't Dexter but sometimes she wished it was that way she'd have the courage to at least chop his balls off for lying to her and his wife.

Drying herself off, she reached for her clothes, wobbling a little while doing so. That had been happening frequently especially when she was excessively tired. There were also dizzy spells and the occasional regurgitation of liquid when she refused or didn't have time to eat. It didn't make sense but everything else was normal. She just needed to get more rest and maybe she would take the weekend off to do so. Since landing the job at Allegheny General, she'd been at the hospital more than at the house she was paying the mortgage on. Damn why the hell am I so tired? Just slipping into her sneakers seemed a trial to her. She grabbed her jacket off the hook, cell phone in hand poised to dial Justin as soon as she made her way toward the parking lot.

Melanie Marcus was finally able to get off work. She handed case after case off to her subordinates in the hopes she would only be gone a few days and could get back to Toronto after collecting her wayward wife and son, to complete the case of her career. She was tired of playing phone tag with Lindsey- well really more like no tag since she would call and Lindsey would not return it. Since she had taken the car and the emptied the money out of her personal account, Melanie couldn't even fall back on that money since Gus' college fund was no longer available. As she was loading J.R. into the car, she received a heavy placket she still had yet to open. The only address on it was from a William Eldridge in Pittsburgh; someone she didn't know or care about. Things with Lindsey had gotten way out of hand. Usually when they argued it was only for a few hours and then Lindz was right back home, especially if Gus was with her. Because of Lindsey's defection with the family car, Melanie incurred another expense renting the one she drove into Pittsburgh- a city she had no intention of ever visiting again, having avoided Debbie's repeated attempts for them to come down from Canada. Sure Debbie visited, but Melanie wouldn't and cajoled Lindsey out of visiting as well. She didn't want to be anywhere remotely close to Brian Kinney and his machinations or his influence over her wife. Instinctively she knew that's where Lindsey was...up under Brian's thumb again.

"Mama, are we going to see Dad while we're here?" J.R. asked from the backseat. She had been
sour with Melanie since Gus and Lindz had been gone.

When Melanie would try to explain the situation was only temporary, she would roll her eyes, suck her teeth and challenge Melanie’s version of the truth. Melanie acknowledged she had every right to be upset. What child accepted change of any kind at any time? But it still didn't change the fact that J.R. held her completely responsible for Lindsey's defection. What was worse was that Melanie had to leave for work later and leave work earlier because of J.R.'s schedules. When Melanie had asked the gallery owner if Lindz had been to work, he informed her that she hadn't worked there in a little over a month- around the same time she left home.

"We'll try to see him, honey. I don't know if he's in town. Uncle Ben had a book tour and I'm not sure if they're back. I know they went to London but I'm not sure where else." J.R.'s noncommittal grunt was the only response she'd gotten as she always did after Melanie would answer her questions. Beyond that, there wasn't any conversation, at least not from J.R. There was plenty to her in which she would either pretend not to hear or answer with a blank stare. "Are you looking forward to seeing Gus and Lindz?"

"I am. I miss Gussie and Mommy," J.R. answered. Yeah...me too. "What are we doing here?"

Melanie pulled into the nearest parking space she could find. The lot was overfull which usually meant Brian was in conference. She hoped he was. "I have to ask Uncle Teddy something important, honey. Do you want to stay in the car or come in?" J.R. silently undid her seatbelt, opening the door and closing it a little harder than Melanie would have liked but she didn't push the issue.

Entering the lobby, it looked and smelled the same as the last time she entered the vaunted halls of Kinnetik. It still had the fresh paint smell emitting from the charcoal gray walls, the lighting was bright but never overpowering and the buzz of faraway voices and phones droned. It catered to four of the five senses intensely and effortlessly unless one could taste the success literally filling the air. The Justin Taylor Original painting enhanced the entire space providing a palpable sensuality. The business was more than thriving; it was a living breeding ground of creativity and innovation. She had to hand it to Brian- his success was hard-earned and well-deserved.

Approaching the security desk, she gave her name while showing her ID which was mandatory protocol. She advised J.R. to sit in the lobby and not to move as she disappeared behind the frosted glass leading to Teddy's office. Her steps, although muted by the grayish beige carpet, felt no less heavy than if she was walking the green mile to death row. She silently admitted that it had been wrong to take the money and give it to Rita, especially without speaking to Lindz about it but it wasn't like Gus was going to need it right away and Rita needed to move into the home for Seniors before the last room went. The house her cousin lived in for more than twenty years drained her finances even more than it was supposed to and it was getting harder and harder to explain the diminished paychecks to Lindz.
Music pumped the photo studio across the hall from Ted's office, sounding like the inside of Babylon. Ordinarily she would have made some snide remark but she couldn't think past her purpose for being there and the fear of running into Brian Kinney- a face she definitely didn't want to see at the moment. She let out a sigh of relief at finding Ted in his office alone. As usual his face was buried in a large ledger while he tapped away on the keyboard, lifting his head ever so often to remove a line or add a new one. She couldn't remember how many times prior to her relocation to Toronto she'd seen him thus.

"Cynthia, I'll have the portfolio done in a matter of minutes so can you tell the Almighty Kinney to keep his pants on?"

Melanie chuckled causing Ted to stop typing. "That would be a new one for Brian," she said laughingly. "And I would deliver your message if I was Cynthia."

"Mel, hey," Ted said rising out of his seat and embracing her at the same time. "What are you doing here?"

He let her go so that she could sit down in one of chairs in front of his desk. He closed the door, taking his own seat in the process. His office was the only staid room in the building yet it still spoke of the seductive elegance matching the rest of the decor within the building. His degrees hung on the light brown colored walls above the built-in bookcases. His massive mahogany desk dominated the room yet it didn't feel cluttered. The Tiffany lamp she'd given him as a gift for his one year anniversary clean and sober, stood tall on his desk. Looking at Ted thriving in the environment of Kinnetik, no one would have known he'd overcome a severe crystal meth addiction which he still refused to talk about. The malaise almost destroyed years of friendships that had meant everything to him. But he did. His skin held the healthy and happy glow of a man who'd gained his self-respect back, earned the respect of those around him and had the love of a good man. In short, Teddy looked well and for that she was grateful. She shook herself out of her revere to address the problem at hand.

"Ted, you know why I'm here. Lindz hasn't been back to Toronto and I need to know what my options are. How much danger am I in if I'm unable to recoup Gus' college fund?"

He took a deep breath before answering and she had a feeling the news would be far from encouraging. She was right. "Mel, the biggest problem you have is if they decide to sue. Since- for some reason that is still unfathomable to me- you never went through with the formal adoption of Gus, technically you stole the money. You know that because you're a lawyer. The best advice I can give is that you talk to Lindz and see if she's willing to accept a payment plan."

"I will talk to her but not for that reason, Teddy. I miss her and so does J.R." Melanie jumped out of
her seat to pace in front of the desk. "We've argued about money before, Ted. In fact most of our arguments have been about that but this time it was about Brian's involvement in our lives. Granted I know that if it wasn't for his support, we would have floundered financially long ago but that doesn't mean I have to like that he still has an influence on her and Gus. Even J.R., who was once sweet-natured has become a little Kinney by default. I can't get rid of the motherfucker for anything. So I asked her to sever the relationship- nothing I haven't asked in the past."

Ted held up his hand to stop the tirade he knew was coming. "Melanie, you have never asked Lindsey for anything...You demanded and cajoled but you never asked."

"But that doesn't mean I didn't have a right to, Ted." She threw herself back into the chair. "We were supposed to be an alternative family which means two moms- not two moms and a dad. This is not a polygyny relationship but it might as well have been."

"If that's how you feel, Mel, then why ask her back? She's not going to give up a friendship that quite honestly was there long before your marriage. In fact if you think about it, you never would have gotten together in the first place."

"Yes we would have," Melanie answered indignantly.

"Melanie, I was there. Remember? In fact if I remember correctly, Brian was responsible for you finding out her name, the first time you danced, the first time you fucked and-"

"Alright, alright already, Ted. Geez! So Brian fucking Kinney is a goddamn saint." She rolled her eyes. "He's also been responsible for many of our difficulties. She takes up for him even knowing he was wrong."

"But he took up for you when you were wrong and cheated on Lindsey with what's her name," Ted reminded her.

"He's involved himself in many of our arguments, taking her side or forcing her to make a choice between he and I. She always chose him."

"Of course he took her side, Mel. They were friends long before you were born to her. However, Brian has never been the type to just involve himself like Michael does. If he offers an opinion or a solution, it's usually because he was invited to and you know that. Besides, he was also responsible for your first wedding, even in getting Lindsey to remember what was important in spite of her
"Who are you and what have you done with Theodore Schmidt? Jesus, Teddy, you sound like his fucking cheerleader."

"Look, Mel. I am the first to admit Brian is far from perfect. In fact I'm more inclined to point out his imperfections and lack of morality more than most. But what I will say is that this was not his fight; he didn't involve himself in your problems. In fact, he tried to get Lindsey... you know what—you should really talk to her," he said.

"You don't think I've tried, Ted. She won't answer the phone. I thought she would have gone to stay with her parents but her father wasn't even aware she was in town. Her mother and sister are off doing God knows what and where. Gus' number isn't connected anymore and the friends in Toronto that have heard from him, won't give me the information because he asked them not to. When I asked them why, he told them that his mother asked them not to. What the fuck, Ted? It's like she's running from me or something."

"Maybe she's just not ready to deal with it all, Melanie. You know how Lindz is better than almost anyone except probably Brian." At her protest, he held up his hand. "Look whether you like it or not, that's the reality. Brian knows Lindsey as well as you do. Perhaps you should talk to him first." Ted shrugged.

"No fucking way. I don't want to hear anything he has to say. This is all his fault."

Ted shook his head in response when a knock on the door interrupted their conversation. Cynthia walked into the office.

"Brian said I you don’t have the figures in twenty minutes, you’re fired," she said laughingly.

Ted chuckled. "He fires me just about everyday but since security hasn't shown up to throw me out, I think I'm relatively safe for now." Returning his attention to Melanie, he said, "Talk to him, Mel. He maybe the only person who can get you the results you want."

"Come on. Let's christen my office again," Brian said as he attacked Justin's neck with a renewed
resolve to seduce him.

"No matter how much I would love to, we're supposed to meet Daph for lunch," Justin said
laughingly and breathless from both arousal and trying to fight off the hands of the most gorgeous
attacker ever invented. "Oh God-" Justin moaned.

Brian laughed softly against the special spot behind his ear. "Do I need to remind you what name
you should be calling right now?"

"Uncle Brian..." A small voice interrupted their interlude and caused them to jump apart like two
naughty kids caught by their parents.

"J.R. Darling, what are you doing here and where's your mother?" Brian asked.

"She's visiting Uncle Teddy. Can I talk to you?"

He offered her seat on the couch across from the conference room. Justin still sat against the desk
eying the two of them with a look of puzzlement and foreboding creasing his eyebrow.

"Now what can I do for you?" Brian settled himself next to her.

Despite what Melanie thought of him, he and J.R. had become friends especially during his last trip
to Canada. Wherever he and Gus went, J.R. tagged along and he honestly adored her as much as he
did Gus-although he wouldn't tell her that. She was the best of both Melanie (intelligent) and Michael
(innocence-or what used to be innocence anyway) but she also had a healthy dose of Lindsey's
ability to see all sides to any situation.

She bit her lip as if contemplating her answer before she spoke. "Can you keep a secret?"

"Of course I can and so can Justin," answered he answered the ten-year old whose eyes were
downcast.

She looked at him directly. Her bottom lip trembled and Brian waited patiently as she decided
whether or not to trust them. Her eyes shifted to Justin, who also waited patiently. Brian could see
the moment she decided to confide in them. "I don't want to stay with Mama anymore," she said quietly.

Justin gasped and Brian issued a warning look toward him which settled him. He knew the conversation he had to have with her wouldn't be easy and that it might not bode well for any of them within the office. He had told her that she could come to him if she ever needed help but he never expected the type she asked for. "J.R. that's for your two mothers to decide. Have you spoken to either of them about it?"

"No. I can't talk to mama about it. In fact, I don't want to talk to her at all because she drove Mommy and Gussie away. But I don't want to be in Toronto without them and I don't think they're coming back there."

Brian nodded. She was always an astute child so he couldn't and wouldn't lie to her. "No they aren't but have you asked your mama about moving back to Pittsburgh?"

Again J.R. shook her head. "Anytime Mommy would speak about moving back here, they would have a fight where you were always talked about. Gussie and I would be caught in the middle. He would always get Mommy to come back but this time it was worse than ever."

"Worse," Brian gently corrected her speech. "How was it worse this time?"

"Other than mama breaking the vases, she said some pretty mean things about you and about Gussie. She said she never formally adopted him. What does that mean, Uncle Brian?"

Brian and Justin looked at each other, the brief look of shock registering between them. They both remembered the events of the past where at first Brian wouldn't give up his parental rights. Then Lindsey was going to marry a fellow teacher who was about to be deported during Lindsey and Melanie's first break up. Brian had struggled with the idea of formally giving up his claim to his son. Justin laid all the facts out for him and essentially pointed out that he loved his son enough to give him the best life possible, including the benefit of a loving two-parent household so he'd signed the papers and presented them to Lindsey and Melanie. The stipulation was they had to give their relationship another chance and that he be allowed to see Gus from time to time. J.R.'s revelation sent his world spinning for more reasons than one. Looking at J.R. again, he said simply, "It means Uncle Brian has some pretty big decisions to make, J.R. but that's something different and not for you to worry about. Now back to you...is it that you want to stay with your dad?"

She rolled her eyes then and it almost made Brian laugh especially considering how he was feeling about Michael, too. He'd done his fair share of eye-rolling whenever his name had been mentioned in
the last month, too. "I don't know him- not really anyway. I see him only once a year but Grandma Debbie comes to visit a lot. So no. I don't want to stay with him either. Only Mommy and Gussie. You and Justin can come too if you want."

Brian chuckled. "Thanks for the invitation and maybe we will." He sobered quickly as he heard the commotion just outside of his office. He would recognize the voice of Melanie Marcus anywhere. "Listen, J.R." When she turned to face him fully he spoke very clearly. "You have to go with your mother." When she began to protest, he held up his hand. Once she quieted, he said, "In the meantime, I have some work I'm going to do for you, okay?" She nodded so he continued. "First, I'm going to ask your Mommy to call you. Even though she is mad at your Mama right now, she would still want to speak to you. Then I'm going to arrange for you and Gus to see each other because I know you miss him. The other stuff that I have to do, I can't tell you right now."

"Why not?"

"Because it has to be a surprise but you have a job to do, too. Wanna know what it is?" She nodded again so he leaned his head closer conspiratorially. "You have to behave yourself. That's it. Be respectful to your mama. If she ask you a question, answer it nicely. I know that you aren't happy but you still have to be nice to people and that most especially includes your mama, okay?"

"Okay," she answered sighing lightly. He almost laughed because he understood the sentiment. Melanie could be a trial to deal with.

"Promise?" He pushed further.

She wrinkled her nose in response before she said, "I promise."

"And we never make promises we can't keep right?"

"Yes, Uncle Brian. But you promise that Mommy will call me, right?"

"Yes I do and don't worry J.R. Sometimes things just need a little time to work themselves out, okay?"

"Okay." She jumped up hugging him just as Melanie stormed into the room.
"Let go of my daughter," she demanded.

He did as she asked. "Nice to see you, too, Melanie. Where did you park your broom?"

"J.R., honey it's time to go," she said deliberately ignoring his comment. "Say good-bye to Brian and...Justin, what are you doing here?"

Justin put on his biggest smile and directed it towards Brian. "I'm back for good even though I'll still be traveling between New York and the office here in Pittsburgh."

"Don't tell me you're actually giving up your career to be with this asshole," she said scathingly.

His smile didn't diminish one bit when he said, "I don't consider it giving up anything. In fact, I've gained everything I want."

Before Melanie could answer back, J.R. cut in the conversation. She looked back and forth Brian and Justin. "Do you still want me to be nice to her?" she asked ingeniously.

Justin almost passed out trying to keep a straight face, whereas Brian snickered before blanking his features. "J.R., remember what we talked about. She is your mother and she deserves for you to be nice to her."

"But she wasn't nice to you or to Justin," she said.

Brian went down on his knee before her. "That doesn't matter. You cannot control what everyone else does or says, J.R. and just because someone chooses to be mean, does not mean you have to be mean, too. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Uncle Brian, I do. You will keep your promise, won't you?" Her lip trembled again.

"Yes," he answered. She nodded and turned toward the door.

"What did you promise her?" Melanie demanded to know.
"That's none of your business. It should be enough for you that she isn't throwing a tantrum." Rising off his knee, he went to stand by Justin deliberately slipping his arm possessively around him. "Now, get out of my office." He buried his head in Justin's neck who in turn lifted it to allow full access. He breathed a sigh of relief when he heard the door close behind them.

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"You handled that well," Justin said sighing as Brian went back for that special spot in his neck.

"I was always good with kids but then you should know that," Brian answered laughingly. Justin began to tickling him as the intercom within the office beeped. \textit{Fuck! Was there no rest for the weary?} "What is it, Cynthia?"

"You're not going to believe who is standing in front of the security desk."

"I'm waiting with baited breath. The Pope, the President of the United States? If it's St. Joan or her worshiper, Claire tell them I have no bananas for the circus they usually bring when they come to my office."

"None of those, Brian and stop kidding around. Does the name, \textit{Kip Thomas} ring a bell?"

Brian thought a moment. It was vaguely familiar but Justin remembered right away. "You're fucking shitting me, Cynthia," he said. "What the fuck is he doing here?"

Cynthia directed her answer towards Brian although she knew Justin could still hear. "Remember that new \textit{hot shot} I told you Vance hired, Brian? Well Kip Thomas is it."

"Wait. He hired the little asshole who was trying to sue me for sexual harassment all those years ago?" Brian asked holding in the laugh that threatened to bubble up.

"One and the same."

"Well get rid of him," Brian demanded.
"No don't," Justin said quickly. At Brian's puzzled look he said, "He came all this way, you should at least hear what he wants. Besides you taught me in business that to be forewarned is to be forearmed. I think that rule applies here."

Brian looked at him closely but in the end he just shrugged it off. "Fine, Cynthia, show that Lil' Shit in." He clicked off the intercom. "This had better be worth it otherwise you'll pay for it later."

Justin kissed him quickly. "I'll look forward to the punishment."

They separated upon hearing his outer office door open; Brian returned to his seat behind the large desk, Justin still standing in the place before it. "Why are you standing over there? Come here."

Justin smiledly shook his head. "If I come back there, I'll be tempted to blow you up under the desk."

"All the more reason why you should," Brian returned quickly causing Justin to give a sharp bark of laughter.

The inner door opened to admit Kip Thomas. He still looked the same as he did before except his hair was black instead of the lackluster color he'd had when both Brian and Justin laid eyes on him although Brian didn't know about the latter.

"Mr. Kinney, I'm not sure you remember me," Kip began only to be cut off.

"Yeah, I remember you. What the fuck are you doing here?"

"Mr. Vance suggested that I introduce myself to you since according to him, we'll be going after some of the same accounts." Kip began to reach around the desk to pull the chair out from behind the desk but his way was blocked. "Oh excuse....what the fuck are you doing here?"

Justin just stared back with a slight smirk on his face. "What? No 'hello'? Or 'how have you been? I've been great. Thanks for not asking. As to what I'm doing here, you're standing in my partner's office. I wanted to make sure you couldn't accuse him of anything this time but knew he couldn't refuse the meeting without tarnishing his reputation. You're good at trying to destroy those, if I
remember correctly."

"I wasn't aware he had a partner of Kinnetik."

"He doesn't."

Brian looked back and forth between them. "It's evident the two of you know each other but how?"

"This little shit was the reason, I didn't continue pressing charges against you which I should have. Because of him, I lost ground whereas I could have been sitting where you are."

Justin laughed. "First, you could never be sitting where Brian is. You were always meant to work for someone else. From what I've seen of your work, it is still mediocre compared to his and mine," Justin said before he cleared his throat. "Secondly, the night you went to the loft, I had just left. Thankfully, he has a remarkable recovery time otherwise he couldn't have fucked you." Justin told the lie only to prove a point. He remembered asking Brian to go to Babylon with him and Brian said that he had to work, which technically was the truth. It was supposed to be an informal brainstorming session for Liberty Air- an account Brian had won back when Vanguard was called Ryder Advertising. Kip had other ideas and Brian wasn't one to turn down a chance to fuck back then. At Brian's puzzled look, he said, "You know how my innate curiosity is, Brian. I had to know what he looked like. Truthfully he reminded me of a weasel then and actually he still does."

"You picked him up," Brian said a slow smile forming on his lips.

Justin winked and smiled smugly. "Yep. Two days before I turned eighteen. I couldn't let you lose your job and even though I never intended for you to find out, you have thanked me many, many times over the years."

"Well remind me to thank you again later." Brian chuckled but sobered quickly. "Now, Kip. I know that you know that there is no way we'll ever work together. Nor will you win any account I choose to go after. Your work is good but...well mine is better. Our ideas are completely different and even if they weren't, you're not me. So I think this meeting is concluded, don't you?" Kip began speaking as Justin's cell phone rung. Brian's attention immediately shifted to the pale look across his face. "What is it?"

"Is she alright? I know you can't give me too much information but...you know what, never mind. I'm on my way."
"What's wrong, Justin?"

"It's Daphne. That was the hospital. They found her passed out next to her car in the parking lot."

"What the fuck?"

"I know, Brian. I have to go."

"I'm coming with you," Brian stated. "One more thing. Kip, get the fuck out of my office and don't come back. The next time you do, I'll have you thrown out- head first." Brian waited until the dark haired man stormed out of his office before he left locking the door behind him. Cynthia wasn't at her desk when he passed her office so he dialed her number on his way to the car. Justin was already in the front seat buckled in, shaking his left leg as he always did when he was on edge. He lit up a cigarette as Brian threw his jacket in the backseat of the car. "Cynthia, Justin and I are on the way to the hospital. Daphne...no, we don't know what the situation is yet. I'll call you when I know. In the meantime, the idiot who just left here. Under no circumstances is he to come back here. He's definitely not allowed in my office or the art department for any reason. Let Charles and his staff know immediately. I don't trust his ass as far as I can spit. I'll let you know later what he actually wanted. First and foremost though let the security guard at the front desk know and ask Charles to have the guys upstairs run a video, still it and capture the photo to be plastered at the front desk. I will not tolerate mistakes but especially in the matter of Kip Thomas." Brian started the car and immediately backed out of the parking spot. He floored the engine understanding that time was of the essence.

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Colby sat in the Liberty Diner listening to one particular conversation which peaked his interest when a loud red-head with a bubbly personality offered to refill his coffee.

"Haven't seen you around here before, stranger?"

He put on his brightest smile addressing her while still listening to the conversation going on in the booth directly behind him. "New in town, Ma'am."

"Pfft...don't call me ‘Ma'am,’ I'm not that old. The name's Debbie. And you are?"
"The name's Colby, Debbie."

"Holy shit. That accent of yours can make a woman really forget herself, Colby."

"Aw, Princess, stop it or I may have to sweep you off your feet to make you forget more," he said adding a little on his natural brogue. As Debbie moved away, he couldn't help but shake his head and laugh. She was charming—unlike her whiny little son who was currently sitting behind him detailing the meeting he'd had with Brian and how Justin had threatened him if he didn't mind his own business.

"Well Michael, if Brian is telling you that he knows what he's doing, shouldn't you respect his wishes? It is his life and whereas I know you care, really you're interfering in a relationship between two men. Two stubborn, belligerent men who are tired of denying themselves to please others. Look, remember when we first started dating and your mom was totally against it because I'm HIV positive? Remember how you felt then?"

"Yeah but that was different, Ben," Michael answered.

"Different how exactly? If I remember correctly, you told her to mind her own business. It was right around the time she started dating Carl and told you to do the same. It's the same principal, only the players changed. And frankly I really don't understand your issue."

"Justin always used Brian, Ben."

"From where I've been sitting on the sidelines of the Brian and Justin show as well as the Brian and Mikey show, Brian is perfectly capable and more than willing to do exactly as he pleases even at the risk of alienating others. So what's the real reason you can't except Brian and Justin's relationship for what it is?"

"And what's that?"

"None of your business," Ben answered. "Look. If you keep up what you're doing, you're going to drive an even deeper wedge between you two. Is that what you want?"
"Of course not but-"

"There are no ‘buts,' Michael," Ben said sternly. "It is his choice just like I was yours; just like Horvath was Debbie's. Leave. It. Alone." Ben moved out of the booth at the same time Colby decided to make his presence known.

"Long time no see, Stranger," Colby said facing Ben.

"My goodness," Ben said moving forward and embracing Colby with a kiss on the cheek both laughing and smiling in greeting. "What are you doing here? It's been...what fifteen years?"

"Ah more like twenty and you still look like the young lad I remember," Colby said, pleased that Ben looked well and healthy. He remembered the good times they shared during college and beyond until they’d parted ways.

"Likewise. So seriously what are you doing here?"

"I recently moved into the area to be closer to my cousin who is the only family I have that I care about. You remember how uptight the rest of those bastards were."

"Ben?" Michael stood there staring back and forth between the two tall men.

"Oh sorry honey. Colby this is my ...my husband, Michael." Ben said.

Colby almost burst out laughing at the slight hitch in his voice; like he’d forgotten all about Michael for the brief time they had been speaking. "Nice to meet you, Michael," Colby said soberly.

"So how do you two know each other?" Michael asked, smile in place but Colby could here the edge in his voice.

I should let the little fucker wonder. "We actually went to Penn together many, many moons ago."
"Oh that's good. Don't you have a lecture to get to, Ben?"

"Yeah. I actually do. Hey since you're staying in town and all, why don't we get together for drinks later this evening. Say about seven at Woody's?"

"That works for me," Colby said brightly. "What about you, Michael?" He looked down at the little man from his advanced height. Ben was a moderate six-foot-three but Michael's height topped out at Colby's elbow. The mental imagery almost made Colby cackle aloud.

"I can't tonight. You know I'm supposed to help mom with redecorating since Emmett is in New York with Drew and Carl will be home tomorrow. But hey you guys go ahead and if I finish early, I'll meet you there."

"Okay then seven it is," Ben said cheerily leaning in to give another hug to Colby. He could feel the tension radiating off of Michael as he stood watching the exchange. Finally backing away he let them pass only to be confronted by Debbie again.

"Listen you charming son-of-a-bitch, as long as you remember that Ben's my son-in-law and I'm a lioness when it comes to my cub, you and I won't have any problems. We clear?"

Colby bent down to look her directly in her blue eyes. "Crystal," he whispered and leaned in to buss her cheek. He was gratified to see the blush on her cheeks which took the bite out of her warning. He gave a final wave as he left the diner, dialing Cynthia's number as he walked toward Kinnetik.

*I'm taking my own freedom, putting it in my song
Singing loud and strong
Grooving all day long
I'm taking my own freedom
Putting it in my stroll
I'll be high-stepping y'all
Letting the joy unfold*
Lindsey Petersen was making a comeback. She couldn't remember a time she had ever been happier, except perhaps the night Gus was born fifteen years ago. Thanks to Justin, she had purpose and was doing what she loved to do and she didn't have to compromise her wants, needs and opinions to do it. As his personal assistant in Pittsburgh, she earned a hefty salary—enough to live her life, pay her bills, take care of Gus and put money into the account to help with J.R. which was legally her responsibility due to third-party adoption. Even though Melanie never filed the adoption papers for her son, she had filed them for Jenny Rebecca so Lindz was tied to Melanie through her daughter. She didn't mind that so much as J.R. was a loving child and truthfully she spent more time with Lindsey than she did Melanie anyway. She thought about her often and if there was one regret in the whole episode, it was that she couldn't see J.R. without returning to Toronto because Melanie would never bring her to Pittsburgh.

Taking a deep breath of fresh air, Lindsey made her way to her favorite spot on the property by the pond, sketchbook in hand. The beautiful part about her job was that it allowed her to indulge her three favorite pastimes in addition to raising her son in peace and no arguments. When Justin ran behind on projects, Lindsey worked them using the blueprint he set before her. It was the same with Amy in the New York office—who was an artist as well as the office manager. When Justin was unavailable to take a meeting, Lindsey went in his stead which sometimes allowed her travel outside of the state. Because Brian lived nearby, it wasn't a problem in terms of Gus' school and sports schedule. Although Emmett was in New York for the interim, she and he Skyped regularly in preparation for opening the Justin's art gallery in which there would be an emerging artist exhibit—his way of paying the opportunities forward the way Lindsey and others had done for him. The more she worked with him, the more she understood the man he'd grown to be and the more she realized how perfect he and Brian really were for each other.

Her cell phone rung as she made herself comfortable on the new Brian had put in when he'd furnished the house. Justin in turn furnished Daphne's although the poor child barely spent any time in hers.

She cheerily answered. "Ironically, I was just thinking of you."

"I shudder to ask what you may have been thinking," Brian sardonically replied. "But listen up because there are a couple of things you need to know."

A loud piercing alarm rang in her ear along with a message over the PA system announcing "Code Blue." She instantly went into panic mode. "Brian, are you okay? Where's Justin? Oh my God, why are you at the hospital?" The instant quiet made her more nervous. "Brian? BRIIIAAAN?"

"I'm here. Damn it, you didn't have to shout. Thank you for the fucking headache I'm going to have
"Well next time, answer when I call you," she answered huffily. "Now what is it you need me to know?"

Brian unexpectedly chuckled at her response causing her to respond in kind and roll her eyes even though he couldn't see. "Have you spoken to William Eldridge today?"

"Not yet. He said the divorce papers would be delivered this morning- one set to go to the house and another to go to Melanie's office."

"Okay. Well Melanie is in town and so is J.R. Apparently, Mel had some business with Ted-probably trying to figure out her options now that we both know that Gus is not legally her child and she basically stole the money no matter how well-intentioned to put it back."

"That sounds about right, but what of it? We both agreed that we weren't going to press charges."

"That was the intention and it still is. But that isn't the issue you really need to be aware of. J.R. confided in me and Justin that she doesn't want to stay with Mel anymore especially since you and Gus are not there."

Lindsey sighed deeply. "That puts a completely different spin on things, doesn't it?"

"Yeah, it does. What you need to do is ask Eldridge what rights you have and decide what you want to do. The truth of the matter is that you and Melanie are both her parents- Michael shouldn't even have a say since he's barely there but there's a good possibility it will end up being a situation like when she was first born. Which is the main reason you need to know what you're dealing with and quickly, Lindsey. If you're absolutely sure things cannot be worked out- which honestly they can't be since you've sent the divorce papers- then you need to secure your place in J.R.'s life and protect her and yourself. Don't forget, you have a stable home and job now but you also have a hefty salary to match."

"So what should I do?"

"Uh-huh, Lindsey. I'm not going to tell what to do," Brian said. At her silence, he continued. "But if it were me, I would think of this in terms of business and leave personal feelings out of it. Now I
know that's hard to do because you're a cwazy wesbian but that's the real of it. You have to protect your interests and that includes J.R. to an extent. Just remember, no one stays clean in custody hearings nor divorce. Oh and I did promise J.R. that you would call her. So that's the first thing you have to do...even though you're not going to be happy having to go through Melanie to get to your daughter. Believe me Broom Hilda was none to happy today."

"Okay," Lindsey sighed heavily again. She did not feel like dealing with Melanie but she did want to speak to J.R. "Now that we've gotten that out of the way...why the fuck are you at the hospital?"

"Justin and I are fine but we're waiting to hear regarding Daphne. Apparently, she passed out by her car and no one knows why. They're running test now so we're waiting. Justin has practically threatened everyone and God, if someone doesn't get answers for him soon. Her parents are unreachable so since she listed him as the emergency on her personnel file, he and I are the only ones here."

"I'm on my way. In the meantime, I'll make the calls."

Lindsey disconnected from Brian and called their mutual attorney. William Eldridge was one of those smart people who could have been a mass murderer if he was into bombs. Brian often called him a genius in terms of interpreting the law fully and correctly. In addition to family law for high-profile clients, he also specialized in Corporate Law and dabbled in Criminal Law. The man was a veritable font of information at only thirty-five years old. She left a message on his voice mail knowing he would call her back as soon as he could. She stared out over the still water of the pond. What did she really want? Financially she was stable and even if J.R. lived with her she still would be. She could opt of an arrangement like the one originally in place for Gus, where J.R. would visit during the summer and every other holiday but would that be enough? The only other option would be for her to seek full-custody of J.R. and that would literally break Melanie's heart although Lindsey had been the full-time parent for both Gus and the little girl from the time they moved from Pittsburgh. Besides Melanie would never be willing to compromise anyway. Then there was Michael who paid his measly child support and visited once a year. Brian was right about the possibility of it becoming a three-ring circus again.

She dialed Melanie's number hoping it would just go voice mail. No such luck.

"Lindz, where are you?"

"Hello to you, too, Melanie. I just called to speak to J.R., is she around."

"Talk to me first."
"I would rather not, Melanie. I said all I needed to before I left. Now I just want to speak with our daughter."

"Lindz, look, I'm sorry. I didn't mean for any of it to happen and I didn't mean any of it."

"Apology accepted but don't delude yourself into thinking you didn't mean any of it, Melanie. It wasn't the first time and I know it won't be the last," Lindsey snapped.

"Honey-"

"Don't you dare call me 'honey,' Melanie. You know what...I don't want to do this with you. I can make that choice now and I am. Now can I please speak to J.R."

She heard the resignation in Melanie's voice as she called J.R. It was a relief to hear her voice. Lindsey listened as J.R. detailed everything from her studies to her soccer tournament and how the trick shot that Gus taught her worked like a charm-all of the things Lindsey would have heard daily if she had been there.

"When are you coming home, Mommy?" J.R. asked.

"I have a new home now, sweetheart. Maybe some day you can come and visit."

"But I don't want to visit...I want to stay," J.R. said like the ten-year old she was.

"That's something that has to be decided between your mama and I and it won't be decided immediately, Love. But in the meantime, I will try to work out a schedule to see you while you're here in Pittsburgh okay?"

"Okay," she said quietly.

"I have to go now but I will talk to you again soon, okay?"
"Promise?" J.R. asked.

"I promise, Darling. Bye now.

"Lindz? When are you coming home?" Melanie asked before she could disconnect the call.

"I'm not, Mel. My life is here now. My attorney will be in touch about a possible visitation schedule for J.R."

"You know you really have no rights," Melanie said spitefully.

"Well now see, that's where you're wrong, Mel. Whereas you don't have any rights where Gus is concerned, I am considered an equal parent thanks to your immediate filing of the adoption paper. Would that you had been that diligent when it came to my son. But that is two tears in a bucket now, isn't it?"

"Why are you concerned with why I didn't file the fucking papers now? It's because of him, isn't it?"

Lindsey laughed. It was always the same argument with her. "You know, Melanie, this is really pointless and Brian has little or nothing to do with what we're arguing about but as always you make it about him. You know what...I said I wasn't going to deal with this right now and I won't. I'll be in touch to speak to J.R. soon, Mel." And Lindsey disconnected the phone softly singing the lyrics to Bon Jovi's "It's My Life," while traversing the graveled walkway leading to her house.

And it's now or never

Cause I ain't gonna live forever

I just wanna live while I'm alive

My heart is like an open highway

Like Frankie said I did it My Way

I'm just gonna live while I'm alive

Cause IT'S MY LIFE!**

Golden- Jill Scott, Anthony Bell*

It's My Life- Jon Bon Jovi, Richie Sambora, Max Martin**
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NECESSARY Roughness

TIME'S UP VOLUME II: SHARE MY LIFE by Nichelle Wellesly

Summary:

T U V O L II

Categories: Alternate Universe, QAF-U.S., Family, Angst, Bdsms, Brian/Justin, Canon, Could be Canon, Drama, Humor, Jealousy, Justin/Ethan, Justin/Other, REAL LIFE ISSUES, Romance, Toppy! Justin, Unsafe Sex, What If Characters: Brian, Cynthia, Daphne, Justin, Original Character(s), Other Canon Characters, Ted
Challenges: None
Series: TIME'S UP SERIES
Chapters: 40 Completed: No
Word count: 215094 Read: 52889
Published: February 04, 2015 Updated: October 03, 2015

Chapter 17- NECESSARY Roughness by Nichelle Wellesly

Author's Notes:

Mikey Prude alert....Something tells me Lindz is going to possibly get in some naughty business of her own...LOL At least I hope so!

Craig stood outside the door of his Ad man's office, listening to the conversation therein. Kip Thomas ranted about Brian Kinney and the surprise of finding Justin Taylor with him. Gardner Vance was silent until feeling the need to ask pertinent questions, filling in blanks for Craig along the way as well.

"I always wondered before I fired Brian and then asked him back-before he started the company-what his connection to Justin Taylor was, Kip. He never said but I suspect you know, don't you?" Gardner's voice was as smooth and cultured as it had always been despite his penchant for hard liquor. "Now you tell me they're partners. From the last investigation I did about the company, he doesn't have a partner and therefore we have no way in."
"They aren't business partners or if they are I can't see it. Although, Justin Taylor is an amazing artist, I can't see that he would willingly work for someone else even with an equal stake in the company. He and Brian are "all or nothing" type of people and pride themselves on their independence; a fact I'm sure you're well aware of. To answer your question, Gardner: The one thing I learned from Brian Kinney was to research a situation completely so that you don't go in blind. I didn't do it beforehand because I didn't see the need but on the way back here I did. The reason why he never talked about the situation with you was because he probably felt it wasn't important enough to divulge it or more likely, it had no bearing on retaining his position." He took a deep breath before detailing the entire situation for Gardner, leaving out his own history with Brian and Justin- that would have looked bad-but describing their entire relationship as he knew it from his source of information. Their story was well known within the circles Kip frequented although no one in the office knew he was gay himself. He knew some his more important clients wouldn't handle him being a homosexual with equanimity. With the new developments regarding Brian Kinney and Justin Taylor, that particular news would jeopardize everything he'd been working toward his whole career. "Apparently, although Justin is a success all his own, with Brian his work takes on a new dimension and vice versa. Together they're unstoppable and untouchable."

Gardner listened and nodded. Their relationship, even before he merged with Ryder Advertising, was always a mystery. He'd always wondered why Brian was exceptionally hard on young Justin Taylor, criticizing his work mercilessly and unapologetically. He'd pushed so much that even Gardner had to tell him to lighten up a few times but Justin always rose to the occasion, surpassing even Brian's high expectations in the end. He remembered one meeting with former Chief Stockwell in particular. It was late on the night of a rally at the Gay and Lesbian Center, where Stockwell had been verbally backed into a corner to explain the cold cases involving victims within Pittsburgh's LGBT community. Stockwell had blamed Brian for knowing exactly what was going to happen beforehand. When they arrived at Brian's loft seeking answers, they found Brian and Justin naked and obviously just up from having sexual relations. More importantly, there had been scattered posters which littered the glamorous space-the same ones found all over the city-and the artist who had created them lying unabashedly on a plush pallet watching the mostly silent exchange between the other three occupants. Brian equally unashamed asked Stockwell, 'What's the matter, Jim. Never seen two guys fucking before?' The following day when he asked Brian why he did it, he simply informed Gardner that he wouldn't understand because he wasn't gay. Gardner had fired him because of it. In retrospect, Gardner would have still fired him but it would have explained why he would take such a risk to begin with. Hearing the story of Justin Taylor's bashing and the lack of justice, even Gardner could understand the need for revenge in such a situation. He secretly admired Brian more than he already did because of his willingness to mete his own special brand of justice directly with those who failed to administer it in the first place. In a ballsy move, Brian Kinney gambled big, lost enormously but won it all back and then some.

"What do you want me to do now, Gardner?" Kip asked. "I will tell you this, the place is a veritable fortress and Kinney's security is top notch. If he doesn't want you to know something, you won't learn it."

"Let me think on it," he replied. "The latest account up for grabs is a million dollar account for a clothing line out of Rochester, New York. Sharlene Brent and her partner, Bethany Chambers have
meetings set up with us and Kinnetik. They are looking to go global now that their success has been well-documented in the U.S., Canada and certain parts of South America. If you don't land this account...well I don't think I have to say what will happen, do I? You have three weeks." Gardner rose out of his seat and headed for the door noting Kip's hard swallow.

By the time, Vance reached the door, Craig Taylor was heading for the door leaving Vanguard, an idea taking shape in a small corner of his mind.

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Melanie couldn't believe what she was reading. Lindsey was seeking a divorce? After all the work they had done over the years in Pittsburgh for the Marriage Initiative which was for marriage equality, she wanted to divorce? The claim cited "Irreconcilable Differences" but that wasn't completely true. She was willing and hoping for reconciliation; Lindsey was unwilling. She could just give Lindsey the no-contest divorce but she wasn't in the mood to play nice. The document detailed all the reasons why Lindsey wanted the divorce; listed each and every fault Lindsey found with Melanie including the violation of trust in reference to the fifteen thousand dollars. She knew who had put Lindsey up to filing for divorce...Brian. Lindsey would have never thought to do it on her own. In addition to that she worked for Justin's company so the fact that Lindsey filed for divorce had Brian Kinney written all over it.

As an attorney, she decided to come up with a counter suit of her own, including Lindsey's infidelity with Sam Auerbach many years before. She requested the money from her grandfather's inheritance she used fifteen years ago which allowed Lindsey to stay home with Brian's spawn. Lindsey had also had the audacity to file for visitation rights for J.R. For her daughter? NO! She also asked that Lindsey pay alimony since she left the marriage and home. She visited Marty Rabinowitz, her former partner, to file the papers and asked him to represent her. She was familiar with William Eldridge and although she could represent herself, it was always better not to in court. She was not going to make this easy on Lindsey. She wasn't going to make it easy on anyone.

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"You know if you keep pacing and wearing out that section of the room, you're bound to fall through the fucking floor. I'm not catching you."

"Fuck you, Brian," Justin said.
"Later," Brian responded. "But look...your pacing isn't going to make anything go faster so sit the fuck down already."

Justin flung himself in the seat next to Brian. First they had to get her pressure down so they could run tests. Then based on the test results, they had to perform emergency surgery on Daphne yet no one would tell him what it was for. They only told him that if they didn't do it immediately, she could die. They were informed when she was moved to recovery but still no one would tell them what the situation was. Apparently that was at Daphne's request or so they were told. Justin instinctively knew that whatever it was would change her life but he couldn't say if it would be better... or worse. He leaned his head on Brian's shoulder needing the connection more than ever.

"I don't know what it is, Brian, but I know it's not good."

"Come on, Sunshine, it's my job to be cynical not yours. You wouldn't want to put me out of business by doing my job, would you?" Brian was relieved when he'd heard the small chuckle from Justin. He was just as worried as Justin was and he had the same sense of foreboding but Brian liked to live in the solution. If there was some way to fix what was hurting Daphne, he would.

"Dr. Bradley." Justin jumped up as the chief of surgery walked briskly towards them. "How is she? When can we see her? What was wrong with her? And please don't tell me that you can't tell me because I will personally hurt you if those words pass your lips again." Brian was by his side instantly, holding his left hand knowing Justin meant every single word.

Dr. Troy Bradley for his part, stayed calm understanding exactly what Justin was feeling. He'd felt the same way seeing Daphne wheeled in. In the relatively short time he'd known her, he considered her a true friend and a light in his life, especially considering the nature of their jobs. He looked at Justin and the man with him and immediately understood why they were friends with Daphne. He pulled them to the side, speaking low. "It's against the law for me to be telling you both this so, I need your word that you will keep this in confidence. I recognize love when I see it but still it's Daphne's business, even though you are listed as her go-to, Justin. But make no mistake, I care about her just as much as the two of you and if this..."

"You have it," both Brian and Justin answered immediately and without hesitation.

Dr. Bradley looked at them assessing every part of their concern. Satisfied with what he saw, he spoke softly. "She suffered from preclampsia—one of the most severe cases I'd ever seen."

"Preclampsia is a condition in which a pregnant woman develops extremely high blood pressure and dizziness amongst other symptoms. It can be potentially dangerous— even fatal in some cases but thankfully not hers—to both the mother and fetus. The encouraging news is that although she passed out, there wasn't an interruption in brain activity which would have been a seizure and she didn't have a stroke. We'll still have to keep a watch on her to make sure she didn't develop any blood clots."

"But Daphne isn't pregnant. She would have told me, Dr.Bradley," Justin said.

"She isn't...anymore. She was a little shy of six months pregnant and we had to take both babies. They did not survive and if we didn't she wouldn't have either. For someone Daphne's age there was no way she should have had a blood pressure well over the standard to be considered high. I'm only telling you this because she is going to need your—our—support more than ever now. She still hasn't woken up yet and I'm not sure if she knew or not. It's possible she didn't because when we drained the urine from her bladder, there was protein in the urine but the HCG hormone indicating pregnancy
wasn't present. It wasn't until we took her blood that elevated levels of the hormone showed up."

"So how will this affect everything else?" Justin asked.

Troy nodded understanding that they were asking if she would be able to ever have children. "We really won't know everything else we need to until she heals. In the meantime, I'm not leaving the hospital until she does so I'll be here even throughout the night. My advice is that when you see her, you let her tell you what she wants you to know. You two know her better than anyone. As bubbly as her personality is, she can get angry and hold a grudge better than anyone I've ever met. In the meantime, go and get yourselves something to eat, get some rest- do something other than stay in this hospital and wear out the floor." He gave a meaningful look to Justin who had the good grace to look down.

"I'm not leaving," he said stubbornly.

"Yes, you are," Brian said, equally stubborn. "Unless you want to end up in a bed next to her, you're going to do what the good doctor says." He turned to Troy, "You will call us the minute she wakes up, right? Or if there are any further complications? Nothing better happen to her and we not know. Are we clear?" He stared at Dr. Bradley steadily- not blinking or batting an eyelash. If anything happened to Daphne Chanders there would be hell to pay.

Troy smiled slightly. He liked them...a lot. "You have my word. I've also picked the only nurses I trust to tend her. The reason this has to remain confidential is not only due to federal HIPAA laws but because of Daphne's position. Honestly, she is one of the best trauma surgeons I've ever seen. Smart, witty and completely driven to be the best in her career. In the short time she's been here, some of the other surgeons have become a bit...intimidated by her knowledge. It shouldn't be the way it is but that's the real of it. If word got out about what's really been happening with her, it could jeopardize what she's really working toward. Narcissistic surgeons are like vultures to a dead carcass. They enjoy waiting for others to fall so they can usurp the position and claim the top spot."

"And that is?" Brian asked. He'd always known Daphne was ambitious but at the risk of her health?

"My job," Troy said simply. "It would intimidate lesser men- and it does-but not me. I don't mind the competition but honestly if I had to pick my replacement, it would be her. She really is brilliant but she's actually in it for the science, not the notoriety. That's what going to assure her success."

Lindsey was just grabbing her pocketbook, keys and leaving note for Gus about dinner when her cell phone rang. She checked the caller ID deciding immediately that if it was Melanie, she would have to wait. "Mr. Eldridge, hello."

"I'm fine, Lindsey and please call me Bill. I'll start looking for my father if you don't and since we don't speak, it's best that I don't look," he responded laughingly. "Now you called about understanding what you could seek in terms of J.R., correct?"

"Yes. I wanted to know if I could apply for full custody, if possible. The bottom line is that I was the primary caregiver even though Melanie is her biological mother." He was silent for a time and she worried briefly if they had lost the connection. She was relieved when he spoke again.

"The good news is that I took the liberty of including a visitation petition to the documents already."
That would have been delivered with the petition for divorce."

"But?" She knew there was one in there somewhere. She didn't have to wait long for it.

"Although you are the secondary parent on record and providing Ms. Marcus doesn't issue a counter-suit, we still have Mr. Novotny to worry about. He may decide that it's in his best interests to petition for custody himself since this is a third-parent adoption situation."

"Well that's ridiculous, isn't it?" she asked indignantly. "He only sees her once a year and pays six-hundred dollars in child support which doesn't even begin to cover her expenses. The rest has pretty much come from Brian Kinney, who is my son's biological father. Basically what you're telling me is that if it came down to him or me, I would lose even though J.R doesn't want to stay with either of them?"

"I didn't say that but it will be difficult to make a case against either parent. Because J.R. is young, it really won't matter what she want although it will be taken into consideration. Since she hasn't suffered physical abuse from either party, the judge will have to make a determination strictly on the evidence presented."

"Let me ask you this...how different is the arrangement I have with Brian regarding Gus than what Mel and I have with Michael?"

Bill took a deep breath before explaining. "Mr. Kinney signed over his parental rights but he has what is known as a Post Adoption Contract Agreement, in which Mr. Kinney has access to Gus whenever he likes and you've agreed to share pictures and such with him. Although it isn't legally mandated that he provides financial support for Gus, he does without a problem. The arrangement you have with Michael Novotny is different. You have a Third-Parent Adoption with him, in which he has visitation rights and is legally bound to pay child support to Ms. Marcus, just as you are. Even though he does the absolute minimum, he is still her biological father. If it came down to you or him, they would more than likely side with him."

"So at this rate the best I can hope for is visitation?" Lindsey asked feeling a little dejected.

"Listen, Lindsey....I will do my best for both you and J.R. but I won't lie to you. This is not going to be short and sweet. From what I've heard of Ms. Marcus outside of what you and Brian have told me, is that we are dealing with someone vindictive and intelligent. In a case like yours, it makes for a very tough opponent."

Lindsey sighed. "Well thanks for your time, Bill. I know you'll be in touch and should I hear anything else, I'll call you immediately." She hung up understanding what her freedom was really costing her and wondering if it was all worth it.

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Chris paced around his house waiting for George to arrive. It would be the first time he'd had him over, giving his sweet George a glimpse of the life he really lead. He knew it was dangerous but Allison wasn't scheduled to be home for another week and he felt the need to create some decent memories in a house that saw nothing but cold indifference. She often felt trapped and so did he. He'd thought about divorcing her many times but under what grounds? To the outside world in their upper-class existence, they were perfect. He worked, she stayed home or shopped or traveled just
like other society matrons within their social class. But Chris was miserable—beyond miserable really—and George gave him the feeling of freedom.

He raced to the doors in the study as he heard it open softly. He'd dismissed the staff for the afternoon so he knew it was the love of his life.

"Nice digs, Lover," George's soft voice said in awe.

"Thanks, Baby," Chris responded placing a gentle kiss on George's plush lips while handing him a glass of cognac, which was George's favorite.

They would seem a mismatch by anyone's standards. Even though Chris would never play football again after taking a well-deserved bat to the knee years ago, he still maintained his athletic physique. George was thin but plump in all the right places, especially his ass. Chris stood a head taller than George, which both especially liked. It made it easier for them to have sex standing up without putting added pressure on his knee. George looked almost nerdy whereas Chris' whole persona screamed jock. Despite their differences, Chris was never happier than when he was with George.

"So what was so important that I had to drive all the way out here," George asked.

"What you didn't want to see where I live?"

"Wait...you were serious when you said this was your house?" George asked with a huge smile on his face.

"I share it with my family but yes."

"Does this mean we're finally official?"

Chris laughed. "We've been officially fucking for a year today. Don't tell me you didn't realize that?"

George put his arms around his neck. He pressed his lips to Chris', causing the latter to sigh into it. When the kiss broke Chris felt momentarily bereft of the contact but he didn't have to wait long to be warmed again. "I hadn't thought of it that way, Chris." George shrugged briefly but then he smiled. "Well, don't you think we should celebrate our anniversary?"

Chris yanked George to him again and lost himself in the only person he would ever love. Sadly their romantic interlude didn't last as long as either of them would have liked as Allison happened up in the guest room two hours later.

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"Michael, why aren't you done hanging those curtains yet? Carl will be home before you finish," Debbie complained.

Admittedly, Michael was distracted which he apologized for. "Ma, let me ask you something?"

"Okay but can you do it while you move a bit faster?"

Michael smiled briefly. She was always impatient when she took an idea into her head. She'd always said it was best to do it before she changed her mind. Uncle Vic had once told him that women were the only creatures allowed the luxury. It was how he'd bullied Debbie into accepting a date from Carl Horvath in the first place. Michael wasn't happy at first but he had misjudged Horvath as Vic had
repeatedly told him. Based on the excitement he engendered in his mom, Uncle Vic had been right. He really missed him. But since he died, his mom was his go-to when he needed advice especially since Brian wasn't available to him.

"What do you think of Colby Butler?" Michael asked, distracted momentarily seeing the bright smile on Ben's face in his mind's eye not for the first time that afternoon.

"I think he's a nice young man. And a good-looking one, too," Debbie answered. "Built like a brick shit house with great manners. And that accent...that accent of his could melt the drawers of Jesus."

"Thanks, Ma. I feel so much better," Michael said quietly while rolling his eyes. Debbie touched his shoulder and seeing his downcast eyes, she slapped him. "Ouch! What did you do that for?"

"Because I recognize self-pity and stupidity when I hear it," she answered. "You can't possibly be threatened by Colby and Ben having a friendship."

He rubbed the side of his face. "So what if I am? You said it yourself..he's good-looking, built, charming and he voice is amazing. He also went to college with Ben which means he's smart, Ma."

"And what is wrong with being smart? You're smart."

"Not like they are, Ma. But that's beside the point."

"Well then what is your point?" Debbie asked about ready to knock him upside the head again.

"I'm not like them. I'm not like him. Colby and Ben have a lot more in common than me and Ben. That's my point. Ouch! Again?"

"Yes again," Debbie answered. "What the fuck's wrong with you? Ben married you. You have a relationship; a life together. So what if he's friends with an old college buddy especially after all he's gone through regarding your feelings for Brian. He's had to put up with it for years, even now if you're honest with yourself. Cut him some slack."

He was saved from answering by the ring of his cell phone. "Hey, Melanie. How are you? How's J.R.?"

"Yeah we're fine, Michael. Look, are you busy?" she asked.

"I'm helping Ma redecorate before Carl gets in tomorrow."

"Do you mind if I stop by?"

"Wait. You're in Pittsburgh? I asked Lindsey when I saw her about a month ago and she said you and J.R. were still in Toronto."

"You saw Lindsey? Where? You know what never mind. Do you think Debbie would mind if I stopped by?"

"No not at all. I'll see you in a little bit then," Michael said and hung up.

"What was that about?" Debbie asked.
"I'm not sure but I know it must have something to do with why Lindsey was here meeting with Brian."

"They were meeting? I didn't know she was in town past the last day she and Gus came into town."

"Yeah but I didn't ask why. I had other matters to discuss with Brian," he said remembering exactly what happened in the restaurant.

Debbie picked up on the inflection in his voice. "You didn't?" she asked shaking her head. "How many times were you advised to mind your own fucking business?"

"Ma, I couldn't just let him destroy his life. I'm still not going to willingly sit by and watch it happen all over again. Justin fucking Taylor is trouble."

"Michael, do you honestly think Brian can't run his own life? That he doesn't know his own mind? We know what happened with those people he has to call family due to DNA even if the others don't. So based on that knowledge, do you honestly believe he can't take care of himself?"

"No because as usual he's thinking with his dick and not using the head on his shoulders."

Debbie shook her head again. "So, what happened?"

Michael related the entire episode. "And then the little blond bastard had the nerve to threaten me saying that Brian stopped at blacking my eye but he wouldn't." Debbie outright laughed. "What the hell is so funny, Ma?"

"You are. And for the record, Justin is pretty damned adept at defending himself with his fists- gay or not- so you should probably take heed to his warning. Furthermore, if they are both telling you to mind your own fucking business along with the rest of us, you should listen. Hell, Ben even told you that it isn't your business and that almost never happens. Yet while you're hellbent on following Brian and Justin around and trying to destroy their happiness, you're also standing here worried about some old friend of Ben's moving in on your territory. Do you see anything wrong with this picture?"

Michael turned away, climbing onto the ladder to hang the curtains but Debbie's words were still ringing in his ears.

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Troy stuck his head inside the room checking on Daphne. He was relieved to see her sitting up but disheartened to see the look on her face. Although she looked like his Daphne, there was no evidence of a smile; her bubbly personality, absent. He moved further into the room calling her name softly. She turned from the window where the sun was setting, to look at him. His heart nearly broke at the tears he'd seen there making her eyes appear like chocolate diamonds. He wanted nothing more than to remove the nameless shadows from her eyes.

"What happened to me?" She asked simply.

He knew he couldn't lie to her. Hell she knew just as much as he did and he knew she was alert enough to know a part of her was touched which had nothing to do with her head. "Preclampsia."
"That's impossible, I wasn't preg-" her words cut off. "Troy, I took pregnancy test after pregnancy test. All came back negative, I was scheduled for a blood test and check-up next week. How the fuck? Oh my God, the baby. Where's the baby, Troy?"

"Daphne-"

"The baby, Troy and don't you dare fucking think to lie to me or spare my feelings or whatever else you think to do. Just answer the question." She rambled but with conviction and authority which he'd only heard her use a few times with subordinates in the operating room. Again he understood her friendship with Justin Taylor and Brian Kinney, who had used the same tone earlier in the day with him.

So he decided to use the same tone with her. "If you would shut up and let me get in a word edgewise, I'll tell you what you need to know. No bullshit, just us. Okay?" Her eyes widened briefly and her nostrils flared but she nodded. He felt relieved because it meant that the Daphne he'd come to love wasn't far away. That thought brought him up short for a moment. Yeah—he did love her but he didn't have time to examine how he loved her at the moment—not with the look of impatience etched across her pretty features. He pulled the stool meant for doctors up to the bed on the side of the window so she could look out of it if she needed to. "The babies are gone, Daphne. We had to take both of them. It was a matter of your life and they were..."

"The babies were what? Spill it, Troy," she said firmly, tears in her eyes but determined to hear all of it.

"Stillborn. They were already dead when we took them, Daphne. Even if you had been able to carry them to term, they would not have been alive."

"How old were they?" She looked out the window briefly before looking back at him.

"You were just about six months. The hormone was evident in your blood but your urine held an obscene amount of protein which is how I knew something was off, even before we got the blood work back. We had to lower your blood pressure quickly which is probably why you have a headache now?" He formed the last in an open-ended question which confirmed a slight nod. "Your pressure was one-ninety-four over ninety-seven. Fortunately there wasn't an interruption in brain activity but you know all of this so why am I telling you?"

"Because I need to hear it," Daphne said quietly.

"Why?" he asked just equally quiet.

"I knew something was wrong, Troy. I knew even as I showered, preparing to leave the hospital but you know us...people in medical make the worse patients," she said offering him a small smile again which quickly disappeared. "Anyway, hearing exactly what happened restores my faith that I couldn't have prevented anything with the exception of passing out. Where did I pass out anyway?"

"By the car," he answered. "Good thing you hadn't made it far."

"Yeah lucky. Who have you told?"

"Just Janie, Meredith, Anne and I know what's going on with you. I wouldn't allow anyone else to tend you; would not even have anyone else in the O.R. with us. Risky yes but you know the vultures circle when they smell blood, especially yours or mine. I know we can trust them."

She nodded. "Brian and Justin? I know they were here. Somehow, even unconscious I could hear Justin yelling," she chuckled. "I won't yell or complain if you did. I know how they can be."
It was his turn to laugh and nod. "I told them and they vowed to keep your confidence. I told them that I wasn't leaving you alone and promised to call them when you woke up."

"Let them be for now. If I know them and I do — they will become a royal pain in your ass soon enough. Enjoy being 'proctologist' free for a little while longer. They'll be rooting in your ass and not in a positive, life-affirming way when they get here." At his puzzled look, she laughed. "They may be good-looking and elegant in their manners but they can be vicious when crossed and their bite is much worse than the bark, I assure you."

"And are you like that, too?" Troy was genuinely curious to know.

"Brian and Justin never let me get that deep into myself to find out. If I have a problem and they hear of it before I have a chance to tell them myself, they handle it without me knowing until after the fact. They are the big brothers I've never had — even though Justin is only a few months older than I am and they really are the best friends a girl could ask for," her smile took on a serene quality when she spoke of them.

"You should rest before your sentinels come back." He got up from the stool but she grabbed his hand.

"I guess you're right but do me a favor."

"Anything."

She smiled brightly at him then and his heart stopped for a moment. "Don't promise that. I've been dying to get to Tahiti and I may ask for that at your expense." He laughed, enjoying the feel of her hand on his wrist. "Sit with me for awhile... at least until I fall asleep?" she asked.

He lowered himself back onto the stool, keeping hold of her hand as she fell asleep watching the sunset.

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Brian and Justin stopped in the diner for a quick bite before heading to the loft to grab a little something to eat. Justin's appetite, which was usually robust at best, seemed to have fled him so he and Brian decided to split a turkey sandwich on whole wheat, no mayo. Ordinarily Justin would have made some quip about the how dry the sandwich was but not then. Brian watched him steadily, knowing he was hurting for Daphne as much as Brian was.

"How could she not tell us, Brian? Justin asked, finally breaking the silence which was beginning to drive him nuts.

"You heard what the doctor said just as I did, Justin. She may not have known. Unless Daphne had a blood test in the last few months which I'm pretty sure she didn't then there was no way she knew. Now eat. You're playing with your food worse than Gus used to." Brian took another bite to emphasize how it's done. Justin followed suit mainly to keep the argument to a minimum—Brian knew. "Look, he said he would call us when she woke up so in the meantime.. we'll go back to the loft and fuck to relieve some tension."

Justin chuckled for the first time in many hours causing Brian to smile in return. "I've always marveled at your ability to get romantic at the expense of other's plight."
"Hard. I get horny at their expense," Brian corrected.

"You're always horny, Brian."

"Would you prefer me to get maudlin and cry and boo-hoo over the misfortunes of life or would you rather me fuck you to within an inch of your life, Sunshine?"

That made Justin laugh out loud. "Ever the romantic." He pulled out his wallet daring Brian to stop him. He shook his head when Brian made a gesture to signify zipping his lip.

As they were leaving the diner, Justin came up short at the sight which greeted him.

"You're looking well, Justin," the slightly cultured voice stated. "I see you're back and gone backwards treading old territory again."

"Ethan, I see you're back as well," Justin said nonchalantly. The second half of his comment didn't deserve a reply. "Last I heard you were in Berlin. That was what? Six years ago? Haven't heard anything else since though."

"I didn't know you two knew each other," the man with Ethan said. Cody Bell was a one-time friend of Justin's back in the Pink Posse days when Justin had been tired of being a victim. He'd forced Justin to face his fears, including Chris Hobbs but they parted ways when things took a potentially deadly turn. Justin realized that the role of "hetero-bully" just wasn't for him. With the new laws in Pittsburgh, Justin guessed it wasn't for Cody any longer either. He actually looked...calm.

"Yes, Cody. Justin and I know each other very well, don't we?" Ethan asked, a feral smile gracing his features.

Brian stood by a slight smile on his lips watching the exchange. Justin knew he would step in eventually but was content to let Justin put the fool where he belonged which was firmly behind him.

"Yes, Ethan we do. I know myself as Brian's life mate and I know you for the raggedy mistake I made. But then I was, what was it, Brian?"

"Inexperienced. You had to have a boy to appreciate the man, Sunshine. That's all." Brian smiled as he shrugged.

"Boy have I learned my lesson," Justin said winking and biting his bottom lip. He enjoyed the effect the action had on each of the three men standing around him indicated by the slight but sharp gasps by each of them. But only one's reaction caused the answering twinge in his cock. Brian folded his lips, to keep from laughing out loud.

Ethan was the first to recover since the comment was directed at him. "You enjoyed our time together as much as I did."

"I did enjoy it but you could never make me cum as hard or as often. You see, Brian had an amazing recovery time. He still does and he's much more...experienced than you could ever hope to be. I can't remember the number of times I told you not to cum but you did. That's called dick control but again...that's the difference between a boy and a man. Boys are selfish in all things, especially when it comes to getting off. Men are not."

"It was just his money and you know it." Ethan said bitterly.

"Do I? Since I have my own, is that the reason I'm still with him?"
"And how did you get it? Sucking and fucking him?" Ethan shot back.

"Well if it was, it was well-earned since I still suck and fuck him often and enjoy every fucking second of it." Justin turned and gave Brian a brief kiss but their lips clung at the end of it. "In fact, we were on our way to do just that. Enjoy your evening," Justin said as he moved past them but turned back briefly. "For the record, I have my own success and it didn't top out six years ago." He turned again but could still feel two sets of eyes boring into his back.

"Well done, Sunshine."

"I know. So how are you going to reward me?"

"I thought that was obvious. You ready to get sucked and fucked?" Brian asked, pulling Justin in close and letting his voice drop an octave.

"I'll bet my ass, I am," Justin responded causing Brian to laugh out loud.

As they rode past the diner in Brian's Jaguar, the two figures still stood in front while Justin threw up a hand to wave.

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Melanie arrived at Debbie's in record time. She'd spoken to Marty who advised her of the uphill battle facing Melanie regarding the divorce. The custody situation was a different matter altogether. According to Marty, Lindsey had just as many rights as Michael and Mel because they had a three-parent adoption. Although Michael had not been able to provide much support for J.R., Lindsey had both in time and financially. That was the bad news. The good news was if the biological parents were in agreement, then the third parent would have to abide by the judge's decision, no matter what it was-and that included still paying child support. Even though Jenny Rebecca was an intelligent child and knew her own mind, and she would be allowed to tell the judge her thoughts, her opinion would be taken in account but not used in the overall decision because she was a minor.

"J.R., when we go in here, I need you to spend time with Grandma Debbie okay, so I can talk to your daddy."

"That's fine by me. I like Grandma. She's fun like Mommy."

"What daddy and I aren't fun?" Melanie asked a little amused at the reasoning of the ten-year old.

"I please the fifth," J.R. said.

Melanie laughed out loud then. "It's 'plead' the fifth, sweetheart. You *plead* the fifth. But why would you?"

"Because Uncle Brian said, I should be nice to you. I don't want to hurt your feelings."

"You can be honest with me, J.R. I promise not to get upset with you." Melanie wondered why Brian would have to *tell* J.R. to be nice to her. It hurt that Brian knew things about J.R. that she did not. Same was always the case with Lindsey.
J.R. took a deep breath. "You're mean to Mommy about Uncle Brian and Gussie. You're hardly ever home and when you do come home, it's like all you want to do is fuss and fight with Mommy. She works just as hard as you do but all you do is stomp and yell."

"That's between Mommy and I, J.R. and not your business," Melanie said sternly.

"I don't see why not since I live there, too. And that's another problem. I don't want to live there without Mommy and Gussie."

"Well that's too bad, J.R. I work there, you go to school there-our lives are there."

"I'm already missing school so I can always enroll here. Mr. Marty said that it wouldn't look good for you to leave town so why can't we stay?"

"I'm not discussing this with you, J.R." Melanie said angrily. J.R. was silent then.

Michael met them at the door, asking J.R. all the usual questions about her life. Melanie was pleased that she displayed manners, even if she hadn't to her. Michael took her into the kitchen where Debbie was almost finished baking cookies. J.R. greeted her enthusiastically talking a mile a minute. Melanie couldn't help the small feeling of jealousy watching the two of them with their heads together.

"Well what was so important to drag you back to the Pitts, Mel?" Michael began leading her into the living room.

Melanie sat down, accepting a cup of tea from him. "You really don't know?"

"Know what?" Michael asked warily.

"Lindsey is seeking a divorce."


"Yes way. She's filing under 'Irreconcilable Differences,'" Melanie answered. "But there's more." She detailed most of the suit leaving out the details which drove Lindsey to seek divorce in the first place and Gus' missing college fund. She advised him that she was seeking visitation rights but could take it further in requesting custody because of the third-party adoption.

"So what do you need from me?" Michael asked still in shock from the news of the divorce.

"I need you to side with me on this, Michael. Look- I've never complained against anything you've done or haven't been able to do after we left here. However, if Lindsey proceeds we could both lose out on seeing Jenny Rebecca grow up," she lied smoothly.

"Well that's unacceptable. Lindsey wouldn't do that would she?"

"Who knows, Michael? She's not the same Lindz anymore and she's not in the mood to be reasonable. From what I understand she's working for Justin and has bought a home here, already. She has no intention of returning to Toronto with me or otherwise." She noticed his body stiffen at the mention of Justin's name. She would examine that later.

"When is the hearing?"

"Two weeks from tomorrow."
"I'll be there," Michael answered as Melanie smiled in response.

They walked into the loft and Justin was immediately assailed with memories from the first time he'd set foot in the glamorous space from the last moment he'd left it ten years ago. Very little had changed; the feeling of rightness and as if he belonged there certainly hadn't. Perhaps it was because of the owner who stood in the middle of the floor watching him. Brian discarded his leather jacket, tossing it recklessly on the cream-colored couch, waiting for Justin to come to him. Justin knew he wouldn't push or rush him intuitively understanding Justin's need to absorb it all.

Justin's eye caught on a painting he'd recognized at once, hanging along the back wall of the living room area. The first half of the story hung in the gallery of Britin. This painting, again consumed in muted light, shadow and midnight blue bedding was titled *Aftermath*, in which the culmination of their relationship ended with Brian and Justin entwined in a tight embrace. Brian's face was buried in Justin's neck, his long fingers entangled in the blond locks- much shorter than they were as he stood mesmerized by the image- Brian's body stretched the full length of Justin with one knee bent. Justin looked up at the ceiling with tears in his eyes, not wanting to leave but understanding that he had to go. One foot was balanced on Brian's bent knee, the connection between those glistening figures in the painting never severed.

Justin hadn't realized he'd moved from the doorway until he felt Brian behind him moving his hair to expose the nape of his neck. He still couldn't take his eyes off the painting as Brian launched the sensual assault. Justin gasped at the sensation of Brian's tongue caressing the top of his spine. His jacket was unceremoniously discarded to join his lover's on the couch.

"I never thought to see it again," he said quietly.

"I know," Brian responded equally quiet. "I couldn't *not* buy both of them."

*Love what we do*

*I adore the taste of every thought of you*

Justin nodded understanding more than he could express in words. Brian turned him then kissing him softly at first, then building speed and intensity gradually. Justin sucked on his sensuous bottom lip as Brian sucked on Justin plush top lip. Justin gasped at the cool air moving across his back as Brian pulled his shirt up and off in on swift movement. He brought them back together burying his tongue in Justin's mouth over and over again, swallowing the aroused aspiration as Justin exhaled. Justin's hands itched to feel the skin-to-skin contact. He pulled Brian's shirt up and over his head in the same swift movement, thankful Brian had decided to forego his usual tie and his shirt was unbuttoned at the neck. Teeth clashed briefly as they began to kiss again- harder as they breathed in each other-hands clawing and gripping, tearing at pants. Justin needed to feel the body he constantly craved.

*You're so strong and so pure*

*Got me dickmatized and I want some more*
Brian forced him down on to the familiar cushions positioned directly beneath the painting. The Mies Van Der Rohe coffee table was roughly pushed back as Brian pounced on Justin. The latter took his lover's weight easy reveling in the feel of their torsos meeting roughly at first, then smoothly as they settled a steady rhythm- dry humping and building the anticipation with every swipe of their tongues. Brian kissed Justin's neck, biting at the sensitive spot there sending shockwaves through the body beneath him. Justin clung to Brian as if his life depended on it and in a way it did. He wrapped his arms and legs tightly bringing them even closer, enjoying the grunt that left Brian as Justin tightened his limbs around him. It became a semi-wrestling match as they struggled to get closer. Finally broke free of the hold around his neck, zeroing in on Justin's nipple. Justin cried out at the first bite, moaning at the second and whimpering at the third. Brian licked and then blew the pain away before repeating the exercise. Justin gripped his hair close to coming as Brian continued his ministrations.

*I drink your mind, Suga, Consume your soul*

*Cause you give permission for me to let go*

No one other than Brian could pull reactions like that from Justin. It was easy for Justin to lose himself completely in such a dominant and complete lover. He allowed Justin to enjoy the feeling without having to worry about what came next. The short burst of pain mingled with pleasure as Brian continued down Justin's torso. His dick throbbed with every movement Brian made against him. Low moans were pulled from him as he felt the hands loosening his pants, pushing the pants down his legs and then issuing the most punishing grip on his hip Brian ever gave him- holding him in place as Brian swallowed around his dick. Justin's eyes rolled in his head at the feeling of his head being squeezed first by lips and then by a constricting throat. Brian fingers dug deeper into his flesh, keeping him from moving. All he could do was moan and groan and plead as Brian's hot mouth and talented tongue sensitized him mercilessly. He ached. He wanted. He needed. "Please."

*I can be with you, all of me*

*Submissive, dominant, freaky*

"Brian please. I need-" Justin begged.

It was what Brian had been waiting to hear. Wordlessly, Brian stood up eagerly completing the process of undressing. Justin sat up to watch him. Brian saw the pleading look in Justin's eyes but he continued to take his time. He knew the longer he made Justin wait, the more frenzied he became. It was one of the things he loved about fucking Justin. He was eager and insatiable but it was always controlled, except with him. That was why people who Justin fucked and tried to build relationships with never lasted, Ethan especially. They didn't understand how to handle him when he was stressed or when he was under a lot of pressure, which he was because of Daphne. Running into Ethan and Cody hadn't helped matters- it made him angry no matter how satisfying it was at the same time. Then the shock of the painting and all it represented...he was on sensory overload and needed to be taken completely out of his own head.

Lowering himself fully onto Justin, Brian relished the sound of the sharp intake of breath Justin made. His skin was as feverish as Brian had ever felt it. He was squirming under Brian as if trying to crawl inside the body covering his. "Stay still, Sunshine and I'll give you what you want. But I'm not going to be rushed. Understand?"

Justin smiled and nodded. "Yes, Sir."
Brian's nostrils flared and smiled slightly back at Justin. They understood each other as no one else ever would. He kissed Justin softly only once and it was enough just then. Brian looked around and spotted just what he wanted. He grabbed his tie he'd worn the last time he'd been at the loft. Tying it tightly around Justin's eyes but not tight enough to hurt him, he instructed him not to move. Justin whimpered at the loss of body heat but he did as Brian told him, lying stretched out. Brian headed into the kitchen, grabbing a couple of items there and then headed into the bedroom to grab the set of manacles he'd brought Justin several years ago to re-teach him the act of trust after the bashing. Moving back over to the pallet, Brian set the items on the coffee table.

"You trust me, right?" Brian asked needing to hear from his lips. Trust was a gift never to be taken lightly nor implied.

"Always, Brian," he answered smiling brightly and Brian's breath caught at the sight. He attached the fur-lined handcuffs onto Justin's outstretched wrists causing Justin to giggle slightly. "I can't believe you kept those."

"How do you know their the same ones?"

I recognize the feel of them, Brian. Besides you had them specially made."

"Leave it to you to remember." He had them made so they were a little loose on his right hand, which was adversely affected. "Now shut up and let me do what I'm doing."

Brian took a sip of JB, transferring the liquid to Justin who promptly drank it from his lips. He did that twice more advising on the third time not to swallow until he told him to. He looked up to make sure Justin obeyed, pleased that he did. Grabbing the ice, Brian a small ice cube in his own mouth, swirling his tongue around his. When he caught it between his teeth he told Justin to swallow. As soon as he swallowed the warming liquid, Brian attacked his nipples again causing the body under him to bow fully.

"Oh my god, Brian," Justin gasped.

Brian chuckled as he continued alternating between ice and the heat of the liquor until Justin was shivering with want and begging again with need. After applying more ice to his tongue, he flicked it against the head of Justin's dick. Once again Justin caved upward both running from the sensation of it and soliciting it at the same time. Brian applied the lube to his fingers keeping up the his oral ministrations. The sight of Justin completely at his mercy, cock dripping with pre-cum and begging for what he wanted, was more than enough to get Brian off but he wanted to do that inside Justin. He rolled Justin over onto his stomach, biting each cheek in turn before positioning him for his entry. Brian slowly pressed against the opening as Justin pushed back. Brian applied a firm smack to the plump ass.

"Keep still or I'll stop," he ordered. Justin stilled immediately. He chuckled.

"Will you just fuck me already?" Justin's natural inclination to be demanding was kicking in.

"Uh-huh, Sunshine. You don't get to be the bossy bottom right now. Keep it up and we'll start all over again," Brian threatened.

_Cause when I blackout_ 

_And then I come back_
Justin took a deep breath to calm his nerves as Brian gained the first ring of access. He pushed into Justin's back and he bent further forward, deepening the curve of his spine. Brian slid in further, enjoying the slow, deep moan Justin produced. Brian groaned at the feeling of the tightness he would never get tired of. He began the steady back and forth rhythm snapping his hips hard at the end. Gripping Justin by the back of the tie still over his eyes, Brian bought the back of him in direct proximity to his chest. Sitting back on his haunches, Brian whispered for Justin to move. He yelped when he did, Justin bouncing hard and fast on Brian's cock. He reached around to begin stroking Justin, remembering when he had done that to Brian. The effect of the ass bearing down and clenching consistently on him brought Brian to the brink. Fortunately, he didn't have to wait long for Justin to come. Brian bit his shoulder andFuck him through the orgasm as he shot his load over and over, decorating Brian's hand in the process. He collapsed forward in a heap, body still quivering. The resulting tremors brought Brian's foray into ecstasy immediately afterward. But as always Brian recovered in mere seconds. He waited until Justin regained consciousness to begin moving again. He released the blindfold although the cuffs still stayed in place. He watched Justin as Brian built them up to culmination a second time.

*You still meet me in the eye*

*And you're still hittin' that*

He finally released the cuffs from Justin's wrists and dislodged himself, exhausted. "Feeling better?"

Justin laid quietly, breathing deeply while staring up at the painting. "Lots."

"What's wrong, Sunshine?" Brian asked as he nuzzled Justin under the ear.

Justin smiled a small smile as he continued to look up. "Other than the fact that my ass is sore from you fucking me through the floor?" Brian laughed briefly as did Justin. "I don't feel the way I did when I painted that. Hopeless, stupid, dejected...worried."

Brian listened attentively as he spoke. It vaguely reminded of the time Justin had returned from doing the movie. It was never something they talked about, opting to live in the moment and enjoy each other enough so it would last until the next time. There was something almost poetic about them having this particular conversation in the loft instead of at the house. He grabbed two cigarettes and lit them, passing one to Justin. They inhaled and exhaled in silence for a time before Justin began again.

"I thought that it was the right thing to do...so much so that I was willing to sacrifice both you and me to it and for a time I did. And yes, we're on equal footing now, Brian, but what at cost?"

"Look the important thing is that we decided to stop being assholes, right? So the rest doesn't matter. No apologies, no excuses. No regrets."

He leaned over kissing Justin; effectively shutting out every other thought. The tension of the moment gone.

*Until Then (I Imagine)- Jill Scott*
Upon leaving Vanguard Advertising Agency, Craig called Jim revealing all he accidentally (on purpose) heard of the conversation he'd overheard between Gardner Vance and Kip Thomas. They agreed to meet at the Hobbs residence to plan and organize how to deal with the information. Repeating the information again to bring Senior and Samuel up to speed, Craig reminded them of the Kinney/Taylor banking information.

"So you want to use Kip Thomas, to bring Brian Kinney to heel?" Senior asked. "Exactly how do you plan to do that, Craig? It's not as if we have all of the other financial information we need to wage a full out war against him."

"Distraction is the key to mistakes being made," Craig said. "The best tool we have for that distraction is Justin."

"But he isn't going to cooperate. We all know that, Craig," Stockwell said shaking his head.

"Of course not but Kip Thomas will. The guy is a rat and we all know he has the most to both benefit and lose in this situation. He has been looking for a way to get even with both Brian and Justin for years. Using him would be our best chance to destroy Kinney, thereby separating the he and Justin for good and true."

"Wait," Samuel said. "Craig, are you sure that's what you want? I know that you don't consider him your son anymore but he's still your flesh and blood, no matter. He's just opened a new branch of his business here in Pittsburgh as well. So even if we destroy Kinney there is no guarantee that your son will leave him. I think we need to leave Justin out of this plan altogether and concentrate all of our efforts on Brian Kinney. That cock of the walk is the real power of the duo."

"That's where you're wrong," Craig protested. "They are equals in every way that matters and that includes financially. I'm sure Justin doesn't have as much in the bank but they compliment each other in business as much as anything else. If you bring one to heel, you have to bring the other to do so as well. Otherwise, Justin will help Kinney rebuild and then Kinnetik will be just as untouchable as it is now."

Jim nodded. "How sure are we that this, Kip Thomas, will cooperate?"

"If he doesn't, he will lose his job. Vance can't afford to lose this account to Kinnetik. The company-run by two head-strong and business savvy women- is worth a hefty sum and are looking to expand further into the international markets. Even at collecting two percent of the profits, based on what they've done already with Canada, the U.S. and South America, Vanguard stands to gain two million dollars from the account per year. That's nothing to turn a nose up at or a blind eye."

"Alright, Craig. Since he is familiar with you, you speak to him and see what he can do. In the meantime, I will call Joshua. It's time he came home," Samuel said.

"Planning another bombing?" Jim asked.

"Possibly on a smaller scale but it's best to have him on hand should the opportunity arise."
"Holy shit," Chris said under his breath.

He had dropped by to see his grandfather as he always did. But this time was different. He wanted to see what his options were for dissolving the marriage with Allison and how much would be fair in the settlement before he had the family attorneys draw up the papers. Even though she was pissed off Chris was fucking someone else in the house, she wasn't upset about George. She was more upset about how having him there would look to the neighbors. She asked for a no-contest divorce and disclosed her own infidelity with Chance Barber, one of Chris' long-time friends who had become distant in recent years. At least he understood why that friendship was on the brink of dissolving completely.

Arriving at the house where he'd grown up, the last thing he'd expected to hear was the plans to destroy Brian Kinney and Justin Taylor. He was torn about what to do for several reasons: number one: there was family loyalty and the fact that Chris Hobbs stood to inherit a substantial fortune when his grandfather passed. If he were convicted of a felony- including the eight deaths associated with the bombing of Babylon several years ago, all of that could go up in smoke. Secondly, there was no question that he would always feel threatened by Brian Kinney and Justin Taylor, if they found out about that he was a closeted homosexual and the fall out from it. They could cause him to lose everything he'd been waiting patiently for.

Again he reflected of the events surrounding his and Justin's sordid past but then he considered his own relationship with George. He began to understand the feelings Justin and Brian must have had toward each other even back then. He would be hard-pressed not to kill the person or people trying to take George away from him in the manner Justin's own father was suggesting. The third reason and probably the most telling of all was the need to make up for all his wrongdoings in reference to Justin Taylor. He didn't understand what his actions really did until Justin confronted him at gunpoint some years before. The humiliation he felt as he pissed on himself while a gun was placed in his mouth, he understood the fear Justin must have felt at his hands. Chris had looked over his shoulder for well over three years because of that incident and even though it angered him that he'd became a paranoid wimp, he still could not be angry at Justin for instilling the same fear in Chris that he'd faced everyday since discovering he liked men. The same fear of discovery coursed through Chris every time he went in search of George. The only difference was eventually Justin got tired of hiding who he was; Chris didn't have the same luxury. Money versus integrity was a helluva dilemma indeed.

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This story archived at http://www.midnightwhispers.ca/viewstory.php?sid=3187
Chapter 18- Inception by Nichelle Wellesly

After receiving the call from Dr. Bradley while Justin had Brian tied to the Mies Van Der Rohe coffee table, he hurriedly took care of his partner-which Brian found no less satisfying, indicated by trying to stand on a set of wobbly legs- raced to the shower and drove back to the hospital all within half an hour of the call with Brian still trailing behind. There was no question of how they'd spent the afternoon. Although Justin was moving significantly faster than Brian, he still had a bit of knock-kneed action going on which caused Daphne to burst out laughing the minute they came through the door of her room and made their way over to the bed.

"Oh shut up," Justin said as she tried to minimize her outright laughter to the occasional chuckle. It didn't work and Brian and Justin had no choice but to laugh with her.

Getting her bearings, she said, "Sorry to interrupt." A slight smile still on her lips.

"No, you're not," Justin said with an answering smile but he quickly sobered. "How are you
feeling?"

"Like my abdomen was run over by a truck but there is a reason for that." She looked away briefly. "Troy told me that you know what happened." As Brian and Justin started to speak, she held up her hand. "Before, I answer every question I see in your eyes, there's a lot to tell you so you may want to sit down."

"I'll-" Brian began but she stopped him.

"You too, Brian. I want you to hear it, too."

Justin grabbed the chair whereas Brian opted to stand by the large window.

"So why didn't you tell us, Daphne?" Justin asked.

"First thing I will tell you is that I didn't know. I was sure something was wrong but I figured whatever it was would straighten out on its own. I took about five pregnancy test, which were all negative. *Everything* was normal. I won't go into what everything is because let's face it- you're gay men and *men in general* are squeamish when it comes to women issues. I don't need you two passing the hell out when I can't get out of bed to tend you two," she said smiling.

"Whose was it?" Brian asked, the look in his eyes almost murderous.

She stopped a moment before saying, "You can't kill him or have him murdered, if that's what you're thinking. Besides if Drew found out, I'm fairly certain he'd already have done the job."

"Drew? What the hell has he got to do with this?" Justin asked before Brian had a chance to. There was no question of how angry Brian and Justin were but if Drew Boyd knew about this beforehand...

Daphne took a deep breath. "Justin, remember the man I was seeing in New York."

"Steve Marshall, right?"
"That's right, Dr. Steven Marshall. It turns out that my last patient was his wife, who happened to be Drew's ex."

"Whoa. You were seeing a married man, Daphne? You know better than that," Brian said angrily.

"Of course I know better than that, Brian and it would never have happened if I'd known. Surely you know by now that I'm not that kind of woman," Daphne said equally angry.

He'd known Daphne all of her adult life and even though they hadn't seen each other for many years, he still knew she would never do something so callous. "Yeah, I know, Daph," he said calmer realizing what he basically accused her of. "I'm just fucking pissed off right now. You're fucking lying in a hospital bed because of that asshole and you're telling me I can't kill the motherfucker. You can't blame me."

She shook her head and let out a frustrated breath. "No I can't but as pissed as you are, I think I'm even more so and with very good reason. But to let you know, Brian, he pursued me for well over a year before I even went out for coffee with him. We've dated for five of the six years, I've known him- or thought I knew him anyway. That's why the barista at the coffee shop I took you to, had an immediate issue until I told her who you were. We went there every day when I was on break and he wasn't on the surgical rotation. You're damned good looking but you weren't Steve. She believed like everyone else that we would end up together. Life doesn't always work out that way, does it?"

She shrugged, eyes downcast.

"So that's why you quit your job, Daphne?" Justin asked more calmly than what he was feeling. Truthfully, he felt like Brian in wanting to kill the bastard for hurting Daphne. But he also realized that Daph needed him more.

She nodded. "In my position at the hospital, I would have been expected to tend Ciara, which I wouldn't have had a problem with. I also would have had to continue interacting with Steve and that couldn't happen civilly. Above all things, I am a professional and I would not have been able to stay that way if forced to deal with him. In fact, he begged me to stay on his wife's case because I was the only doctor he could trust implicitly with her care. I'm diligent whereas some of the others are not and they wouldn't have been, even knowing who she was. But there was more because you see, the two of us were the same amount of months pregnant. I really hope she gets to keep hers and that they have a long, healthy life with or without Steve."

"That fucking bastard..." Justin began but Daphne held him off.
"Yeah, that fucking bastard. It didn't matter that I didn't know I was pregnant at the time but it did matter that he'd been dating me as long as he'd been married to her...longer in fact. Isn't it obvious why I had to leave?"

"So what does Dr. Bradley say about all of this?" Brian asked.

"Nothing because I haven't told him."

Justin had seen the look in Troy Bradley's eyes when he spoke of Daphne and it wasn't just her admiring of her surgical skills. "Why haven't you told him, Daph? He seems to genuinely want to be your friend outside of work."

"And he is to a degree, I suppose, but I've learned my lesson about workplace romances. I'll be friends with everyone who extends the olive branch but nothing more."

As Justin was about to speak, the topic of conversation peeked his head in. Gracious as always, Daphne invited him in and they began chatting it up as familiar with each other as Justin and Daphne were during high school. Brian and Justin exchanged a look but neither would comment on it until they were alone later.

"So, Doc. When can she get out of here?" Brian asked.

Troy answered. "Within the next few days but I want her to take a few weeks off."

"Mind asking me what I think?" Daphne said firmly.

"Okay, Dr. Chanders, what do you think?" Troy said indulgently looking her square in the eye. Brian and Justin watched the exchange intently, still exchanging subtle looks.

"I think I should take the rest of this week and half of the next then get back to work," she answered matter-of-factly.

"Mm-h'm, I see," Troy said noncommittally. "And is there any wonder why I didn't ask you what you thought, Daphne? It's because of the answer you just gave which is completely irrational and
unacceptable. You just had surgery for God's sake." When she started to protest, he held up a hand to stay her words. "As your boss, I'm mandating it but as your friend I'm requesting it."

Justin snickered while Brian turned to the window discovering the moon particularly enchanting but there was no question he was laughing. Troy Bradley had learned how headstrong Daphne Chanders was and knew how to handle her with ease. He was right that she needed to take some time off but had he not pulled the employer card, she would have disregarded it immediately.

"Okay," she said petulantly. All three male occupants looked at her at the same time; two of them with looks of shock, the other with a satisfied smirk. "But you better be prepared for when I come back from my enforced vacation, Troy. I'm bound to be a bitch."

"You don't scare me, Daphne. Others- maybe- but definitely not me. Get some rest." He straightened up, smiling wide as he left the room.

She watched him go while Brian and Justin watched her. When she turned back, they were still watching her. "What?" she asked.

"Nothing," Justin answered quickly.

"Everything," Brian answered. "Daphne, if you don't fuck him at least once, I might check your ass into a mental hospital so you can't check yourself out until you agree to it."

"Oh, Brian, please. Didn't you hear a word I said before Troy came in here? I'm not shitting where I eat again. Besides, Troy and I are friends nothing more."

"Yeah. I heard you but tell me something- is that drool on your bottom lip." When Daphne reached, he burst out laughing. "Friends my ass. You want him as much as he wants you. Besides you don't have to be in love with him to fuck his brains out."

"Leave her alone, Brian. At least for now," Justin added with his trademark smile in place.

"You two are fools," Daphne said, laughing in spite of herself. "Anyway you'd better be ready for one huge pain in the ass in the coming weeks because I'll be at your place."
"Didn't we have this conversation already, Daphne?" Justin said reminding her of the conversation in the bank.

"Hey you two, of all people, are not strangers to fucking in front of an audience. It will be entertaining. Besides would you rather I watch or Debbie?" And at their collective groan, Daphne laughed more than she had in the past few weeks. Maybe being off for a couple of weeks wouldn't be so bad after all.

-Colby walked into Cynthia's office as she was just finishing up a call with someone named Lindsey. Colby shrugged and sat down waiting patiently. He really was amazed at his Elf's ability to hold a conversation, talk to whomever that was on the phone, then grab the PDA and make notations there. Even with all of his education, he would have chucked it though the huge bay window at her back.

"So how did it go?" Cynthia asked as she hung up the phone, still putting the finishing touches on a document on the computer.

"The initial contact went fine, I guess," he answered nonchalantly.

"You guess? What's with the guessing? You're usually so cocksure," she said laughing.

Colby smiled in return. She was right. "Okay so here's what happened..." He told her about the conversation between Ben and Michael and how he had been told to leave it alone, rather forcefully by his husband. "He reminds me of a pit bull when they get hold of something and you have to pry their jowls open for them to release it. That's the way Michael is where Brian is concerned. He's hell-bent on saving him, though by all accounts the last thing Brian Kinney needs is saving. Shit, that man should come with a warning label himself and so should his lover."

"What you've seen Brian? Where?"

"It was outside the diner where they were accosted by some other little people who wanted to take shots at them."

"Little people?" Cynthia laughed. "At your height, everybody's a little person, Colby. Did you catch the 'little peoples' names?"
"One's name was Ian or something like that and the other Cody."

Cynthia blinked twice fast at him. "You mean Ethan and Cody?" When he nodded. She added, "Together? As in they're involved?"

"If holding hands in public when there isn't a broken wrist in sight constitutes as together, then yeah they are."

"That's a mismatch if I ever could imagine one. Well what happened?" She listened attentively as Colby told her what he'd heard. She laughed hysterically at his retelling of Justin explaining what dick control was but then she sobered quickly as he told her what happened when Justin and Brian got in his car and left. "Fuck! Ethan was always a liar but never violent. Cody, from what Brian told me about him, was militant and violent."

"The young man I saw today wasn't. He seemed almost staid in his appearance. Blue eyes which sparkled, light brown hair tapered on the sides. The guy could be a fashion model if he wasn't so short," Colby said laughingly.

"From what you say, he may have changed but... I don't know, Colby. I just feel like there's some unspoken danger surrounding Brian and Justin."

"Don't tell me you're tapping into that Celtic side of you after all these years, seeing shadows where there aren't any. One thing's for certain though, I wouldn't bet against the house. Those two seem strong."

Cynthia nodded. "They are. More than you could possibly imagine but the question is: how much more can they survive?" The loud pounding on the closed office door, shook her out of her revere. Ted burst in looking nothing short of panicked.

"We have a problem, Cynthia. A big one," he said breathlessly.

Colby and Cynthia exchanged looks before she said, "Go on, Colby and let me know how it turns out. In the meantime, I'll try to secure what you asked me for in terms of a condo but that may take some time so I'm calling in a rather large favor from someone we can trust and who has just as much at stake."
He nodded. "You'll fill me later, right?" He stood and Ted looked from one to the other suspiciously.

She smiled at the look on Ted's face. Colby often garnered the shocked deer-in-headlights-expression when he stood up from a seated position. "Yeah, I'll let you know," she said still smiling while Colby squeezed past Ted to get to the door.

He laughed as he heard Ted's parting comment. "That's a helluva beanstalk to climb, Jackie." He left out of Kinnetik's front doors still laughing.

Drew was in a pissed off mood when he arrived back in Pittsburgh. Emmett was kind of worried about the information Drew received while they visited in Ciara in the hospital in NYC.

"Are you sure Ciara meant that, Drew or that she even knew what she was saying? She was on some pretty heavy medication. It didn't help that her baby is in NICU either," Emmett tried to get him to see reason.

"I know what I heard, Emmett. That fool Steven had been having an affair with Daphne."

"Well that would explain why she moved back here. You know to remove temptation and all that. We know Daphne, Drew- me more so than you- she would never willingly get involved with a married man, let alone helping the ex-husband of the wife. She's like Justin used to be...idealistic, romantic; the type to actively seek a relationship, not fuck around just for the sake of fucking. That's Brian and Justin's m.o. Daphne isn't like that."

"I want to believe that but I still want to get her side of the story. Jesus, Emmett. Do you know what it took for me not to beat the shit out of Steven? Ciara and I had our problems but I won't allow her to be hurt...by anyone."

"I know, Drewsie," Emmett said, rubbing Drew's broad shoulders lightly. "Seeing her like that got to me, too, but there has to be a reasonable explanation of how Daphne is involved in this. She's just not that type. And whereas love makes people do crazy things- I mean look at Brian and Justin after all- I can't imagine her not using her brain and willingly getting involved with a married man."
They entered the hospital through the emergency entrance. Between the phones ringing off the hook which nurses were too busy to answer and doctors trying to talk over what had to be family members asking questions all at once, the normally quiet space made a stadium full of shouting fans seem quiet. Emmett spotted Brian and Justin stepping off the elevator, the latter's hair like a beacon in a normally dim setting. They were laughing and speaking no doubt trying to find their way through the maze of humanity which littered the fairly small space.

Reaching them was fairly easy due to Drew. People seemed to automatically give him a wide berth even with the crowd that size. Then again, it could have been the ever-present scowl on his face which told people to part like the Red Sea. "What are you guys doing here," Emmett asked. "Everything okay?" Em brought Justin in close for a hug and a brief kiss as was their custom whenever they saw each other. He nodded briefly to Brian who returned the gesture distractedly still trying to figure what the hell was happening.

"Yeah, now it is," Justin answered. "You guys okay? What the hell is going on down here?" Justin gestured toward the overflow, picking up some foreign words he recognized amongst the cacophony of raised voices, out-of-control phones and incoming sirens.

"Looks like pandemonium or better yet like hell broke loose somewhere," Emmett answered. "We're just getting in from New York."

Brian nodded. "How's Ciara. Daphne told us that's why you went."

Drew answered. "She's going to be okay. Speaking of which, where's Daphne? I was going to ask for her at the desk but with the way this place is..."

Brian and Justin exchanged looks which Emmett did not miss. "Well...where is she?"

"Why do you want to know?" Justin asked. He'd noticed the scowl on Drew's face as they approached.

"Justin-" Drew began but Emmett stayed him with a subtle but solid hand to his torso.

"The thing is Drew needs to ask her something about the man Ciara is married to. Apparently, Steve-Ciara's no good ass husband- had been having an affair with Daphne. She was on her way to the hospital to speak with Daphne when she got into that God-awful accident. Drew just needs clarification on everything that happened before he kills Steve." Emmett finished with a slight smile.
"Well Drew we're of the same mind," Brian said grabbing Drew around the shoulders and heading toward the elevator. "I'll take you to her."

"Shouldn't she be down here?" Drew asked looking around.

"She should but she isn't," Brian said. "It's her business to tell but that doesn't mean I can't give you a nudge to get your answers. So are you coming or not?"

The four of them crowded into the elevator heading up to the third floor. Emmett looked back and forth between Brian and Drew, as did Justin. The silence in the elevator was both deafening and telling all at once, each of the occupants lost in their own thoughts. Stopping by the desk, Brian informed them of the guests and that he and Justin were going back in to speak with Daphne. At first the idea was met with resistance until Brian spotted Dr. Bradley hurrying down the hall.

"Can you take care of this?" Brian asked giving a cursory look over the nurse behind the desk glowering at him. "They're friends of hers just as we are."

"Yeah, follow me. It's okay Anne, I don't think Daphne will mind," Troy said soothingly. Turning to the group of four, he said, "You're lucky because I was heading to her room anyway. Believe it or not, I needed to get her advice on one of her patients."

Justin laughed. "You must have a death wish or some rather balls of steel. You just put her on leave, remember?"

Troy laughed, too. "Let's hope that it's just balls of steel that I have. I know she's going to hand me a bunch of shit about it but I'm ready for her."

They entered her room to find her looking out the window, her brow furrowed in concentration. Her long reddish-brown hair hung loose about her shoulders and they heard the catch of breath from Troy, who had never seen her with her hair down. It was always under a cap or tied back. Realizing he was being watched, he made a great show of checking the monitors for her vital signs while Justin chuckled and Brian turned his head.

"What are you doing in here again, Troy? Isn't there some emergency you have to take care of?" She asked laughing. "You know you're about to have your manhood card yanked for being a Mother Hen."
"Shut up already," he said but he was smiling in response. "I've brought you some visitors but first I have to ask you about Mrs. McKee."

"Shit. She's back? What the hell happened? Has she been drinking again? What the fuck, Troy? Are you going to answer? You know what, I'll go take care of it myself." Her speech was as fast as ever as she made to get out of the bed.

"You will do no such thing," Troy said as stern as she'd ever heard him which caused her to pause midway. "You're going to lie there and shut up and give me a chance to answer understand, Dr. Chanders?"

"You know you wouldn't have to ask me a fucking thing if you'd let me out of this goddamn bed," Daphne said through gritted teeth. She was literally going crazy from inactivity.

Troy bent down while extending his arm behind her to grip the headboard, causing her to meet his eyes directly. When she did, he repeated his earlier orders very quietly allowing his breath to ghost across her full lips. He leaned a fraction closer and asked, "Would you rather me chain you to the fucking bed, Daphne? I never figured you for a masochist darling but if you keep trying to get out, that's exactly what I'm going to do. Now would you like to answer my questions regarding your patient?"

For her part, Daphne felt like she'd just run a marathon. The sound of Troy's voice softly threatening her made her look at him differently. It made her want. Fuck. He....no she wouldn't think of that. Shaking her head slightly to clear her addled senses of the mixture of green and gold eyes staring back at her. "What do you want to know?" She asked quietly and they began to talk about all the work she'd been doing with the woman to manage her illness. Although Daphne was a trauma surgeon, she was well-versed in many other fields including heptology- the study of the liver. She and Troy often discussed alternative treatments for patients in danger of developing cirrhosis of the liver, which Ms. McKee was in grave danger of. Because the patient had other ailments as well requiring medication, putting her on another was no longer an option. Several of the current treatments promoted a direct danger when combined to the other meds on her record. Daphne recited all the information to Troy advising the effect of each medication and the potential adverse reactions on the patient. When she finished she looked at him mutinously. "Do you have enough to go on, now?"

Troy chuckled. "Yes and thank you, darling. You've been so helpful," he said, picking up her hand and kissing it quickly, causing her to gasp and then chuckle.

"You're such a fucking tease, Troy. Now go take care of my patient and let me visit with the riff-raff.
I know I'll see you in a bit." He winked as he left the room leaving her alone with her friends. She looked at them all directly, eyes widening just a fraction when her eyes landed on Drew. "What?"

"Nothing," they all answered at the same time.

She let it go...for now as Justin sat on the edge of the bed and Emmett took a seat on the stool. As when he first visited, Brian took up his position by the window, looking over the vast grounds. "Drew, how was your trip to New York? Did you see, Ciara? How is she and the baby?" Daphne swallowed hard at the last question.

Drew pulled the chair from the corner behind the monitors, sitting next to Emmett who promptly took his hand. He took in a deep breath before he spoke. "First and foremost, you did a helluva job patching her up. Dr. Blake said that if it hadn't been for your quick thinking, we would be planning her and the baby's funeral. So thank you for that."

She breathed a sigh of relief. The surgery had taken several hours due to a crushed pelvis and Ciara's pregnancy. She'd also suffered several broken ribs, one which narrowly missed puncturing her lung. Daphne knew it would be several months before Ciara healed. "I was just doing my job, Drew. No thanks is needed. I'm just glad she is going to be okay. The baby is too, right?"

"Dr. Blake said so and I have to trust him." He shifted on the seat, a little uncomfortable with the conversation that had to happen but he had to know. "Daphne, I need to ask you about Steve."

"Why?" The question came out whip-sharp. She closed her eyes briefly to gather her wayward feelings. "I'm sorry, Drew. Steve is a subject I would like to bury."

"Yeah so would I," Brian said from the corner. "But you won't let me."

Daphne rolled her eyes at him, redirecting her attention to Drew who watched her as a hawk would prey. "What is it, Drew? Ask your questions so we can be done with it. I would ask that it goes no further than this room but I suspect that would be asking for the impossible, correct?"

Drew nodded. "Yeah it would be asking for the impossible, Daphne. And I'm sorry for that. How long were you two dating?"

"I've known Steve for six years, dated him for five. I only recently found out he had a wife and that it
was Ciara after I performed the surgery. I asked for the next of kin and there he was- the husband.” She smiled bitterly remembering the revelation of it all. Right then she wished she could adopt Brian's philosophy of living in the solution and not the problem but she couldn't. Her existence was all kinds of fucked up. The only thing she had which made sense was temporarily unavailable to her. Her career went so far beyond her lifestyle or prestige or fame; it was who she was.

"You didn't know he was married in all that time, Daphne? How is that even possible?"

"Let me explain something to you, Drew- to all of you in fact- I am my job. I can count the number of times per month I actually sleep in my own bed. For someone like me, it makes it easy not to notice things, like a lying, cheating, sneaky son-of-a-bitch in the form of a charming man. For the record, Drew, based on their anniversary date, I should feel like the one slighted. He married her and she got to have and keep her baby. My babies are no longer here or breathing, so don't you dare sit there and judge me." Daphne looked toward Brian, the only one who didn't have pity in his eyes. She appreciated that just then. She was much too angry to want or need pity.

"My God, you were..." Emmett said.

"Yeah, I was. Only I didn't know that I was six months when they found me in the parking lot passed out by my car." She met his eyes directly then shifted them back to Drew. "Now hear this: I don't want to ever speak his name again. I told you what you needed to know and you can relate it to Ciara if that's what you choose to do so long as I am not around to know of it. I left the city because I wanted to get away from him; to live my life and not look back. I don't want to deal with any of it anymore. Are we clear?"

"Crystal," Drew said. "But there is one more thing, Daphne."

"What is it?"

"Dr. Blake and I were speaking about you in his office and Steve overheard. I can't prove it but I know he did. My gut tells me that and it has never steered me wrong before."

"What? You don't actually think he'll come here do you, Drew?" Justin who had been silent throughout the whole exchange asked.

"I think anything is possible. He was pretty angry when he found out she quit her job and left town for good. He didn't know where she was but the last time I saw him...well let's just say he looked a
bit more relaxed than he had in the days prior and it had nothing to do with Ciara or the baby."

"That's it, Daphne. I know you don't want to talk about it again" Justin said.

"And I won't," she said adamantly.

"Troy has to be told," Justin said just as firmly. "It's better to be safe than sorry and this dude sounds like a problem."

"Justin, I can take care of myself and this is my business. Not yours or anyone else's. Mine."

"You know what...Fuck this," Brian said as he headed for the door.

"Where are you going?" Emmett asked.

"She doesn't want to tell the good doctor, I will." And he stomped from the room in search of the only person who may be able to help Daphne in a way the rest of them couldn't. If only she would let him.

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Ben walked into Woody's with mixed feelings. On the one hand, he felt he should have been with Michael to reassure him and assuage his feelings. In the same thought, he couldn't wait to catch up with Colby. The Wild One, was what he was called through college. He was anxious to find out if he was still living up to the moniker. Ben suspected he was; Colby was never one for living life in the slow lane.

He spied Colby, sitting by the bar being hit on by a tall twink. Even from his vantage point, Ben could tell Colby was amused and bored by turns. He was always like that. If Colby wasn't engaged mentally, being engaged physically wasn't an option. Being as tall and handsome as Colby it just kinda went with the territory. He hadn't looked like he'd aged a day in the years he and Ben's lives took separate turns. Ben and Colby had been inseparable for their years of college and even a few years afterward. They studied together, worked together and cruised for women together. The first night they fucked, Ben was high but couldn't deny having thought about it a million times prior. The drugs just let him do what he wanted to every time he saw Colby fucking the brains out of some nameless broad. Ben thought about that night many times over the years. It was the night he'd
discovered just how shallow his attraction to women really was. Yeah he could get his dick up without a second thought—\textit{at that age who couldn't?}—but with Colby he'd understood just what was missing. It was one of the things he'd never spoken about with Michael and probably never would. He loved Michael but there was some things he just couldn't tell his husband, no matter how open and honest the relationship.

Ben had opted to put in his little-used contact lenses. They felt funny but when meeting an ex-lover no one wanted to look like they were about to give a lecture. He'd waited until Michael went to his mom's to do so, avoiding the most common questions and the cold shoulder. Michael wouldn't have understood the need for Ben to look his best just meeting an old college chum for drinks at Woody's but that was understandable to a point. Michael's most serious relationship had been with a doctor who by all accounts was sophisticated, educated and controlling. Ben's relationships were always more about fun and freedom, committed but casual. Sometimes Ben missed that vibe. The spontaneity of it; the free-fall feelings and being reckless—of being young with no responsibilities past who was next on the fuck list. But that had been years ago...more years than he wanted to remember at the moment.

Crossing over to the bar, he ordered a beer and took his seat by the tallest, most gorgeous stranger in the place...\textit{well a stranger to everyone else}. Ben just knew him as Colby Butler, sexy pirate with a heart of gold. He decided right then to put thoughts of Michael to the back of his mind and just enjoy the illusion of freedom for a little while.

"Up to your old tricks, I see," Ben said laughingly.

"Nah, friend. They never get old. You haven't either by the way," Colby responded, letting his eyes travel up and down Ben's body.

Ben couldn't stop the flush he knew was gracing his face. The silver-tongued devil sitting next to him always knew what to say without having to be told how Ben was feeling. He would do well to remember that. "You haven't changed either," Ben answered simply.

"Ah..I don't know about that. I am in Pittsburgh, after all, and not the South of France or in Ireland. It feels a little funny being landlocked."

"It's funny. I usually feel the reverse with being near bodies of water. I always get a slight sense of foreboding but I guess that's kind of to be expected since I was twenty-three before I ever saw the sea."

Colby nodded. "I hear you've been traveling a bit these last few years though."
"Yeah. My last book did surprisingly well so even ten years later, I'm still doing book tours."

"A lot different than the circuit parties we used to do," Colby said, smiling wide at the memories.

Ben laughed. "A helluva lot different but just as satisfying."

"Really? More satisfying than a white party? As I recall you always left those sore and exhausted, never one or the other," Colby laughed.

"Yeah. My last one resulted in a sticky situation but it wasn't until years later I found out just how sticky," Ben said, cringing slightly at the memory.

"What happened?" Colby placed his hand under his chin looking expectantly at Ben. His green eyes sparkled with his innate mischief and Ben had to chuckle. He was always one for gossip.

"I had sex with my husband's best friend a few years before I met Michael," Ben said, smirking.

Colby laughed outright. "How did your husband take that news? More importantly, how was the best friend?"

Ben shook his head still chuckling. "Michael was not too happy. He kept asking the most invasive questions."

"And did you answer them?"

Ben thought back a moment. "To a degree, I did," he said.

"So what did you leave out?" Colby took a sip of his drink, steadily regarding Ben.

He shifted in his seat under the blazing heat of that look. Inhaling deeply he said, "That I've never come harder since that night. The guy is a top through and through; stamina and skill. Fuck, he
would come and stay hard then come again. It only begins to describe the addiction Justin must feel where Brian is concerned. Those two...

"What?" Colby said at the look of bewilderment gracing Ben's chiseled features. "Those two what?"

Ben continued. "Knowing of their relationship from beginning to its first and second ends, there's no way they would find contentment with anyone else. They fuck around, it's true, but the only person able to keep up with Brian and stand up to him without batting an eyelash is Justin Taylor. I used to describe Brian and Justin's relationship as the story of Icarus. You remember the story?" When Colby shook his head, Ben continued. "Daedalus, the father, and Icarus wanted to escape the Island of Crete so Daedalus built them wings made of wax and feathers. In doing so, he advised his son, Icarus, not to fly too close to the sun. In arrogance, Icarus did the exact opposite of what his father told him, flying so close that his wings melted and he crashed into the sea. For years, everyone had been warning Justin about Brian; that he wouldn't change and he was wasting his time. Sometimes he listened to everyone except himself and to Brian. The funny thing is that no one, Michael included, could see that if Brian was the sun- hot and willful, able to scorch with words or deeds- then the only one on equal footing would have been Justin. Justin is just as willful but in a chilling sort of way, mysterious and moody- able to embrace you one minute and cut you down the next second. He's like the moon which controls the sea currents and also balances out the sun. If the sun is shining here, the moon is also shining on the other part of the world. They're equals."

"That's very poetic, Ben, but why have this revelation now while we're speaking about you and Brian fucking?"

Ben laughed. "Because apparently, I can see what my husband is refusing to. Sadly, he is about to become Icarus and there isn't a damn thing I can do to stop him."

"I think there is plenty you can do," Colby said, a sardonic smile on his lips.

"What did you have in mind?" Ben smiled back. He knew Colby would come up with something.

"Your Michael seems pretty territorial."

"He is or at least he can be, which is why I think he's having such a difficult time with Justin being back. The only one ever able to really come between Brian and Michael was Justin, although that was never his intention."
"Well why not force Michael to make a decision?"

"I couldn't do that. Their friendship is almost sacred to Michael. They've known each other since they were fourteen. It would destroy Michael if it wasn't in tact at least in some form or fashion."

Colby shook his head. "Who's talking about destroying it? From what you're saying, if he doesn't let Brian and Justin work out their relationship on their own, he's going to force Brian to choose between him and Justin. If after all these years, they are finally getting their shit together, who do you think Brian is going to choose?"

"Justin," Ben whispered, swallowing hard. *That would crush Michael.* "So how would you handle it?"

"I've always found the best way to keep a lover from doing something I don't want him to do was to use his weakness against him." Colby moved a little closer to Ben, making Ben feel crowded but not in a bad way. He could feel the warmth radiating from the big man beside him and it transported Ben back to when he felt that heat on a regular basis. Ben mentally shook himself, clearing his head of memories best left unvisited. He refocused to hear the last of what Colby said. "Make him jealous."

"Michael would never buy that," Ben said laughingly.

"Really? Because from where I was standing this afternoon, he was worse than any jealous wife I've seen and I've seen plenty. Especially when they find out I love fucking men and women. Hell I've even joined a few couples."

"Whoa. Still a wild boy, huh?" Ben shook his head but his smile was firmly in place.

"I can give you a tutorial if you'd like," Colby returned chuckling. "But seriously...hang out with me. Show me the sights of my new town and in the process refocus Michael. Sounds like a win-win to me. Besides, he may even appreciate it."

"How so?" Ben cocked his head to the side genuinely curious. He couldn't picture how Michael would even begin to see the irony in what he was considering.

"Well after being around me, you'll be more apt to go home and beast fuck your man. I can't see how Michael wouldn't enjoy that."
Ben laughed but Colby was entirely right. Ordinarily Ben would have said such a statement made his old friend a conceited asshole but just being there with him put Ben in the mood to fuck....hard. Colby possessed a magnetism which made not wanting to fuck him a mystery. Smoldering good looks plus that accent made for a really potent aphrodisiac. He'd never met someone with that kind of drawing power except perhaps Brian. "Alright, so when do we start off?"

Colby smiled slyly, "How about tonight at Babylon? It's sure to get back to Michael quickly that we were there."

Ben thought a moment then shrugged. *It couldn't hurt.* "Let's go."

Ted was still in Cynthia's office when Lindsey arrived. From what she could see they were in a serious discussion and she was loathe to interrupt but Cynthia had asked her drop by.

"So you're saying someone has been trying to change the encryption on their accounts? Both of them?" Cynthia asked.

"Quinn called me this afternoon about it," Ted answered. "He was doing some follow-up work on the paperwork Lindsey dropped off when he noticed the discrepancy when logging in."

"Wait, what's this about?" Lindsey asked injecting herself into the conversation since she heard her name.

Cynthia took a deep breath, exhaling slowly. "Apparently someone has been trying to access both Brian and Justin's accounts from within the bank. Their accounts are encrypted and on a separate network from the general accounts, both their business and personal accounts. Mr. Quinn noticed the potential hack this afternoon after you dropped off Justin's deposits."

"Shit, if that information gets out..." Lindsey said.

"Exactly," Ted and Cynthia answered simultaneously.
"I know that both Brian and Justin will not want to switch banks or lose Mr. Quinn's services but at this rate, they may not have a choice," Ted said. "Whoever was trying to enter the accounts were only off by a seven digits. The only thing that's keeping them from finding the missing links is that no one yet knows of Gus. On the back end of each encryption is the day the met which happens to be your son's birthday. They've been digging into everything. My friend at the IRS informed me of the potential breach just before Quinn called me."

"Can we have the encryption changed?" Cynthia asked.

"We could but it will take at least a month for the all of the changes to take effect. Based on how determined this guy is, we may not have that kind of time. Withdrawing the money from the accounts isn't even an option. Aside from the money from the vendors being wired directly into the accounts, the employees- all of us included- get paid from those accounts as well as the business expenses."

"Who the hell would do something like this?" Lindsey asked shaking her head.

"I don't know but based on them going after Justin, too, this has to be personal," Cynthia said. She reached for the phone and beginning to dial she said, "Ted, I need you to get Quinn in here yesterday. I'm calling Brian and Justin. Lindsey, I need you to put a call into Myrna Singleton and Amy. It's best if we all are on the same page. Oh and Ted, I have one more person who should be in on this."

"Who?"

"That Beanstalk who left here earlier just happens to have brains as well as beauty. He's the best hacker I know who also legally works as a computer analyst."

"Thank you for meeting me at such a late hour, Kip," Craig Taylor said. "But I have a business proposition to make and I thought we should be alone when we discussed it."

"Sure, no problem, Mr. Taylor. What can I do for you?"
"It's not so much what you can do for me but what I can do for you. He smiled sardonically.

"I don't understand," Kip responded a little on edge and bewildered. He handled the ad campaign for Taylor Electronics but outside of that, they didn't have any other dealings.

Craig closed the door softly, knowing the custodial staff would be starting their shift soon. He'd seen them unpacking their van when he entered the building. He took the seat in front of the desk forcing Kip Thomas to meet his eyes squarely. Clearing his throat he said, "I happen to know you are in need of a big account. Two ladies will be coming into Pittsburgh within the next three weeks to meet with you and Kinnetik, is that correct?"

"Yes it is. How did you know?" Kip asked genuinely curious.

Craig shook his head. "It doesn't matter how I gathered the information but that I offer you a viable solution. You need to eliminate Brian Kinney by any means necessary. The question is: are you willing to do that?" Craig watched Kip's eyes light up at the prospect of gaining the multi-million dollar account competition free.

"What did you have in mind, Sir? I can't do anything that would put my job in jeopardy though."

"Tsk, tsk, tsk," Craig made the small smile while shaking his head. "I wouldn't dream of asking you to put your job on the line."

"You wouldn't?" Kip straightened up in his chair a bit.

"No, of course not. You do excellent work for me. Why would I put that at risk?" Craig told the lie smoothly. The truth was that Kip's work was mediocre compared to Kinnetik but he would never go there because of the owner.

"Okay, Sir. So what would you like me to do?" Craig smiled again and began to detail the plan as Kip listened attentively. "I could definitely do that, Mr. Taylor. I owe a little payback of my own and it would be a pleasure to do that for you." He shook Craig's hand to seal the deal. Even though he would adjust the plan a little it still had merit especially if it meant destroying the competition from the inside out.

"Don't fail me, Kip." Craig left the office smiling wide as he left the office.
Cody would have liked nothing better than to be able to soothe Ethan from their run in with Justin but the truth was he’d asked for it. What Ethan didn't expect- and Cody didn't either- was the man that fought back with words looked just as capable of knocking the hell out of his former lover. He supposed he had himself to thank for that. Back in their Pink Posse days, he'd made sure Justin knew how to throw a punch as well as he could receive one. It had pissed him off when Justin opted not to end Chris Hobbs but in retrospect he could understand. Justin was angry when they'd met but he was a naturally non-violent person back then. Obviously that's changed. He couldn't deny watching Justin stand up for himself gave him a massive hard-on which he would happily take care of if Ethan wasn't raving so much.

"And I can't believe he's back with that cheating ass," Ethan finished, pouring himself another drink.

"If I'm not mistaken you cheated, too. So that doesn't exactly give you the right to judge why he is with Brian," Cody said.

"That was a one-time thing, Cody. Brian repeatedly cheated on him."

Cody reached back to scratch a small section on his shoulder. "That isn't how it was and you know it, Ethan."

"Do I?" Ethan asked, snarling at Cody correcting him.

Cody looked stared steadily back at him. "Yes. You. Do. And why is this bothering you so much anyway?"

"Because."

"What? He's moved on. So have you. It can't seriously bother you that in all these years he's decided to go back to Brian."

Cody watched as Ethan took a large gulp of the alcohol. "It isn't just that, Cody," he mumbled.
"Then what is it? Fuck, Ethan just spill what the fuck it is." Ethan shook his head violently before taking another sip of the burgandy fluid. Cody got tired of waiting for an answer that would make sense. "Tell you what. Call me when you decide to be honest with yourself and then me." He pulled on his jacket heading toward the door without a backward glance.

"Where the hell are you going?"

"First, I'm going to take care of this boner and from there I'm going home."

Ethan indignantly shot back. "So you're going to cheat on me? Is that it?" The clunk of the glass on the counter top sounded loud in an otherwise silent space.

Cody turned to look at him, slight smile gracing his lips. He remembered something Justin told him a long time ago which caused him to smile wide. "It's not 'cheating' if you know before it happens." And with that last parting shot, he slammed the door closed leaving Ethan alone to stew.

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"You got a minute?" Brian barged into the office of Dr. Troy Bradley without knocking incurring a decidedly nasty look until recognition dawned in the doctor's eye.

Troy nodded, watching his uninvited guest warily. "Daphne okay?"

"Yes and no," Brian said as he took one of the cushioned seats in front of the massive desk. "Physically she seems to be healing. First, let me ask, how much do you really know about her transfer here to Allegheny General?"

"Not much beyond her saying the situation there was not conducive to her practice anymore. She felt she had outgrown the program there. When I asked Dr. Blake about it, he kept the conversation light and easy; focused basically on her skills as a surgeon and a consultant. I thought there was more to the entire matter but if you've noticed, she can be very closed off. Much like the rest of you." He smiled as he said the last.

Brian laughed. "I think she's known me too long. I've known her and Justin since they were seniors in high school. Before divulging anything I need to know what your intentions are toward her." At Troy's protest, Brian raised a sardonic brow before stating, "Don't hand me the shit you're about to
shuck at me. I've seen the looks, the subtle touches and most of all, I'm a man no matter how gay I am. But understand this I protect my own...Daphne is part of that."

"I appreciate your honesty. May I be just as frank?"

"Please do. I wouldn't expect any less," Brian said letting his shoulders relax marginally. He was prepared to knock the good doctor on his educated ass if he detected any falsehood. Daphne's well being was not only important to Justin, it was equally or possibly more so to Brian. Because of her subtle bullying of Justin, he was back. He eventually told Brian of the conversation they had and how Daphne was right in what she said. Ultimately, Justin made the decision on his own but it took Daphne saying the words aloud that Justin would never have given voice to otherwise. For that alone, Brian owed Daphne a debt he felt he could never repay.

Troy cleared his throat before speaking. "The truth is I don't know what my intentions are yet. She lets me in but still keeps me at a distance. I know I love her but I don't know how. I love her as a friend certainly but sometimes..."

"Well let me tell you what I think," Brian said with his usual candor. "I think you would like nothing better than to make good on your promise to chain her to the bed." At Troy's shocked look, Brian laughed. "Don't deny it- it doesn't become you. None of us in that room were blind except perhaps Daphne and truthfully I don't think she was either. Just in denial and wary. Here's the situation in a nutshell, Doc." And Brian went on to give Troy the basic facts about Daphne's last relationship. "I'm trusting you with this information because I suspect your feelings for her run deeper than you're ready or willing to admit and that's fine. You have all the information to decide for yourself how you want to use it...or not. My only reason for saying anything at all is so that when she is in this hospital, be it working or as a patient, you're guarding her. I don't trust the son of a bitch any further than I can throw you. Usually I don't involve myself without being asked- that's not my way- but I won't sit idly by and watch shit happen to her. She doesn't deserve any backlash from that asshole."

"So what do you want me to do?" Troy asked.

Brian smiled. "You're a smart guy, Doc. You'll figure it out." Brian unfolded himself from the chair, standing to his full height. He was preparing to leave when Justin appeared hand poised to knock on the previously closed door. "Sunshine, fancy finding you on the other side of the door."

Justin smiled briefly. "Not for the reason you think, asshole. Did you have your conversation?"

"We're done here right, Doc?" Brian smiled and felt Justin stiffen momentarily and then relax.
Troy laughed. "Yeah we're done and I will take it all under advisement."

"See that you do," Brian warned again solemnly. Turning to Justin, he pulled him close, inhaling the subtle mix of innocence and sin that never failed to intoxicate him. "Now what was so important for you to come looking for me, Sunshine?" He moved his lips to the hot spot behind Justin's ear and laughed softly at the small catch of breath he heard.

"Not now. Jesus, don't you ever get enough," Justin chuckled.

"There's no such thing as enough. You know that as well as I do." Brian looked at his watch. "And if I don't service you in the next few minutes, you'll become a cunty fag and that just can't be tolerated."

Justin laughed outright and pushed out of Brian's eyes. "It's going to have to wait. Cynthia called, said it was important." Turning to Troy, Justin smiled. "I think you'd better check on your favorite patient. She's getting kinda antsy again. Do you need me to stop by Home Depot?"

"Why Home Depot?" Troy asked smiling.

"Because if you don't get your ass in there, you'll have to make good on your promise to chain her to the bed. Although I suspect you'd like that." Justin cocked his head studying the doctor who actually laughed.

"I can see why you two are together," Troy responded. "Brian said the same thing to me not ten minutes ago."

"Well, Doc, the one thing we aren't is blind," Justin answered laughingly. Refocusing his attention on Brian, he said, "We have to go." Brian looked up as if asking God for relief and release because the only business he wanted to get into was fucking Justin. Discerning Brian's thoughts which for a change were clearly visible, Justin pressed his forehead to his lover's. "Me too but business first. Based on how Cynthia sounded, you'll want to fuck me ten ways past Monday when it's over. So we'll go get this over with and then I'll..."

The subtle clearing of throat from the doctor broke up the rest of the sentence. "You two need Sex Addicts Anonymous. In the meantime, I better go check on Daphne." He shook his head as he led them out of his office, locking the door behind him.
Watching Troy hurry down the hall, Justin asked. "You think he loves her, Brian?"

Brian shrugged his broad shoulders. "He has all the information he needs. Let's see what he does with it."

Justin nodded as they walked toward the elevator.

Arriving home after leaving Debbie's and having his meeting with Mel, Michael was shocked his house was actually empty...as in 'No Ben.' Yanking his cell phone out of his pocket, frown embedded in his normally happy features, he hit each key to Ben's number with derision. He wasn't happy letting Ben go out with Colby anyway but Ben had told him he would be there when Michael got home...Strike one. Michael's anger grew steadily as the message for Ben's voicemail registered. No matter what was going on before, Ben never decided to disregard a call from Michael-no even when he was giving a lecture.

Entering Woody's about ten minutes later didn't make Michael feel any better. The bar was packed with twinks and leather daddies as always but Ben. And what was worst was Colby wasn't there either. He spotted Drew and Em over in the corner, having a cozy conversation. He thought about not interrupting them but Ben was God knew where doing God knew what with that tall Irish former college buddy of his so the thought of not bothering Emmett was relegated to a second thought only.

Michael strolled over, putting on his cheeriest persona even though he was feeling anything but. It's probably nothing anyway. "Hey Em. Drew, how are you?"

"We're fine, Michael. How are you?" Emmett's voice was cordial but Michael could hear the wariness in it. Admittedly, their last meet up didn't end its usual good feelings.

"I'm great. I got to see J.R., which is always a blast."

"That's good. So what are you doing here? I thought this wasn't on your lists of 'Places to Be' to be anymore," Emmett said lightly shrugging but Michael knew what he was getting at. The truth was Michael had neglected the relationships which had meant the most to him, especially when he didn't have David nor Ben. He could admit that but it didn't mean he had to take Emmett's comment humbly.
"It isn't." Michael said just as nonchalantly. "But Ben said he would be here. Have you seen him?"

"No, otherwise we would be laughing it up with him, don't you think?"

"He was with his old college friend, Colby."

"Well fancy that, Ben has a friend in town. I hadn't heard since we're newly back." Emmett stepped down from the elevated barstool preparing to leave Michael there. "Drewsie, are you ready to head to the club? I think it's time to shake your ass a little before I rock you to sleep." He leaned in, placing a gentle kiss on Drew's lips before moving past Michael. "If he isn't here, you may want to check there especially if Colby is new here and gay. It's how Godiva introduced me to everything and everyone when I got here."

Emmett had a point so Michael decided to tag along. "Look, Emmett, I'm sorry about our fight."

He stopped in the middle of the sidewalk on the way to Babylon. "You don't have to be sorry, Michael. But you do have to realize that we have all grown in our own ways and that includes Brian and Justin. So if you can accept that well then good. Perhaps we can all become close like we were again but if you can't... well then you're going to have to learn to live with it."

The line to Babylon was long as usual. Because Emmett was a regular and Brian had given specific instructions about who was not to wait in line, they all moved up to the front for immediate entrance. Blake was at the bar alone which on any given day, Michael would have thought that was unusual since he was a recovering meth addict. "Hey Blake, where's Ted?"

"Stuck at the office but he should be here soon," he answered.

"Mind if I wait around with you?" Michael asked before ordering a non-alcoholic beer. He ordered Blake another water since that was what he'd been drinking when he came in. "By the way, have you seen Ben? He has a new friend in town and Emmett said they may be here."

Blake shook his head. "I haven't seen him, yet. The crowd is unbelievable tonight and there was a line around the corner when I came up."
"Yeah, I heard Poppers was closed for some event."

He nodded then. "A couple of bears, Ernie and Patrick got married this evening and that where their reception is being held since that's where they met."

"That's great. Ben and I talked about making it official here since we're already married in Canada."

"We've never talked about it. The option still feels a little too new, you know?" Blake shrugged.

Michael nodded in response. As he stood there sipping on his beverage, he spotted Colby long before he saw Ben. Colby, with his smoldering good looks, was hard to miss partying in the middle of the dance floor with his back turned to Michael. His broad shoulders and muscular arms glistened as the strobe lights hit the beads of sweat over and over, enticing the watcher to lean forward for a closer look. As Colby turned his head slightly to the left, Michael noticed a thick lock of hair fell over eyes he knew were green. A hand with a wedding ring Michael recognized instantly reached up to brush that single lock back onto his forehead. Their foreheads became close as they began moving in unison to the heavy beat pounding from the sound system. Before Michael realized he had moved, he stood next to them watching as Colby ran his hands sinuously down Ben's torso. It was unbearably hot in the center of the club; the amount of body heat alone was stifling and the lights compounded the feeling. His eyes narrowed as Ben returned the gesture, laughing at whatever it was Colby said over the constant thumpa-thumpa. Sweat poured off each of them as Michael watched unnoticed even though he stood right there. When Colby reached to brush the lock from Ben's forehead in the same manner...

"Oh hell NO."

There you two are," he said with a tight smile on his face meant for Ben alone. "I went to Woody's but you weren't there."

"Well Colby wanted to see what Babylon was all about so tonight was as good as any," Ben answered, still rocking to the beat of the music and flashing smile after smile at Colby. "Everything taken care of at Debbie's?"

Michael swallowed hard and narrowed his eyes. The least he could do was stop dancing. He folded his arms in the usual pouting manner when he was frustrated but quickly unfolded them, opting to ball his fists at his sides instead. "Yeah everything is fine at Ma's. Melanie and J.R. are in town. I really need to talk to you about that."

Ben stopped dancing. Finally. "What's going on? Everything okay?"

"Technically everything is fine but Mel and Lindz are getting a divorce and..." Michael let his sentence trail off, remembering Colby was there. "You know what, I'll talk to you later at home." He turned to go but Colby stopped him. Michael's natural inclination was to disengage his wrist from the
big, warm hand covering it but to do so would cause a scene. He didn't need to give voice or action to the jealousy roiling through his blood on the count of the tall Irishman.

But someone did know. Colby noticed Michael's reactions indicated by the slight tremble of his broad chest. He was actually chuckling? "Hey, Michael. Why don't you stay here and dance with your man; Ben, I'll see ya later. My cousin just sent a text message and I really have to be somewhere. Thanks for showing me this place. I had a lot of fun," he said, then bending stole a quick kiss from Ben's open lips. It wasn't long but enough to ruffle the man-child Ben was married to. He mentally chuckled again. His plan was shaping up nicely and if Michael played his cards right, he would certainly reap the reward of Colby's presence. "Well talk soon." And he was gone before either of them had a chance to respond. He looked back only to make brief eye contact with Ben and chuckled again.

Making his way to the coat check area, he hurriedly collected his leather jacket while reaching for his cell phone. He listened to the follow-up message Cynthia had left on his voicemail. She was still at the office and asked that he join her as soon as possible. What the fuck was she still doing at the office at ten at night? He briskly walked in the direction of Kinnetik which wasn't too far from Babylon. He guessed that made sense since the owner of both establishments may have needed to move seamlessly between the two. The more he learned about Brian Kinney, the more he respected the man. Ben told him that Kinnetik used to be a bathhouse where men could fuck for little or nothing. Yet Kinney bought the building in what was considered a seedy part of town and made it a multi-million dollar business. Colby couldn't see anything other than guts and genius in that brand of thinking.

He called when he arrived as Cynthia had instructed and moved to the side of the building nearest the alley. Although there was a security staff on duty who could have let him in, she had explained that the meeting itself had to remain absolutely discreet. So when the hidden door swung open, Colby stepped through immediately and without trepidation. The long hallway was just as elegant as the main offices although there was much more artwork limning the walls, all with the bold yet elegant scrawl of Justin Taylor. Colby was amazed at the amount of talent and personal communication exhibited in each work. Most of all he understood why they were displayed in this private hall instead of out front. Many of them displayed the owner at probably his most honest and open; painted from a place of love and devotion to the subject. Colby who was generally not so analytical regarding art discerned it all immediately viewing each individual piece. He could only imagine how many times Brian Kinney must have felt the same.

Stepping through the doors at the end of the hall, Cynthia rushed forward, hugging him around the waist. He bent lifting her up to make it easier for them to embrace as he often did much to her embarrassment when in front of others. But to him she would always be his "Elf," so she bared it with good grace. He looked around at the shocked and amused faces assembled as Cynthia and he took their places around the conference room table. Brian and Justin stood at the head of the room. Goddamn they were gorgeous. Dark and Light. Colby instantly understood why Cynthia referred to
them as Sin and Sex, since both radiated those ideas in waves. He also began to understand Michael's jealousy a little more and his conversation with Ben about them a little more, meeting up with them for the first time. The way they looked at each other as if they could read the others' mind. Colby suspected if there wasn't a meeting they would be on the conference table instead of sitting at it. His suspicions were confirmed when Justin leaned over to whisper something to Brian who raised a sardonic brow with a slight smirk on his lips while looking directly at Colby. He made out when Brian whispered, 'Later' back and the bright smile Justin came away from the exchange with. Yes. Those two belonged together.

Cynthia had been busy firing up the computer and the two he suspected were accountants- based on the financial records sprawled out in front of them- were deep in conversation and hadn't noticed the two occupants at the head of the table. The tall blonde next to him did.

"Magnificent aren't they?" She asked in soft tones. "A king and his prince with queen tendencies." Her laughter was soft but good natured. Colby looked at her fully then, wrenching his eyes from the couple at the head of the table. "I'm Lindsey Petersen."

"Colby Butler," he said shaking her proffered hand. "They are. How well do you know them?"

She laughed. "Brian I've known since forever- more years than I care to remember. We have a son together. Justin, I've known since the night they met."

"Now you work for them?"

"Just Justin but Brian and I will always be beyond close," she answered candidly. She poured herself a glass of water and sipped carefully. "Cynthia has told me a little about you."

"Oh did she, now? And what did she say." Damn the woman was fucking gorgeous.

"That you were doing some work in trying to keep Brian and Justin from meeting interference from one particular opposer. Also that you are the best computer analyst she knew which would be a good thing considering what is going on."

"She didn't get into much with me over the phone, just ordered me here like she would have if we were still kids." Colby smiled at her laugh.

"Yeah, she can be like that. She's worked for Brian all these years so she was bound to pick up some of his more charming traits such as bossiness and high-handedness."
Colby laughed outright. "If he refined those skills she already had, I should like to beat the hell out of him for it. She was always a little blonde tyrant."

The subject of conversation brought him a tumbler of Jim Beam, raising an eyebrow. "I should take it back since I'm such a tyrant."

"You should do no such thing, Elf," he said grabbing the glass before she could change her mind and gulping down the amber liquid causing both Lindsey and Cynthia to laugh in response.

"Are we almost ready?" The subtly impatient voice with a sexy rasp came from the head of the table.

"Just waiting on Myrna to check in on SKYPE, Brian," Cynthia answered.

"I'll call her, Cynthia," Justin said dialing her number quickly as Colby looked on.

"They really are a pair aren't they?" he asked his companions.

Lindsey laughed. "You have no idea. As impatient as Brian is to get out of here-or better yet for us to get out-believe me when I tell you Justin is just as anxious."

"Speaking of which," Cynthia cut in. "I've found you a place to stay until your condo is ready."

"Really? I thought I was staying with you," Colby said.

"No. My condo only has one bedroom and I wouldn't want you sleeping on the sofa."

"Well fine I'll take the bed and you stay on the sofa," he said smiling brightly.

"No and don't be a jerk when Lindsey has offered you the guest room in her house equipped with its own bathroom and a park where you can run in the mornings."
Colby looked to Lindsey then who sat with a small smile on her face. "Why would you do that? You don't know me."

"No I don't but I do know Cynthia plus Brian and Justin live right up the road. It's a win-win."

"What about your son? Wouldn't he have a problem with some strange man, not his father, in the house?"

"Gus is a little more open about things than you can imagine. He knows his father is gay and that I'm a lesbian so there really won't be that much difficulty in your being there."

Shit. She's a lesbian? I had such a totally different vibe from her and my gaydar isn't broken. HM... "Well okay. As long as there isn't a problem. Thanks."

"You're welcome," she smiled again. Yeah...we'll definitely see.

*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Mark Townsend sat there under the watchful eyes of the four men who offered him a lot of money for success in cracking the Kinney-Taylor accounts and threatened his family if he didn't. It was a double-edged sword being the personal banker of men of power. They were far less conscientious than his female clientele who would have the decency to threaten having him murdered, not his family while he watched. Whatever two of the most successful men in Pittsburgh did to offend the four men sitting in his office it must have been a huge deal.

"Gentlemen, I assure you I am doing everything I can to get you the information you're looking for but again the files are encrypted and not so easily breakable. I have tried every numeric combination I could think of. The problem is in the last seven numbers, letters or symbols. If there is anything which links the accounts of Mr. Kinney and Mr. Taylor, it would be in the last sequence and unless someone has any ideas this meeting has to be over. It would be pointless to continue at this time." He just wanted to get out of there. Sitting there with the former police Commissioner and Craig Taylor was uncomfortable enough, especially the latter. That a man could want to destroy his own son like that? That was a new brand of evil Mark had never experienced in his life.

"Mark, what kind of information would you need? You said a possible connection between the two accounts but how is that even possible?" Samuel, Jr. asked.
"Honestly, Sir, I don't know. All I can tell you from the encryption I've been able to discern so far, a lot of the same patterns appear in the order. So it stands to reason that there is another sequence which shares the same patterns as the rest."

"But nothing repeats within the accounts?"

"Exactly, Mr. Hobbs. Nothing repeats within the same account," Mark said, partially relieved that at last they would understand the full dilemma.

"Well you'll keep working at it," Craig Taylor said. "In the meantime Kip Thomas is on board with the plan. You could smell the desperation on him."

The other three nodded their assent to whatever plan they had formed in this quest for vengeance. If they had bothered to ask him about Kip Thomas, he would have advised them that in his quest for success, he was and always would be a loose cannon. Mark was working at Ryder Advertising in the Accounting department before taking this job as a financial consultant when Gardner Vance fired him in the merger. But he kept his own counsel. The truth was he liked Brian Kinney. He was hard-driven and harsh but he was an honest man (perhaps to a fault) and he was brilliant at what he did with Ryder and then Vanguard. The same could be said about Craig Taylor's son, Justin. They were out, proud and queer but more than that they were successful. They had to be to have a personal banker and multiple encrypted accounts on a separate network. Only the obscenely wealthy did and these four weren't on the hidden networks. Only seven members of their current clientele were; the other four belonging to politicians and one doctor who Quinn also handled. He tried to access Dr. Daphne Chanders account as well and noticed some of the same sequential patterns in the Taylor and Kinney accounts but again he kept that information to himself.

"Townsend, you'll let us know if you find anything, h'm?" Senior.

"Yes, Sir, I will," he answered. Although it was unlikely it would be anytime soon. If he tried to access them any more within twenty-four hours, the accounts would lock and because he was logged into the system, all arrows would point to him. What good was having a family if you couldn't support them? He had too many people depending on his salary. His mother. His father. His grandmother, wife and three children-one in college. He couldn't afford to lose his job over carelessness and rich people. He expressed a heavy sigh of relief as they filed out of his office still speaking of plans to ruin Brian Kinney and Justin Taylor. God help them.
Melanie laid in bed finally having put J.R. to bed. She was never so happy she'd sprung for a two-bedroom suite as J.R. was difficult at best to deal with lately. Truthfully, if the divorce proceedings weren't handled soon, she would basically be more destitute than she was in danger of becoming. She needed to get back to work and every day she was in Pittsburgh instead of home in Toronto, was costing her much needed money both in salary and bonuses for her case win ratio. Home. What kind of home was it without Lindsey and yes even Gus there? But Lindz had a new life, a new job. She sounded self-assured and confident. Happy like she had when they'd first met. Admittedly, she used Lindsey to take care of home while she went off to play savior. Maybe if she admitted that to Lindsey she would go back to Toronto with them to resume her role as wife and mother to their children. Fuck. Who am I kidding? Melanie thought about all she was learning about Lindsey third-hand. The type of work she did for Justin had been Lindsey's dream for as long as Melanie could remember. The fact that Justin had given it to her and she didn't have to compromise her schedule to be there for Gus, was the best of both worlds for Lindsey. And Melanie couldn't feel more miserable, more betrayed or more angry about it. Lindsey was being selfish and picking her child over their child. And now their child wanted to stay with Lindsey and her son? NO! That would not, could not happen. Aside from the fact she had given birth to J.R., both Lindsey and Michael paid her child support under the third party adoption. If Lindsey left the home, why shouldn't she cover the expenses through alimony and child support? That was the price Melanie would exact for Lindsey's freedom. Sure it would be more beneficial if Lindsey just told Justin where he could stick the job and moved back to Toronto since J.R. staying in Pittsburgh wasn't an option because Melanie wasn't staying regardless of the new marriage law in Pittsburgh. She liked her life in Toronto. Her career was finally going in the direction she wanted it. The house had shaped up well and the equity was building. She had friends and colleagues of her own. She didn't want to give that up so Lindsey could have access to J.R. and she shouldn't have to. She wouldn't plain and simple. It was easy enough to convince Michael to side with her against Lindsey. Now she just had to convince a judge.

Ben listened attentively (and patiently) as Michael detailed his conversation with Melanie earlier in the evening. The fact that Lindsey had even filed for divorce was a shock. Even more of a shock that Michael had decided to side with Melanie. Ben remembered the custody battle ten years prior and the resulting effects. The demise (or near demise) of Brian and Michael's friendship. Melanie and Lindsey's subsequent in-house separation (how the fuck did that work again?). The near destruction of Melanie and Lindsey's relationship in its entirety pieced back together because the near-death experience following the bombing of Babylon and the death of Dusty. It was chaos and the fact that Michael was willingly returning to the "Fight of the Lesbians" was beyond Ben's comprehension and he told him so.

"You don't understand, Ben. I could lose the few rights I have because Lindsey is in the mood to assert herself with Melanie."

"Oh I think I understand perfectly,Michael," he said just as sternly. "You're willing to toss your hat in the ring between them again and for what? To assert yourself over Lindsey as J.R.'s dad? What the hell is wrong with you? When have you ever known Lindsey to be unfair? And honestly, you could see J.R. more if she's in Pittsburgh than when she's in Toronto. Have you even thought about why
Melanie would ask for your help in the first place?"

"Because she needs it since Lindsey isn't in the mood to be reasonable," Michael said heatedly.

"What is exactly is unreasonable about wanting a better life for yourself than staying home and being treated more like a maid than a wife? I'm sure Lindsey had just as many goals when she agreed- against her better judgment, I might add- to move to Toronto in the first place but we know how Melanie operates. Everything takes a backseat to her career goals, including and most especially what Lindsey wants. How would you feel if I did that to you?"

"What's that supposed to mean? You wouldn't."

Ben exhaled an exasperated sigh. "It means you should not have involved yourself in their business, Michael. Ultimately, one or both of them are going to lose but you'll be the biggest loser of them all. If J.R. has to go back to Toronto, you'll be a huge part of the cause and alienate her further. If she gets to stay here in Pittsburgh, you'll incur Melanie's wrath. Let's not even begin to talk about what Lindsey will think of you passed what she probably thinks of you now."

"I don't even know why I bothered talking to you about this anyway, Ben."

"Because you know I'm going to tell you what I think honestly. I love you but I don't have to agree with what you're doing and if you think that's what our marriage has been about these last ten years, then you're sadly mistaken. I will not lie to you to spare your feelings. I think you're being a jerk right now in a couple areas of your life but especially in the custody of J.R."

"And what about you?" Michael shot back.

"What about me, Michael?"

"You and Colby hugged up when I arrived at Babylon. Telling me you were going to be some where you weren't."

"Oh- I'm sorry. I thought this was a marriage not a maximum-security prison. Besides it's funny you should mention my friendship with Colby. I'm not giving it up if that's what you're about to demand and for the record...It's no different than what I've had to put up with for the first four years of our relationship with you and Brian."
"I chose you, Ben."

"And I chose you, too, Michael but I never asked you to give up your friendship with Brian. So don't even think or dare to ask me to give up mine with Colby." Ben took the stairs two at a time, needing a shower to wash the sweat and anger from his body. Again he thought, what the hell is wrong with Michael? Standing underneath the water he decided just to enjoy the act of getting clean.

Hours after Cody had left, Ethan was still fuming over his parting words. It's not cheating if you know about it before it happens. That philosophy rankled then as much as it in Ethan's present day because it was true. And it was where he had gone wrong with Justin, the best thing that ever come into his life. Twelve years later and it still hurt. It didn't help that he lived in the same apartment, never bothering to upgrade when his career took off. He'd figured he'd always have time to do it later. He was wrong. Currently he worked as a music teacher at Pittsburgh Institute of Fine Arts as a music teacher hoping to be inspired again. Once his grandfather died and he canceled some important engagements to be at the funeral, his career had fizzled out. When it came down to the bottom line, no one was compassionate about family loyalty and the like. It was an extremely expensive lesson to learn. His agent had dropped him after years of representing him and the gigs had dried up as well. Meanwhile, he'd kept abreast of Justin's career. His talent, amazing back when they were students, soared to new levels as he grew into full blown adulthood. And he was still with the man he'd called the love of his life.

That pissed Ethan off most of all. Both Brian and Justin's responses made him feel cheaper than a two-pound whore on the streets of London. How dare they? To say that he and Ethan meant nothing to each other was one thing but to be bluntly be called a mistake? All Brian's money hadn't held on to Justin during their love affair. Ethan provided what Justin needed in the way of romance; something Brian lacked entirely. As he sat reflecting on how they looked in front of the diner, he didn't think Brian had learned romance but that Justin had forgotten what it was like to have it. Not having it turned Justin bitter like the Brian Ethan remembered. Pulling out his cell phone, he sent a simple sentence to Justin's cell phone. He didn't know if he still had the same number but it was worth a shot. Pouring himself another glass of wine, his third or thirtieth glass—he wasn't sure—he basked in the glow of new possibilities and renewing more than a passing acquaintance with a certain blond.

The cell phone buzzed loudly across the table in an otherwise silent room. Myrna had finally rung in with the SKYPE and Mr. Quinn had faxed her a copy of the encryption access report he pulled up on Brian and Justin's accounts. Justin grabbed it hurriedly. It reminded him of a vibrator short-circuiting from overseuse. He shook the mental image out of his mind, body stiffening not a moment later from the message displayed.
Justin closed his eyes briefly trying to erase the memories of times gone by when Ethan would call him that and the accompanying nausea from subsequent events.

"What is it?" Brian asked him, hazel eyes staring intensely into his blue ones.

"It's nothing," Justin regarded him solemnly, hoping he would buy the lie for now.

He had no intention of responding to Ethan but he knew Brian. He became very aggressive when jealous even if he knew he had nothing to worry about. Justin smiled slightly at the memory of Brian finding he and Michael fully dressed sleeping in his bed. He literally destroyed hours upon hours of work he and Michael had put in out of sheer vindictiveness and unfounded jealousy. Not funny when it happened but years later, it made Justin want to laugh out loud and rub his nose in it. Then there was the kiss that even sitting there in the meeting in the conference room stole his breath and made him tremble inwardly. When Brian had found out about Ethan but didn't tell Justin he'd known, Brian set out on a dangerous path of seduction with what started out as a simple kiss. It went from love to passion then calculation mixed with manipulation. It finally culminated in dispassion and anger. Justin remembered wanting Brian more than his next breath- far more than he wanted Ethan or anything he had to offer- when Brian abruptly stopped and told him to go take a shower. He had finally gotten what he was missing from Brian in the months leading to Justin's betrayal and Brian rejected him. Both were hurt by the foolish actions of a nineteen year old Justin who didn't know what true love was then. Even when Brian went the passive-aggressive route, it cut deep and quick into Justin's heart. He remembered the first time Brian had done it. Brian had offered five-thousand dollars for a drawing in exchange for Justin not attending a party that the former owner of Babylon, Saperstein, was giving. When Justin responded, 'It's not for sale' and Brian said, 'No just you are,' that hurt him deeply although they'd never spoken about that moment nor the narrowly-escaped rape Saperstein had planned for Justin at the party. There was just some things it was better for Brian Kinney not to know.

As if he'd heard the thoughts in Justin's head, Brian smiled. "You'll tell me later."

"I already told you it's nothing," Justin protested but he was grinning.

"Oh- so I need to work you over until you sing, huh?"

Before Justin could answer, Myrna chimed in with her findings but not before Brian grabbed a hold of Justin's thigh underneath the table, dangerously close to where Justin needed his hand most. "Mr. Quinn, is there another account like these which can be traced back to Brian and Justin in some
form? Like if, whoever this Townsend guy is, will be crack the codes if he gains access to that account?"

Justin's sharp intake of breath caused everyone to look in his and Brian's direction. Brian kept his countenance neutral whereas there was a tell-tale flush on Justin's cheeks- he could feel it. Brian looked to him innocently, shrugging one shoulder subtly in response to the looks they were garnering. "If you have something to say, Sunshine, now's the time."

"Daphne," Justin gasped out.

"Excuse me, Justin? Did I just here you call a woman's name?" Myrna asked chuckling. She may have been on the computer but she knew if she was sitting beside Brian Kinney, his would have been the name she was calling.

Justin took a deep breath to calm his fast-fraying nerves. Brian was making little circles on the head of his dick through his jeans and he felt the nuance of every flick in every fiber if his being. His skin tingled in every tangible, incendiary way and all because of the man beside him who wanted answers. "Daphne's accounts," he repeatedly seemingly unable to focus passed the next second. Damn Brian. Oh I am going to make him pay for this later. "Hers, Brian's and mine have some of the same codes plus the last seven digits are the same. They're the day Brian and I met which is also Gus' birthday and the time we...um...we...um..."

"Fucked," Brian supplied candidly with a sardonic smirk on his face. "Hey, it held great significance for Justin and I and it was definitely easy to remember."

A deep rumble of laughter came from further down the table followed by a couple of snickers from Lindsey and Cynthia. Quinn and Ted looked shocked, horrified and amused by turns whereas Myrna outright laughed. "Mr. Kinney everything Justin has ever told me about you is true."

"Oh and just what has Justin been saying?" he asked, head cocked to the side studying Justin. He still had a solid grip on the area of Justin's thigh he'd been dreaming of kissing since they left th loft earlier in the day.

"I'm sure he'll tell you later, Mr. Kinney," Myrna said with a smile.

"Damn right he will. Now Myrna, Mr. Kinney is dead-well at least my father is-so please just call me Brian. Seeming how you're going to be in my life for quite sometime, I think it's best."
"Okay Brian. If you two can stop playing "Stroke the Salami" up under the table, maybe I can get some more answers." Brian nodded but didn't let go of Justin's thigh. She chuckled briefly in response. "Mr. Quinn, how soon can we have the accounts re-encrypted? We really don't have much time the way this is going. Do you know who is trying to do this?"

"I have a theory, Myrna but I think it should be discussed in private."

"Okay, fair enough," she said. "Do you two know who is trying to sabotage you?"

Justin spoke up then. "I can't prove it because technically he doesn't have much of anything left since his wife divorced him while he was in jail. However, former police chief Jim Stockwell has better motive than anyone as far as I'm concerned. I'm sure he would want to reach out to his former supporters to see how they feel about enacting a little revenge. Because of Brian, Stockwell was indicted instead of elected. On the back end, it would have cost him millions of dollars, which in his current state is near impossible for him to pay back. The fact that they are looking in to me as well as Brian makes this about possibly two things: a vendetta or they're incredibly nosy. I vote for personal vendetta."

"By why you?" Colby asked genuinely curious.

"First, Brian is untouchable. Everything that someone has tried to do to him, he hasn't been broken nor willing to take life rolling over and playing dead. That makes him a threat and a target. Secondly nothing pisses a homophobic straight guy off more than a successful fag and Brian and I are two of them. Also because of the society Lindsey and I grew up in, they could now feel threatened that there are two men who fuck each other well and often I might add-who have an unknown amount of cash. Buying power is the game in the world where I'm from."

Lyndsey nodded. "That's it in a nutshell, Colby. The affluent neighborhood where Justin and I come from breeds men in high-power positions. There is no question they would feel threatened by Brian and Justin being able to access that world simply because their gay. If they were heteros, they would be welcomed with open arms and lauded for their achievements."

Colby looked back at Brian and Justin. "Is that what the two of you want?"

Brian answered first. "No. What I want is to fuck and live my life. I enjoy the finer things but I don't really give a shit about the things they care about. My money brings me the power to control what I want and it has nothing to do with politics. The whole situation with Stockwell was two-fold; a little
thing called "justice" served my way and because he was threatening everything I held dear at the
time; everything which made Liberty Avenue what it was and still is."

"As for me, I wanted to be an equal in my non-relationship with this asshole." Brian snickered while
squeezing Justin's leg again. "So basically I have what I want already. I enjoy my business and Brian
fully. I don't want to go back to the WASP nest."

Cynthia turned toward Colby. "How soon do you think you can have the accounts protected again?"

Colby shook his head. "It's not as simple as all that, Elf. The problem isn't in the encryption. It's that
the accounts will be unprotected for a time until the wall is back up. That's the major issue. Based on
what was presented here between Ted and Quinn, there isn't a way to move the accounts without
upending the business accounts as well as the personal ones. The personal accounts are a bit more
manageable because nothing goes into or out of them without paper checks or deposits. The business
issue is a bit different because all funds into the accounts are wired electronically. Unfortunately,
that's when you become a sitting duck."

"Well we better think of something quickly," Quinn said. "Townsend has tried all three accounts
almost to the maximum access limit for today. If I do anymore, Colby here won't be able to get
started for at least twenty-four hours nor will you all be able to access anything in the accounts. It's in
inbred security system. Townsend knows it as well as I do which is why he's stopped. Furthermore if
we bring in the other person who has your information, that person cannot remain secret and will be
as much a target as Townsend was for this treachery. He has too much to lose by not helping them.
The other person does as well."

Brian nodded. "Cynthia there is a sealed envelop in the safe with your name on it. You should get
that now." Cynthia rose and moved further into the room without question as Brian continued. "Oh
grab the one for Lindsey as well, too. As you know, I like to plan for every eventuality. It's the
charming part of my controlling personality. For some reason Justin has also picked up the trait. The
contents of those envelopes stay within this room unless otherwise specified. Agreed?" Everyone
nodded including Myrna.

As Cynthia arrived back to the table a wary look in her blue eyes, she handed the other envelope to
Lindsey who mirrored the same look. Justin was hard pressed not to laugh. "Open them," he said
trying to contain the bright smile threatening to burst forth. Brian and he had discussed at length the
contents of the envelopes. Because Brian didn't want to use his regular attorney, Justin suggested that
Myrna draw up the agreements.

"Oh my God, are you two..." Lindsey said as her hand flew to her mouth. "Have you lost your mind,
Justin? I can't accept this especially not now with all Melanie is trying to do."
"You can and you will, Lindsey, just as Cynthia will accept her new position. Being a partner in each of the companies you manage will not only protect Brian and I, it also gives the two of you more stability. Technically, you'd be doing he and I a favor."

Brian said, "Justin holds two-percent of Kinnetik and I hold the same in his. This makes Cynthia and I equal partners; just as it does you and Justin, Lindsey. All you have to do is sign. Justin and I only have to date the documents. So shut the fuck up and sign the goddamn papers already."

"This should buy us all some time, right?" Justin looked between Quinn, Colby and Ted for confirmation.

"Yeah it will," Ted who had been silent for most of the meeting said. "But time is still of the essence. The names can be added to the accounts instantly but I would warn against it. Until we know who is behind this and why, it would be best to keep your names as disassociated with partnership as possible. From what Quinn has been saying, these people are not above using others to meet their desired end."

"Quinn, how soon can you set up two more accounts?" Brian asked.

"Now but why?"

"I want you to set them up now with the same encryption on the back end but here's what we need to do in the meantime...We'll use each other's birthdays-Quinn, Myrna and Colby add yours to the list. Justin will provide you with Daphne's. Since the back end will have the same date of 'Gus and Us' it will seal the encryption and the accounts will be easy for the three of you to locate. While we're waiting for the new codes that Colby will provide, Lindsey will hold onto half of Justin's company and Cynthia will hold on to half of mine. When the money shows up into the business accounts, you-Quinn and Ted-are to take half of the revenue and place it into Cynthia and Lindsey's accounts. This should buy Colby the time he needs to complete what the hell he has to do and minimize the individual risk to Justin and myself."

"Sounds like a good idea," Myrna said.

"I don't really have bad ones," he responded smilingly. She returned the gesture. Justin was right about her. "Meanwhile, I have a favor to ask of you, Justin. The creators of the Avlossa clothing line account is coming up in a little less than three weeks. I'd like you two to handle it."
"Brian, that account is worth about ten million from what I understand," Justin said.

"Exactly. Which is why I'm asking you two to make it happen. I trust my staff but with Remson, Iconix and Brown needing new campaigns, they won't have the time to devote to it. Between your two locations, you have more staff than I do but I would really like it if you could handle it personally. I know Lindz will jump in if need be to get the project completed. I'm even willing to pay you double your usual fee plus...perks." Brian leaned in to nibble at the tender spot he knew Justin loved.

"Oh alright," Justin said. "But it's because you're paying me twice as much as I would normally charge. As far as the perks: you're such a slut."

"Good thing for you, I am."

"Okay you two, settle down," Myrna said sternly but her lips twitch as she held back the smile forming. "Brian, I'll have the contract forwarded to you by morning. Standard terms and agreements with the new figure attached. Justin, do not worry, I will be handling this myself remembering your aversion to my assistant. We don't need you having to run for Lotramin due to itchy dick. Colby, Quinn and Ted, please keep me informed from start to finish. Justin will give you my cell number. And Lindsey and Cynthia- congratulations. I have to go deal with the tiny blond tyrant's contracts before he queens out on me."

Justin smiled. "Love you too, Myrna."

"Yeah. Don't love, just send money," said as she disconnected.

"We're all clear on the particulars?" Brian asked as he looked around to each set of eyes regarding him. Satisfied with what he saw, he nodded. "Okay so Justin and I are out of here. Any questions, hold them until tomorrow. Unless the building is on fire or there is some life or death emergency, our phones better not ring. Got it?"

Justin turned to look at him then, the mischievous smirk Brian ached to kiss away and the slow blink Justin always did when he was being particularly naughty showed itself for the first time in hours. "Race you home?"

Grabbing him about the waste and burying his face in Justin's neck he asked, "What do I get if I
"Me." Brian could feel the full grin which surfaced on the softest lips he'd ever kissed.

"What do you want if you win?"

"You." The answer was short, sweet and to the point. Justin reared his head back to look at Brian. He whispered, "Please," in that soft voice which never failed to gain him access to the heart of Brian Kinney.

Brian grabbed Justin roughly fitting his body flush against his own. In a low sing song voice, Brian told him exactly what his intentions were. "I'm gonna fuck you. I'm gonna fuck you all night long." He couldn't resist the urge to kiss Justin full and hard so he gave into it until the initial grunt from the force became a whimper of need and pleasure from Justin. Just right here on the conference table. On the table; through the table. Through the motherfucking floor. Never enough of him. We don't even have to make it home. Fuck him on top of the damn car if I have to. Been too many hours. I just....

Throat clearing and chairs moving broke the spell briefly but Brian never stopped looking his fill of Justin passion-hazed eyes. He saw every ounce of love and lust he felt reflected back in the clear blue eyes staring back at him. A thought edged around his mind but before he could grasp what it was and shape it, the thought was gone too soon.

"Daaammmnn," Colby said. "Are they always like this?"

Lindsey answered shaking her head. "No. Usually they are much worse." She laughed as she told him of the restaurant incident. They watched as Justin and Brian raced toward the private entrance, disappearing behind the door each in his own quest for untamed victory.

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This story archived at http://www.midnightwhispers.ca/viewstory.php?sid=3187
The room was dark when he woke up. Eyes closed he still could still feel the pleasant soreness throughout his body from loving his partner from the minute they reached home. Both couldn't get the door open fast enough; couldn't fall into the house soon enough. They'd fucked standing in the doorway, against the wall...on the floor right, there in the foyer. His knees and back ached a little but he wouldn't have traded a second of the discomfort for all the money in the world. Nothing could compare to the fulfillment of being wrapped by and inside of Justin. To hear him and feel him take what he wanted while giving himself totally was what Brian dared not ever dream of or hope to have...yet he had it and he'd be damned if he'd let anyone take it from him.

The empty side of the bed was still warm from Justin's body heat, the pillow still dented where his head had rested. Brian laid there silently listening to discern where in the huge house Justin might have gone. Nothing. The bathroom light was on yet he could smell Justin's soap he used when showering as if it were right under his nose. Getting up quickly- perhaps a little too quick based on the protest of his bones- he threw on the silk robe which had fallen to the floor when they finally
made it to bed. The downstairs of the house was silent and still as he walked through. The doors were locked, something Justin must have thought to do before they went up. All Brian could think of was getting him into bed to start the game all over again. The subtle waft of cigarette smoke pointed him to the studio upstairs. Why he didn't think to look there he would never understand or why he had a sudden panicked feeling from not finding Justin downstairs.

Grabbing two glasses from the cabinet in the kitchen and a bottle of Johnnie Walker Blue, he headed up the three flights of stairs. The door was open, the custom built horizontal easel dominating the large space. Brian hadn't been in there since he'd bought the last painting Justin did of the two of them in Toronto. It was of Brian sleeping, hand splayed wide over a white satin pillow while Justin stood in the corner watching- a mixture of pleasure and pain in his cerulean eyes. Brian would never forget the first time he'd seen it being displayed in a gallery in SoHo while he was in New York on business. It caught him off guard seeing himself on canvas but more of the surprise was the expression on Justin's face which drove him to charge into the gallery and have it shipped immediately. It was the beginning of the decision which led to where they were; the beginning of the acknowledgement that Brian could not live without Justin. He could breathe but that wasn't living. That was existing. Upon returning from New York, he'd spent many hours staring at the painting, making decisions, arguing with himself, fighting urges and ultimately giving into them. But the payoff was well worth it since Justin was in their house.

Placing the items in his hand softly on the surface relatively the size of a table to seat six, Brian stood just watching Justin work. He'd updated the programming but kept the computer Brian bought him so many years ago when the incident first happened. It gave Brian a twinge of pleasure to know he'd kept it and still used it. He never would have guessed it because of Justin's penchant for updated electronics. Brian smiled inwardly at the fact that he also had the same obsession with gadgets. After it was finished he knew Justin would print two copies-one for himself and one for Lindsey- to get the proposal for Avlossa done and transferred to the boards later. He wasn't worried about it. Even from what Brian could see of the presentation already it would be good but he was more concerned with the tense set of Justin's shoulders. Justin always said Brian had a remarkable gift for looking beneath the surface of his work to get to the issues plaguing him. It was true. Brian could always see what Justin was feeling through his work, reading the brushstrokes the way someone would decipher Morse code. And right then, Brian knew Justin's mind was somewhere other than on his work.

He exposed the nape of Justin's neck placing a soft kiss there, smiled at the slight hitch of breath Justin gave. He loved how responsive and unabashed Justin was. He applied a little nip at the top of his spine and relished the soft deep moan released. "What's on your mind, Sunshine?" He asked low, nipping him again.

"Just working," Justin answered, dropping his head forward to give Brian better access.

He nipped again and laved the spot while caressing Justin's the soft skin covering Justin's ribcage. "Liar." Brian felt Justin smile against his bowed head as he trailed his lips around to Justin's pulse, feeling the slow but steady tempo of it against his tongue. "Full-disclosure, remember?" Justin spun around on the office chair as Brian knelt before him, visually drinking him in. He'd always thought
Justin beauiful but there in the dim lighting of the computer monitor and the colors playing over his features, he'd never felt more so. *Vulnerable* was a word very few would ever associate with who Justin Taylor was now as opposed to who he was as a teenager—and back then it was visible only at the rarest times. The usually chrystal clear sparkle of Justin's eyes were clouded with emotions some of which Brian had seen often, others never. "C'mon, Justin, what is it?"

"Just couldn't sleep. Had a lot on my mind but I don't want to talk about it, Brian. I'd rather fuck." He kissed Brian quickly but before Justin could take it further Brian pushed him away gently.

"Are you thinking about the meeting?"

"Amongst other things," Justin said. He shook his head. "I would rather not talk just now."

"Well too bad and too late, Sunshine," Brian said smiling slightly. "You asked me for honesty. I've given you that; more than I've ever given anyone. So shouldn't you give me the same?" He bent his head to recapture Justin's eyes which slipped deliberately from his own. "Tell me what's going through that little blond head of yours."

Justin sighed heavily, handing Brian his cell phone in the process. He reached up to scratch his forehead while pulling his hair back in frustration. "You know the passcode, so open it."

Brian did as Justin said and was surprised to find twenty messages all from the same person. *Ethan*. All but one were still closed although the way his and Justin's phones were set up, the message could be read without even accessing the messaging application. Based on Justin's look, he'd seen every one of them. Brian opened each one beginning with the one Justin had gotten during the meeting.

*Ethan: You're still MY MUSE!*

*Ethan: I can't function without you.*

*Ethan: I love you.*

*Ethan: Why are you ignoring me?*
Ethan: What's wrong with you?

Ethan: Why are you with him again?

Ethan: You didn't learn your lesson from the last time?

Ethan: LOL you're just a glutton for punishment, aren't you?

Ethan: He's just going to fuck you over again.

Ethan: Come back to me. Please.

Ethan: I want you back.

Ethan: I'll do anything to have you back.

Ethan: I'm sorry.

Ethan: C'mon Justin. Answer me!

Ethan: Remember when you promised you wouldn't leave me? Now who lied?

Ethan: You once said it wasn't about the money. 'Fuck the money. I only want to be with you.' You lied then too!

Ethan: He doesn't love you. I DO!

Ethan: We were always so good together.
Ethan: You're ONLY good for a fuck to him.

Ethan: What if he wasn't here anymore? Then what? Then will you come back to me?

Brian read all of it, glancing at Justin's face ever so often to gauge his reactions. Anger and desperation reached out from the text messages and into the person who sat still before him, eyes still downcast. Brian placed the phone gently on the desk after locking the screen. He reached for his right hand which Justin gripped tightly within his left. Brian knew he was replaying all the events of that time gone by in his head and linking every word of the text messages together. When Justin closed his eyes and reopened them there were tears and confusion.

It's a long road but it's longer without you

And with each passing day, I grow more uncertain

Been away for so long, but I'm dying just to find out

What took you so long to come back around

If I'd only been dreaming, you weren't always hiding

It took two to break us down*

"What do you want, Justin?" Brian didn't want to ask the question but he had to know.

"You, Brian. It's always been you."

"So if you know that, what's the real problem?"

"I wonder if there is more truth to those texts than what I've told myself."
"It's the past, Justin, and we were both stupid assholes then. Why should that effect what we have going now?" Brian shook his hands forcing Justin to look at him. When he did, Brian touched his face, gratified when Justin leaned into it automatically. "What do you want to do? And this is strictly about you, Justin, not me and not us."

He watched Justin search for the answers within himself; sitting quietly while Justin unraveled whatever conflicting feelings he had at that moment. Brian didn't doubt that Justin was staying with him. This whole emotional journey Justin was going through was one of self-forgiveness. Brian knew because he'd had to go through the same process before deciding that he could not and would not live without Justin Taylor again. *But it was something only Justin could do.* It wasn't about Ethan or anyone else...just Justin.

"What if he was right, Brian? You were my security blanket for a long time."

"And now? Am I still your security blanket now? If there was anywhere else in the world you could be."

Justin answered immediately. "I would still be here, Brian but this isn't about that."

"Then what?"

"What if I turn out to be the liar he called me? Look- the last thing I want to do is hurt you...again. I think I've done enough of that in all these years."

*Could you prove me wrong?*

"There was hurt on both sides, Justin."

He smiled slightly. "Yes but this isn't about what you've done to me but the other way around. I apologize for it."

"Sorry's-"

"Bullshit, I know." He smiled. "But it doesn't mean I shouldn't say it. I love you, you know."
"Yeah, I do."

"How?" Justin chuckled.

"Well for one you let me fuck you how ever many times I want," Brian said smiling.

"Yeah but that benefits me, too," Justin retorted quickly. "So seriously, how?"

"You picked your whole life up and moved back here to be with me yet you didn't sacrifice a fucking thing to do it. But are some other things I want from you."

"What free rein of my mouth and ass isn't enough?" Justin joked and Brian poked him in the ribs right where he was ticklish.

"Those are always welcome and we'll get to filling those again in a minute." Justin looked at him and Brian mentally breathed a sigh of relief. The sparkle was back- even if it was just for a little while.

"Okay," Justin said, shrugging his bare shoulder.

"Okay to what? I haven't made my demands yet." Brian slid his hands up the softest and silkiest pajama bottoms he'd ever felt Justin wear. The midnight blue material was warm with his body heat and they felt almost as good against Brian's palm as Justin did...almost.

"Whatever you want," Justin said, running his hands through Brian's hair.

"Whatever I want, huh? You do know that's a dangerous offer you're making." Brian barely stopped the moan escaping behind a hard swallow as Justin dug his nails into his scalp just right. *God I love it when he does that and then he...* Justin pulled his hair back with the right amount of pressure and bit softly into Brian's neck. He couldn't help but release the groan which sounded loud and deep in the semi-dark room.

"H'm-mm," Justin whispered against his neck. "Whatever you want."
"Marry me then," Brian said. The sudden stillness at his neck and within himself shocked him as much as it apparently did Justin.

"What did you say?" Justin looked into his eyes.

"You said I could have whatever I want and I want that. I want you to marry me."

"Brian, I-"

"This is the third time I'm asking, Justin." He met his eyes steadily.

"You're fucking unbelievable," Justin shook his head.

"I thought we'd already established that."

Justin chuckled. "To me we're already married, Brian and have been for years regardless of the years of separation. It's why whenever I tried to move on, I couldn't. So I stopped trying and now here we are and it's right, Brian- finally fucking right. We live together, we're in each other's face, place and space. We're good how we are."

"Okay so the answer is ‘no’ then," Brian said moving to get up.

Meet me in the middle

Tell me something

That could change my mind*

"You didn't let me finish," Justin said pulling him back down and holding his face. "We've never been about locks on the doors, Brian. I may not want a ceremony - a dinner party maybe to celebrate the commitment - but I don't ever want to have to go through what Mel and Lindz are going through.
So we'll wear our rings but honestly I think my soul married yours long before you asked the first two times. My soul married you when I was a lost seventeen year old looking for love in a very wrong place." They both smiled at the last.

"Are you sure you want to leave the door open, Justin?"

*I couldn't let it be known this is the deal*

*Every time I refuse to say goodbye*

Justin thought a moment. "I don't consider it leaving the door open unless one of us chooses to fly away. I'm not going anywhere and I know you're not. We've fought too hard to get here. And who knows maybe someday soon we'll want to seal the door shut and hot glue that bitch closed forever but it will be because we're both sure that it's what we want. Yeah, it's legal here now and that's great but a piece of paper won't change who we've always been and who we are now. You already own everything I have on earth but most importantly you own my heart. Why the sudden need for the title? You've always been my husband, my forever and nothing is going to change that. Not hell, not the high water and certainly not Ethan or whatever else comes against us. I love you, Brian Kinney. Only you. Always you. You're my focus and my distraction, the heart of me, the soul of me and everything that makes me strong and weak at the same time. No piece of paper is going to change that at least not for me. But if you should get tired-"

"I won't, Justin. I won't get tired of you. Angry yes. Sick of your griping and fussing, absolutely but never you. You've been it for me for a...long time." Brian kissed him gently. "So for better or worse?"

Justin kissed him more deeply before pulling back. "In sickness and health."

Brian kissed him even deeper, standing and bringing Justin with him. He wrapped one arm solidly around his waist while using the other to grip Justin's hair just the way he liked it. Hearing the soft moan he sought, Brian ran his tongue over the hot spot in Justin's neck before saying, "For richer and richer. We don't do poor."

Justin laughed. "As long as it's mutually beneficial for both of us."

"Ah- forever then," Brian said as he fell backward onto the couch, Justin on top of him. "So how do you want to spend your honeymoon?"
Justin smiled down at him and once again Brian thought he'd never see anything more beautiful. "I thought it was kind of obvious seeming how you're naked under this robe."

He untied the sash holding it together and Brian nearly moaned at the feeling of the silk pajamas against his bare legs. He and Justin were always hedonists and the only thing more enjoyable than feeling silk sliding on his skin was sliding into Justin. He was more than ready to do that. Instead his back bowed at the sudden feeling of his dick fully enclosed in Justin's hot mouth. As usual Justin wasted no time getting Brian to the brink before backing off and building his orgasm again and again. Somewhere in the midst of the foreplay which had him gasping for his next breath, he realized Justin had tied his hair back giving Brian an unobstructed view of his cock disappearing into the cavity of Justin's mouth over and over. He wanted to close his eyes to heighten the sensation but couldn't bear to look away. "God," he muttered as he watched Justin hollow his cheeks and felt the strong steady pulls from the rhythmic sucking action. He licked Brian from base to tip before taking the plunge again. *Fuck!* He was gonna come. *I'm gonna come if Justin does that one more fucking time.* As if Justin heard him, he raised himself up on top of Brian, shoving his tongue down his throat. The taste of himself in Justin's mouth drove him closer to the brink with each passing stroke of their tongues dueling.

Justin slid the condom onto Brian's cock, sitting up only long enough to poise himself over it. The wicked smile on his face mesmerized Brian briefly before Justin spoke. "Tell me again."

"Tell you what?" Brian asked gripping Justin's thigh's trying to force him down onto his cock.

"You know what I want to hear while I'm sitting on your dick, Brian."

Brian did but he said instead, "Sit on it and then we'll see what comes out of my mouth." He bit his bottom lip in the he knew made Justin even lustier than he already was. *Fuck! I'm the luckiest son of a bitch.*

"Fine have it your way," Justin said with a smirk on his lips. Brian knew what *that* little gesture meant and his body tingled in anticipation. Justin wasn't going to go easy or gentle.

"Do your worse," Brian issued the challenge.

"Remember you said that when it's time for you to go to work in the morning." And Justin sank down easy, adjusting until Brian was all the way encased within him.
He sat a moment, the ecstasy plainly written on his face; another sight Brian would never get tired of. Brian tried to move into him further but Justin sat him such a way where he didn't have even the slightest leverage unless Justin gave it to him. He didn't look like he was in the mood to turn over the reins. Justin could top from the bottom as well as when he the dominant with a submissive. He clenched his ass around Brian's dick, squeezing to the point where Brian had no choice but to cry out. "Say it."

"I-" was all he was able to say before Justin squeezed again forcing another moan, louder and stronger that time.

Justin reached back, massaging his prostate from the outside. Goddamn. "Tell me, Brian, and I'll fuck you so fucking good." He leaned forward, licking Brian's bottom lip. He whispered against the wet spot, "I'm ready to, you know. I'm ready to ride you...hard. So fucking hard you'll barely be able to stand to pee." He wiggled then raised his ass and slamming it back down just to prove his point. They both trembled from the force and Justin's ass rippled around his dick again. "See? You gonna keep us waiting until you say it." Justin said breathlessly.

"Love you," Brian said on a whoosh of breath.

"Say it again." And Brian did I Justin moved up and slammed back down, grinding against him.

It became a mantra Brian couldn't stop saying even as Justin groaned and moaned at the feel of Brian gripping his hips and slamming him down even harder. Justin moved faster then slowed down when he felt Brian close to coming. He was completely at Justin's mercy and he loved every fucking second of it. Justin pulled him up by the back of his neck, long enough to kiss him roughly before pushing him hard back down on the sofa to begin riding him hard again. Justin swallowed every grunt and groan which Brian uttered, twining his tongue sensually around inside Brian's mouth. Brian smacked Justin's ass causing a yelp and the momentary stop steady breathing coming from his partner. "Oh, you like that, don't you?" Brian taunted as Justin rode him faster and harder.

"H'm-mm...Fuck yeah. Do it again," Justin moaned. Brian kept applying his firm hand even as Justin came down harder on him. He took his other hand and massaged Justin's cock and watched as Justin's hair came loose. He reached up briefly to snatch the rubber band off, digging his fingers into Justin's hair the way he liked. When Justin muttered, "Oh God," Brian pulled by his hair, mashing their lips together. The kiss was violent and passionate. I will never fucking get tired of this. Justin moaned heavily into his mouth when Brian squeezed a nipple, while still stroking his cock. "Brian-

"Say my fucking name again," Brian growled against the plush lips. Justin did and Brian kept making him say it again and again, even as he felt his orgasm barreling through him. "God. Justin.
I'm.." And then the explosion of climax happened. He felt like he lost consciousness for a second yet he was fully aware even as Justin's body stilled above him and he heard that long breathless gasp and the roughly sighed 'Ahh' that heralded his lover's release. His heart felt like it was beating out of his chest and he could feel Justin's beating the same pulse-pounding rhythm on the other side. "I really do you know," Brian said breathless and low.

"You really do what?" Justin asked lazily while Brian was still inside him. Brian mentally chuckled. He always did love falling asleep with Brian lodged inside him. He suspected it only happened with him...no one else. Intimacy wasn't something Justin did with everyone, much like Brian himself. He may have discussed mundane things and joked around but he couldn't imagine Justin exposing his vulnerabilities the way he had with Brian to anyone else.

Brian nudged Justin's head out from under his jaw—also Justin's favorite place on his body—and held his head still until those beautiful blue stared down at him. "I love you, Justin Taylor-Kinney. Only you. Always you. Then and Now." He kissed Justin gently at the admission and relished the beauty of his Sunshine's smile. Foreheads together and exhausted, they fell asleep together for the first time as husband and husband—if not on paper then at least in their hearts.

*Meet Me In The Middle- Jessie Ware & Dave Okumu*

End Notes:
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Aurora Kelly sat in an unseen corner of the office listening to the SKYPE call between Daniel Quinn and Myrna Singleton. He'd bought her in before the official time the bank employees began showing up as to not draw attention to her presence. Sure, everyone knew she was co-owner of the First National Bank but she very rarely made an appearance. Usually when she did, it spelled trouble for one of the executives within the branch. This was not the case...yet. Quinn had called her the previous evening to advise of the trouble with quite a few of their major accounts. Daniel Quinn was not a drama queen and when he spoke there was a reason to pay attention. He detailed all of the major problems especially the one regarding Mark Townsend, a young man who had a lot of people depending on him to keep his job. Based on his family issues alone, she could not imagine him being a willing accomplice in the whole Taylor/Kinney mess.

"Whatever the reason Myrna, I agree with Justin Taylor. This is a personal vendetta and it has to be someone relatively close to the pair or knows a helluva lot about them to get provide Townsend with such detailed information. I don't know much about their inner circle yet if I based it on Ted Schmidt
alone, I can’t imagine any of them would willingly try to financially ruin Brian and Justin. However, I’m still going to keep a close watch on Dr. Chander’s account too. I wouldn’t put it past anyone to try to break her code just to see the similarities in the patterns. Colby is going to begin work on that this evening. He’s also running interference on their behalf with a friend who doesn’t agree with Brian and Justin’s renewed relationship."

"It is a quandary, Quinn, I’ll give you that. Based on their joint assets alone, it would cause a lot of people to worry. Money is power but Justin and Brian don’t seem like the type to seek that type of influence."

Quinn laughed. "You heard Brian's reason for having the kind of cash he does and from what I know of him personally, he doesn’t lie. As far as what's known of him publicly, The Stud of Liberty Avenue works hard so he can party and play harder. Well at least he did until young Mr. Taylor arrived back on the scene although I hadn’t heard much of his escapades in the last seven years. A rumor here and there but nothing like what it used to be. We should all have been able to live such a life."

"Justin wasn't a saint either...not by a long shot. But from the moment I met him, I knew he was running from something. Now I can say it was someone and I can see why if last night was any indication. I got chills watching them together- they move as one, think like a unit. To be that close to someone and not be able to hide even a single thought is disconcerting at best. It's all-consuming and I can understand why Justin ran from it for as long as he did even as he pined away for it. In any event, if we don't figure out who is pulling Mark Townsend's strings we may not be able to keep covering their asses. Has any cash flow entered the accounts since the meeting last night?"

Aurora continued to watch and listen silently thinking of the dilemma they were coming against. One thing she knew was whomever had Townsend by the balls had enough power within the WASP set but that could be damned near anyone. They were the upper echelons of the community, mostly those who could make money magically appear or disappear. She could think of at least twenty families off the top of her head which might be involved in the Taylor-Kinney situation simply based on their lifestyle alone. For Aurora's part, she didn't give a shit where they stuck their dicks or in
who. She'd been in the closet for years as a bisexual which her third husband didn't mind because he got the best of both worlds from her. He'd kept her secret because he liked watching her with women and because the prenuptial agreement specifically said if he disclosed her lifestyle, he could kiss his settlement-including a small share in the bank totaling 1.2 million dollars-goodbye. He liked his wine, he liked his women but most of all he loved his money. She did too and that was Aurora's investment in seeing the Taylor-Kinney situation taken care of as quickly and quietly as possible.

Quinn said, "The Remson account already sent their four-million dollar payment but we're just waiting for it to clear. That should happen about nine-thirty this morning. Brown sent half of their million dollar payment as per their contract-the other half is payable upon the new campaign being launched. Brian just got the green light to run the new ads so that payment is forthcoming. Checking on Justin's account fifty thousand just cleared in one of the ad accounts from New York-a company called ReadMo Publishing. Have you heard of them?"

"Yes," Myrna answered. "They're located in Rochester. In fact that should be a joint payment for Miller Galleries, too. In fact the Avlossa account Brian was speaking of are also associates of theirs. Even though they have a meeting with Vanguard the same week they have one with Kinnetik, I'm pretty sure Brian is going to win that account, too, especially if Justin is doing the work on it. That account is generally a ten million dollar per year account so Brian stands to make an easy million off that. Per the contract I'm waiting to get back from him, it guarantees Justin two million from the deal. One million from Avlossa directly and the other million for lifetime use of the copyright through Kinnetik, Corp. I gotta hand it to them, they are fucking geniuses when it comes to keeping their private and professional lives separate."

Quinn agreed. "I've always been impressed by that. Brian taught Justin well. In the meantime, per the meeting I'll put ten thousand in Justin's personal account and split the remaining forty thousand in Lindsey's account and the official business account. I can transfer 2.5 million in to Brian's personal account now so the split the remaining as follows: 1.25 million goes into Cynthia's account and the other 1.25 million directly into Kinnetik. Agreed?"

Myrna agreed as Aurora sat listening to the keys type on her end. Per the agreement, Myrna
Singleton kept a running tab of the Taylor-Kinney assets just as Quinn and Ted Schmidt did. Aurora pulled out her cell phone and sent a text message to Tony Davidson at the bank's security company. The cameras were accessed and watched remotely so they couldn't be erased without prior knowledge. He had recently taken over the company from her long-time friend and associate Frank Murphy. She had found him to be extremely professional and efficient. She also knew he would keep her confidence. In the text she also detailed which cameras she wanted accessed and why, only specifying it was to protect some high profile clients. She asked that he personally look into the matter which he responded immediately that he would. She trusted him at his word. If there was anything to be found she would know by early afternoon. By the time Quinn ended the video call with Myrna Singleton, Aurora had an idea of where to begin looking.

"What are you over there thinking?" Quinn asked her as he still punched in the numbers needed to transfer money six ways.

"That this is the shittiest situation to come through since I inherited twelve years ago. I know Townsend would never jeopardize his job—he has too much to lose. What I can't figure out is who's pulling his strings and what they are using as leverage. I sent Tony Davidson a text though and I expect to hear back this afternoon. I told him to send the videos to my email address at home. I will say this about Brian Kinney and Justin Taylor though, their business acumen in splitting up their assets the way they are is an extremely smart move. I also think it was smart of them not to use someone within the banking network to re-encrypt their accounts because if Townsend was bought, who's to say someone else can't be. You don't think if we offer Mark protection, he'll tell who's behind this."

Quinn shook his vehemently. "If we tell him that we're on to him or if he figures out that we've figured out a way to block his access, he will have to tell them. If that happens we may never know who is behind this or more importantly why."

"I've always loved a good mystery, Quinn but this shit is too much." She rose out of her chair crossing to the door on the right corner of the room. "I'd better get out of here. I don't exactly drive an inconspicuous car and if anyone sees me or it, our strategies will be all for naught. I'll call you
later with the results." As she drove off she'd made up her mind of where to start. *Bell Acres Country Club.*

Lindsey was having one helluva fucked up morning. She had bordered on hysteria at least eight times trying to get Gus up for school so she could drop him off. The new coffee maker she bought had a minor malfunction, giving off coffee which actually looked like mud until she realized she didn't put enough water in it. The brown suit she'd had on to go into check the work on the gallery was safely tucked away in the pile of laundry to drop off at the dry cleaners and then there was Colby Butler. Why she had told Cynthia he could stay with her was one of the great mysteries of life she had yet to figure out.

Deciding she couldn't sleep in the wee hours of the morning, Lindsey ran into a very dark kitchen and a very naked Colby rummaging around in her fridge. He emerged with cold cuts, cheese, lettuce, mayo and an impressive hard on which she was not prepared to see or think about for the rest of the night when she returned to her room.

"Gus Petersen, if you don't get down here right now..." Lindsey yelled but trailed off when she heard an accented voice behind her.

"Cool your heels, Mum. He's coming," Colby said as he strolled into the kitchen.
On anyone else the pure white crew-necked sweater he wore may have made them look pale in comparison. Not Colby. Lindsey unwillingly- but unable to look away- took in the rest of his appearance. His jet black hair which had been flying everywhere the previous evening was neatly tied back in a ponytail. The 501s he wore fit him to perfection, hugging thighs which reminded her of tree trunks and a pair of combat boots on his feet. Most impressive were the rolled up sleeves on the sweater revealed tattooed forearms. A sophisticated pirate was her thought as she continued to eye him. He was speaking but she hadn't heard anything as he waited expectantly for an answer. She mentally shook herself awake, turning away quickly to hide the tell-tale blush she knew stained her cheeks. "What did you ask me?"

Colby chuckled, the deep rumble moving through her in ways she refused to examine further. "I asked if the coffee was ready and I apologized for last night."

She looked back at him. "The coffee is finally ready after a disastrous start to the morning. Cups are in the cabinet over the coffeemaker. As for last night, no need to apologize. Just do me a favor and next time rummaging around in my fridge throw a pair of pajama bottoms on."

Colby laughed. "Yeah, I tend to forget them when I'm on a food hunt since I don't sleep in them. You look nice by the way." He reached for the cup, pouring himself a cup of the hot brew.

Again Lindsey felt her cheeks heat up. It had been a long time since she'd received a compliment. Before she could respond, she heard what sounded like a herd of elephants running full-throttle down the main staircase. "Finally, Gus. What took you so long?"
"I'm young but to look this good takes time even though I look like Dad, Mom. No one would expect any less from his son."

Lindsey couldn't stop the little snicker which escaped her. Gus became more like Brian everyday. Gus had developed his father's taste in clothes amongst many other things. She wondered how she was going to survive both of them. "By the way this is Colby, Cynthia's cousin."

"I know. We've met," Gus said before inhaling one of the pastries laid out on the counter.

"When did you meet?"

Colby answered, giving Gus a chance to eat and drink the hot chocolate as was his morning custom. "After about the tenth time in three seconds you called him from down here and waking me up too-thanks for that by the way- I went and yanked him out of bed. I introduced myself and that was that."

Lindsey laughed in spite of herself. "You're welcome for the wake-up call. As you probably figured out, he sleeps like the dead."

"I do not, Mom. I just like ignoring unruly adults who don't have the decency to let me sleep." Gus smiled just before taking another sip of his hot chocolate.
Colby laughed outright. "Oh yeah...that's Brian Kinney's kid alright."

"Through and through," Lindsey agreed.

"Wait." Gus looked upward to Colby. "How do you know my dad?"

"It's a long story but I'll make it short. Cynthia is my cousin and your dad is her boss. He needs a slight favor from me so I met him last night to discuss it."

"What kind of favor?" Gus' natural suspicions and interest in all things regarding his father was piqued.

"Nothing I can't do. I'm a computer programmer."

"You are not," Gus said disbelievingly. Lindsey had had the same reaction at the meeting the
previous evening and couldn't resist a chuckle at Gus' reaction.

"I most certainly am, young Sir. And your dad's systems need a complete overhaul. Your mom is kind enough to let me stay here until my condo is ready in a few weeks."

"So you'll be sticking around?"

"Looks that way. I think I actually might like Pittsburgh. I may have to switch my running schedule though. It's pitch black dark outside during the wee hours when I'm used to running."

"Cool. Maybe one of these days, I'll come with you," Gus said.

Lindsey looked at her watch. If they didn't get a move on she was going to be even later than she already was. "Alright, Gus. We have to go. I'm do at the gallery in forty-five minutes and I still have to drop you off." Gus grumbled as he often did about school but headed back upstairs to grab his book bag and a coat, leaving she and Colby alone.

"Lindsey, would you mind dropping me off, too? I haven't had time to secure a car yet which is probably something I should work on today sometime."
Lindsey's eyes traveled the considerable distance to reach Colby's eyes. He stared down at her, sardonic smirk on his lips as if he could read her thoughts. "Yeah, it's no problem. I also have to make a stop by Kinnetik so it's no trouble at all." She was proud of how steady her voice sounded although she felt anything but. What the hell is going on with me? I haven't been this affected by a man since...nope won't think of him. She stepped around Colby, grabbing her red trench coat off the other barstool which matched her outfit and headed toward the front door. She could feel his eyes on her back but she wouldn't turn around. There were just some things and memories better left behind her.

What the fuck happened last night? My ass feels like it got hit by a freight train...literally. Oh that's right a train called Kinney rammed into me over and over...repeatedly but in fairness, I started it. And even though sitting, standing- FUCK! I'm actually laying down and sore as all hell- I wouldn't trade a minute of it just to hear him say it again.

Justin cracked open his eyes only to stare directly into the most gorgeous combination of green, brown and gold he'd ever seen reminding him of what the first leaf changes between summer and fall. A small smile played on the most sensuous lips he'd ever kissed and one of the most luxurious dark locks his fingers ever had the pleasure of running through fell over a forehead he'd kissed many times. The little sprinkles of gray interspersed here and there winked at him making the urge to tweak them almost irresistible. He went to move a hand to do just that but could not. Searching for the reason, his eyes drifted lazily upward to discover his only free hand (the other was tucked somewhere beneath the covers) was entwined tightly with the owner of those incredible eyes.
"Good morning, Sunshine," Brian said, voice sleep-sexy and languid as if he didn't have a care in the world.

"How long have you been up?" he answered by way of a response.

"Long enough to make some decisions while watching you sleep."

"Decisions again? And you need to see someone about your stalker tendencies," Justin said grinning.

Brian folded his lips to hide the smile Justin saw forming. "Well you see I have a good reason to be stalking you."

"Well let's hear it and make it good."

"And if I don't, will you have me arrested?"
Justin was enjoying their easy banter, hands still locked and faces close. "Only if I get to wield ...the 'be good' stick."

Brian burst out laughing then. "If you handle it like you did last night, I may have to misbehave more often then."

Justin ignored the twinges in his muscles, especially his ass which was protesting and begging to be filled again, and leaned over to plant a soft but lingering kiss on Brian's lips. Lying his head back down on the pillow, he asked, "So what decisions have you made?"

"First, I'm not going to work today."

Justin laughed. "That's unusual but why?"

"I can barely move to take a piss," Brian said laughingly causing Justin to snicker in response.

"Sorry but I warned you."
"That you did but I don't regret any of it. Secondly," Brian reached under his pillow pulling out the smaller of two platinum rings. "I think it's time you put this on but before you do, I want you to read the inscription and make sure it's what you want."

"Brian it's been engraved for ten years. I doubt if I don't like it you can have it changed."

"Just read the fucking inscription, Justin. I never let you see what I had put inside the ring. I was going to show you at the altar before placing it on your finger. So just humor me, okay?"

Justin took the ring, twirling it delicately in his fingers until he could see the small scrawl. Brian's To Have and To Hold. Justin smiled wide at the inscription, the pressure of tears threatening to form until he willed them away. "I love it, Brian and I love you." He handed it back allowing Brian to slip it on his finger. It still fit perfectly although Justin was a little worried at first. He wasn't exactly the same twink he was when they'd first gotten the rings even though Brian still handled him as if he was. He was more muscular all over and his hands had filled out a bit more as well from all the art work over the years. "Where's yours?" Brian pulled his from under Justin's pillow. Justin's To Have and To Hold. It was as good as being branded. He looked directly into Brian's eyes as he slipped it on his finger. A mixture of love and relief shown back at him.

"I love you, Justin," Brian breathed before he pulled him close and kissed him. What began as a chaste kiss quickly escalated and evolved into so much more of feelings spoken between pecks and unspoken words when their mouths collided. Brian pulled away abruptly. "You're sure you don't want a wedding?"
Justin smiled the heartfelt smile reserved only for Brian. "Maybe some day but for now I'm just happy to be yours at long last. And who cares if I'm not Justin Taylor-Kinney on paper. I am to you and me; to everyone or everything which matters I have been for a very long time."

Brian nodded. "I made a third decision but it really depends on you."

"Okay. What is it?"

"Promise you won't get upset or overreact as you usually do?"

"I promise."

"Swear on the memory of Patrick Swayze. I can't use Marilyn Monroe with you- that's for Michael."

Justin laughed again. "Alright, I swear on the memory of Patrick Swayze I will not get upset or overreact to your third decision of this very semi-weird conversation."
He inhaled so deeply that his words came out in a rush and Justin had to ask him to slow down and repeat himself. "I want exclusive rights, Justin."

"Who are you and what the fuck have you done with Brian Alexander Kinney?" Justin asked, shock plainly on his face.

"It's me and I haven't been abducted by aliens since the first time I asked you to marry me," Brian said, smirk plainly visible earning him a poke in the ribs by Justin.

"You've never asked for that, Brian. In fact if I remember correctly you're staunchly opposed to the idea of monogamy."

"I am- was. Things change. People change." Brian licked his lips before continuing. "Look, being apart from you has taught me two things."

"And they are?" Justin was still in shock.
"Number one is that I want to kill any man you touch or fuck who isn't me and yes that includes all of our friends even though I can tolerate them a helluva lot better than others. The email from that asshole Jason was bad enough even though I know you didn't fuck him."

"How did you know?"

"You promised you wouldn't when we were in the office and I trust you. Aside from that and you feeling the same when I fucked you in the backroom, I know Jason wouldn't have gone bottom, not even for your hot little blond ass."

Justin nodded. Brian knew him longer so it stood to reason he would think that. Justin actually had topped Jason before but it wouldn't due to tell Brian that. "And what's the second reason?"

"Secondly, I wanted to make sure I could do monogamy before I bought it up to you."

"And were you able to?" Justin couldn't imagine it.

"Even though men threw themselves as me and still do, my last trick was three and a half years ago, Justin."
"What?" Justin asked incredulously. "That would have put it right after we met up in...

"London. I decided after the last one that I didn't want anyone else, I didn't need anyone since they weren't you. So I threw myself into work like a madman. Our unexpected visit in Toronto was the first time in God knew how long. Then when I came back from there, I threw myself into work again so that I wouldn't want or need anyone else. I know you needed to live your life and I even understood all of that. I fought with myself time and again to let you go but you know how it is once I get something into my head. In retrospect, somehow I think the indefinable part of me made up its decision about you a very long time ago. It just took my mind awhile to catch the hint."

Justin's mind was reeling. What would have happened if I decided this wasn't for me? But Justin didn't give voice to that thought. The truth was there was really no decision to be made. He'd always known from that first night when he'd first saw Brian while standing under that street lamp. It was a lust so strong, he'd taken deep breaths to calm himself and slow his heart-rate down. He had stood there watching as Brian approached him, feeling that if he even thought of shifting his feet he would fall over. Everything about Brian- his look, his walk, the way he smelled and sounded- reached into Justin immediately that night. Justin resisted the urge to burst out laughing remembering the stupid things he'd said about his allergies and what he liked to do. *I said play Tomb Raider for fuck's sake while he was sitting naked on top of me.* God, how naive he was. Later after returning from meeting Gus for the first time and Brian took his virginity, he remembered hearing Brian say that he loved him. It was the driving force behind all Justin had gone through; the thing that kept him coming back no matter how Brian tried to push him away. He'd known then what it had taken Brian years to figure out for himself. *Now Brian wants monogamy?* It was almost too much for Justin to take in at once. "Ask me this question again in six months," Justin said. At Brian's puzzled look, he continued. "Although I'm sure I'm clean, I don't want to take any chances. I've been with other people trying to compensate for the loss of you. I won't put you at risk in haste to have you without a barrier no matter how much I want to.

Brian nodded to Justin's relief. "So what do you want to do today?"
Justin smiled. "First things first. I want to put that huge bathtub of ours to good use so an Epsom salt soak is in order."

"And then?" Brian shifted a little closer, fitting his head in crook of Justin's neck. Justin felt him smile against his skin just before giving him a soft peck.

"You should call Cynthia; I should call Lindz and Emmett. Hopefully Auntie Em won't mind bringing food. Anita has probably come and gone by now and we need to eat but I don't think I can brave the stairs today." He chuckled. "How the fuck did we get in bed anyway? The last thing I remember is passing out on top of you."

Brian laughed. "Although the details are a little fuzzy from having my brains fucked out, I vaguely remember leading you down here. I would have carried you but my back disagreed."

"Wow. Brian Kinney are you getting old on me?"

"Asshole," Brian muttered affectionately. "Never that, Sunshine. There's a little blond dynamo who makes it a point to keep me young."
"And I always will. I love you, Brian."

"Love you, too."

Melanie looked at her watch again for the fifth time in as many minutes. Michael was late. Ordinarily, she wouldn't have minded especially because she knew Debbie was off for the day awaiting her fiance's return home from an extended vacation. Michael had imparted that information to her. Debbie wasn't even her main concern...it was running into everyone else while they were discussing plans for the upcoming hearing regarding J.R. She didn't want to answer the usual questions she was sure everyone would ask. It was bad enough she'd had to involve Michael and therefore Ben in her marital problems. Brian and Justin were involved by default, helping Lindsey in spite of knowing the problems it would cause between Melanie and Lindsey. Because of them, Lindsey had a whole new life which wouldn't have been possible without their help. She would have had to return to Toronto where their life was if not for them meddling in her affairs.

She nearly slammed the ceramic cup back into its saucer when she thought of Lindsey's defection and their betrayal. Although she shouldn't have expected anything less of Brian. He was as loyal to Lindsey as she was to him and they each made no secret about it. She'd always suspected there was more to their relationship than either would admit but then she would chalk it up to her naturally suspicious nature. Brian was gay; Lindsey was a lesbian despite her one-time affair with Sam Auerbach which had almost destroyed their relationship completely.

"Sorry I'm late, Mel." Michael came in interrupting her from her musings.
"Have you given our conversation any more thought?" She got right down to the matter, afraid that any minute they would be interrupted.

"I did. No matter what I just want my rights protected. I don't want it to be a situation like when J.R. was first born, Mel. That hurt us all emotionally and almost destroyed our friendship. Are you sure there is no way Lindz is willing to work this out to where everyone benefits?"

Melanie blew out a huge sigh. What part of the situation didn't he understand? Melanie was not willing to return to Pittsburgh. She wouldn't be there now if her wife wasn't being such a fucking bitch and digging her Birkenstocks in by not giving in to what benefited their family and not just her. "Michael, we've been through this. Lindsey has gainful employment here and an obvious place to stay. Gus is enrolled in school already, whereas J.R. is missing school. I've managed to secure a private tutor for my unfortunate stay here but I have intention of making this my home again. My life- our life for all Lindsey abandoned it- is in Toronto. I have no desire to uproot my entire existence again."

As Michael was about to answer, Lindsey rushed through the door looking like she was on a mission. "Well... Aren't you going to speak to her, Mel? Try to make her see reason?"

She nearly rolled her eyes at the expectant look on his face but she shifted out of the booth anyway. She had to admit Lindsey looked damn good. She had fixed her blond hair in spiral curls which framed her classic features. The red pantsuit with the matching trench coat accentuated her tall frame and made her more statuesque than she already was. Standing next to her unnoticed made Melanie feel out of place in jeans, t-shirt and her leather jacket but Michael was right. She had to try.
"Hello Lindz."

She watched intently as her voice registered and was gratified when Lindsey froze momentarily from searching in her over-sized tote. "Hello, Melanie," she replied calmly. To Melanie she sounded cold or as a WASP would say 'professionally distant.'

"How have you been?" What a stupid question, Mel. Get a grip.

Lindsey resumed looking in her purse as she responded. "I'm well, thank you. I've been meaning to call you."

"You have?" Melanie couldn't keep the shock from her voice.

"Yes. Gus has been asking to see J.R. and quite frankly, I would like to see her, too. I thought perhaps we could meet somewhere so the kids can see each other."

Melanie bristled but was determined to stay calm and not cause a scene. "Why are you doing this, Lindz. Why are you doing this to our family- to us? I said I was sorry."
"I know, Melanie and I accept your apology but you of all people know that sorry doesn't fix everything. I'm at a point now where I am finally happy."

"I thought you were happy with me," Mel responded bitterly.

"I did, too. And for a number of years I was content to think that but not anymore. It funny when you wake up and realize that you've spent your entire life living for someone else and forgot that you have needs, too."

"That sounds like the influence of Brian talking," Mel said raising her voice causing the action within the diner to suddenly cease.

"And that right there is part of the problem, Melanie. You blame *him* for all of our issues, never taking the time out to find your part in it. For the record: those are *my own* thoughts. I'm not a robot, which is something you seem to have either repeatedly disregarded or forgotten- take your pick. I had dreams and goals long before I met you and have lost sight of them being with you but I've found them again. I'm not giving them up for you or anyone else."

Melanie huffed out, "Even at the expense of our daughter?"
Lindsey's eyes widened marginally. "Really, Melanie? You're allowed to be selfish without thought or care to our daughter but I'm not allowed to develop a life of my own. Why? Because it doesn't fit into your schedule or your orderly life? Well let me tell you something, Ms. Marcus. This is my life to live as I choose and see fit. I'm not about to squander anymore of it for your comfort while I'm miserable. I'm finally doing what I love and I don't have to sacrifice my son or my life to make you happy. As far as J.R. goes, surely we can work out a visitation schedule to include Michael since he lives here in Pittsburgh most of the time as well as I. Please think about that when you once again accuse me of being unreasonable. I'm not. In the meantime, I have to get to work and I'm late as it is. Enjoy the rest of your day." Lindsey moved passed her without a backward glance.

Melanie returned to her seat where Michael sat staring out of the window as Lindsey got into her car and drove off. "See what I mean, Michael? Completely unreasonable."

"I'll be in touch, Mel," he said excusing himself and leaving her to replay all the events in her mind.

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"Look, Allison. I know there's no love lost between us but I'm asking for more time," Chris pleaded with his soon-to-be ex-wife. They sat in the middle of Bell Acres Country Club, trying for all their world to look and be civil. Chris understood that Allison was impatient to move on with her life. He really couldn't blame her because he felt the same. There was nothing more he wanted to do than be with George and he'd been asking (demanding really) to know when Chris was moving in.

"Why should I have to be reasonable, Chris? I want the divorce yesterday. We both do so what the hell is the hold up?"
"I can't tell you." Chris looked down at his plate, moving his food around by not touching anything. "We may not be able to stand each other but I wouldn't willingly put you in danger. It's bad enough that I told you some of what they were planning before, Allison, but if you knew anymore of what I know...Hell if they find out I know-family or not- I'm a dead man, if not physically then financially."

"I get it, Chris. I really do but maybe if you told me the rest, I could help. We didn't spend years in this stuffy ass world for no reason."

"I doubt Stockwell or Taylor will give a shit about sparing either one of us based on the fact we have a young family. No, Allison. What they have planned for Justin and Kinney, I really don't want you to be a part of. I don't want to be a part of it but it's too late for me even though they don't know that I am. As far as my grandfather and father go, they're different. It's actually pretty fucking scary to know that Craig Taylor is involved with them in any way considering mine and Justin's history. The man really must have no parental love for anyone or anything."

"And you think he's really going to go through with ruining Justin, Chris?" He noted the concern on Allison's face and appreciated her wanting to help even though he wouldn't let her. This was something he had to decide on his own.

"Honestly Allison, I've given up any hope that there could be redeeming qualities at all in Taylor. I was surprised to learn he never went to visit Justin in the hospital after the...incident. I know there was a lot of reasons put out there why I did what I did but you now know the entire truth of it and even though we are divorcing, you haven't judged me. Justin, on the other hand, was literally disowned by the one he called 'father.' I know if it comes out about me the same will happen and I'll deal with that then. But with Justin and Brian, who are they really hurting? No one and yet Justin's father and his friend, Stockwell as well as my family are going after them. For what? Because they threaten everything those old men hold dear? From what I've seen and heard down on Liberty, they
Allison nodded. She knew that given a chance her own father would have been involved, too. She liked Justin up until finding out he was gay. He was cute and funny and talented. When Chris first bashed him, she'd been so angry. Everyone was except for his friends on the football team who had been down on Liberty Avenue the night Justin and Chris got into an argument. Recently, he'd revealed what the entire episode was about and at first she was disgusted all over again but then she understood what would've happened if anyone took Justin Taylor's story seriously at the time. It would have been as bad for Chris as it was for Justin. Unlike Justin, Chris didn't have a loyal group of friends or the hottest fucking man, gay or straight, in Pittsburgh to defend him and give him a place to stay. No. His friends were only loyal as long as Chris' athletic popularity held out and his family loyalty was contingent based on Chris being the "good" son. A large part of that included hating the things they hated- homosexuality amongst them. She felt a little sorry for Chris because he would never be able to live and love openly because of a long line of prejudice ingrained from cradle. Allison had grown up in the same kind of environment but the difference was she was never afraid to disagree with them. Perhaps it was because her father wasn't leaving her anything that would be passed directly to her. Anything she would get at the time of his death would be passed to her husband. If she didn't have one, it would be passed down to her first born son or sit in trust until she got one. Despicable of course but that was what happened with "Old Money." Within her family women were only good for providing heirs to the legacy. It was part of the reason the divorce settlement was so important to her and why she was willing to help Chris any way she could. If she had money of her own, she wouldn't be held to being a walking uterus.

She reached over to grab his hand, noting the slight shake of it as he set down the fork he held. "Chris, I know this is not easy. The situation is bound to get worse before it gets better and the decision you have to make will only make things harder. But if you need me, I'm here. No, our marriage was not a happy one which is why we're divorcing but we started out as friends. We've been friends since kindergarten and we share children. That will not change so whatever you need, you got it. Okay?"

He nodded and squeezed her hand in acknowledgment of her offer. It was enough for him.
Jennifer sat at the table in a state of shock. She couldn't believe the bits and pieces she'd overheard between Chris and Allison Hobbs. She was supposed to be having a romantic breakfast with Tucker which he'd planned in honor of the day they first met. He was always romantic like that; so different from her ex-husband for which she was thankful. He not only made her feel young and beautiful but special with his attentiveness. At the mention of Craig and Justin's name in the same breath behind her, she tuned out of what Tucker was saying. She couldn't help it. It was as automatic as breathing when it came to her family.

"Jennifer, did you hear what I said?"

"Oh. I'm sorry, Tuck sweetheart. I've just got a lot on my mind."

Tuck smiled gently. "I could tell otherwise you would probably be in my lap by now."

"What? Not here I wouldn't but out of curiosity, why would I be there? I would think I've spent enough time there lately."

He flashed her the beautiful smile she'd come to adore over the years. It didn't matter that he had just turned forty or that she was almost sixty. He still made her heart beat erratically when he smiled at
"We're going to Rome and Venice in three weeks," he said as he took a sip of his coffee and waited for the words to sink in.

"Oh Tucker," Jennifer breathed. "How in the world did you swing that?"

"It's something I've been working on for awhile. With Molly away at school but coming home for Thanksgiving, I figured it would be a perfect time. Justin can watch the house and I was able to secure the time off. In fact my boss offered the use of his villa in both places."

Tucker had left teaching in elementary school about five years ago gaining an assistant director position at the Carnegie Mellon registrar office. The hours were more flexible and the increase in salary allowed for he and Jennifer to do more as a couple. She still worked as a real estate agent when she wanted to since Justin bought her company. He'd presented it to her on the tenth year anniversary of her divorce from Craig. He told her that it served as a semi-retirement present since it was also on her birthday. She rose out of her seat and crossed over to him. Taking a brief look around and noting that the dining room was filled with young couples instead of the older crowd, she perched herself gently on his lap causing him to chuckle softly. If the older set was in it would have never happened because of they were sticklers for protocol and pretentious behavior at all times. Jennifer allowed her lips to say what her voice hadn't been able to, giving him a kiss which curled his toes and spoke of forbidden promises. When she pulled back to stare into his dazed eyes, she whispered, "Thank you," making sure to shift against another part of him she would be thanking later in the evening.

He noticed the action and smiled brightly at her. "You know, I'm not due in the office for another
Jennifer chuckled briefly. "I can't. Unlike you, I have an appointment but I'll make it up to you later." Sliding off his lap, she gave him one more kiss before leaving the club without a backward glance.

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Ted, Cynthia and Lindsey was in the makeshift office set up for Colby when the call from Brian came in advising that he and Justin would be notably absent from civilization for the day. There was much good natured ribbing about the tiredness of his voice which Brian took in stride. Ted assured him that he'd heard from both Quinn and Myrna and the accounts all seemed to be in order. Although they were tried again, there still wasn't any success in getting into them.

"Lindsey, can you stop by the hospital to see Daphne for Justin and I and explain what's going on about everything. If you have any problems, ask for Dr.Troy Bradley. He's her doctor and a personal friend and will be able to get you the access to her. Have you heard from Melanie and the attorney? Is she willing to allow visitation at least?"

"I honestly don't know but maybe Michael will be able to talk some sense into her. He was there although I didn't acknowledge his presence. I truly did not want to either. In any event, I made my terms clear and tried to reassure him directly that I wouldn't try to take his rights away. If I know Melanie, that perceived threat was how she lured him into helping her. You know how gullible he is. And it's sad really that even though he's a grown man, he hasn't grown up in all these years."
"Don't be too hard on him, Wendy," Brian said. "It just takes some of us longer than others to look at the bigger picture. We've all had our moments of dumb assness."

Lindsey smiled as she heard water splashing in the background. "Brian, is Justin anywhere near you? I'd like to ask him a question." She heard grumbles and more water splashing followed by Brian laughingly murmuring 'You asshole.'

"Hey Lindz. Hey everyone, what's up?" Justin answered.

"Oh nothing much, Jus. At least I know Brian isn't sick since he isn't coming to work for the first time in forever," Lindz answered.

"Yeah. He's such a terrible influence," Brian answered while getting steadily getting splashed with water.

"I am not. I'll still be working," Justin said.
"I'll bet you will," Colby said earning him a few snickers and a punch in his arm from Cynthia.

"How are things going there anyway?" Justin asked. "You should have received an email from Fred in Kinnetik's art department detailing the Avlossa account specifications. I started work on it last night."

Lindsey nodded. "I have it and forwarded to you this morning. Oh and the official opening for the gallery is scheduled for a month from today. Emmett's agreed to plan it. Amy fired Tom Hanson in the New York office. Apparently she found out he was undermining one of our client's campaigns. It turns out he was an ex-boyfriend or some other such nonsense."

"Fuck!" Justin said. "I think I know which account it was. The adult toy line, right? How much damage did the asshole do? That campaign is set to go national next week. Any idea of the cost to push it back by two weeks?"

"Whoa. Hold it Boss man," Lindsey chuckled. "According to Amy, Tom had made everything look like little laughing penises." She could hear Brian laughing out loud in the background. "When asked about it, Tom said it was because Toby Nickels had a baby dick and his campaign shouldn't reflect false advertising- a practice your company never engages in."

By the time Lindsey finished explaining even Justin was laughing. "So how much money is this going to cost me to fix?"
"Amy has it well in hand." Lindsey broke off understanding the pun which caused the others to start a fresh round of laughter.

"Tell her to send it to me as soon as possible. I'll get to it sometime today," Justin said.

"You sure about that?" Brian asked. The others froze in astonishment, envy and unwilling fascination at the low moan following Brian's statement.

Justin amended. "I'll get to it tomorrow."

"Thought so," Colby said low causing the others to chuckle. They all knew if Brian wasn't going to work, there was no way in hell Justin was.

"Alrighty then," Lindsey said with a self-indulgent smile. It was nice to hear them happy after all the years of misery. "As far as what it will cost to fix the mess...well you'll determine that when you see it. In the meantime, I called Mr. Nickels and smoothed things over already explaining that our printing press needed repair and that we wanted to do our best work for him. He bought it and agreed to push back the campaign."
"Thanks, Lindz. See? I knew I did the right thing by making you partner," Justin said.

"Well thanks for having faith in me, Jus. In the meantime, you guys enjoy your day off. Try not to get into any more trouble, will ya?"

"I'm not promising a damn thing," Brian said causing everyone to laugh. "I'm not a liar and Justin is a bad influence."

"Now that's debatable. Gotta go though. I need to call Emmett to bring food over and I have an offer for him that he will not refuse. He's waited too long for it."

"Wait are you two-" Cynthia started.

"No. At least not yet," Brian said. "But I do need you all to clear your schedules for three weeks from tomorrow. Justin and I are having a party and we would like you all to come. Lindsey, I will talk to Melanie directly to see if we can get J.R. there even if I have to allow her here, too. J.R. is family whether Melanie agrees or not."

"Good luck with that, Brian. You know how she is when she digs her Manolos in and what about Michael? Are you going to invite him, too?"
"I'll give him the option of coming but it's his decision," Brian said.

It had taken them a half hour to finally get in the tub from the time they had left the warm sanctuary of the bed before they made the requisite calls using the blue-tooth function on Brian's cell phone. He chuckled when he paired it to the built-in speaker system in the bathroom—one more surprise for Justin he'd never gotten to use or dream of. Brian smiled to himself. With all the water they splashed on each other in the bath, it was a good thing the phone had a voice call command feature and was safely placed on shelf on the other side of the enormous bathroom. As soon as the lovers left a message on Emmett's voice-mail, they relaxed for a time enjoying the companionable silence.

"I know you have to invite him, Brian," Justin said sensing what was bothering Brian.

Brian sighed. "Yeah, I do. He and I have been friends practically our whole lives. It would seem strange if I don't."

"And that's why you have to do what you have to do," Justin reassured him, taking his soapy hand exposing the rings they wore. "This is a major step we're taking. It wouldn't be right not to invite the person who meant the most to you in your life before and after I showed up in it."
"Not after," Brian said, kissing the tip of Justin's ear. "I know I have to give the option, Jus, but he's changed so fucking much. Why can't he just be happy for us like I was for he and Ben?"

Justin laughed. "Are we indulging in selective memory now? You weren't happy when they first got married, Brian."

Brian thought about it and had to laugh with him. "No, I wasn't happy when they married but I was still supportive of their relationship. I wasn't half as happy at his relationship with David. Michael always had a tendency to follow the example of his partners; I thought he should be his own man. After he'd gotten married, he began to make *holier-than-thou* pronouncements on everyone's life and their decisions. Ben wasn't exactly like that but Michael was based on some preconceived notions and no doubt the influence of Stepford Fag Avenue."

Justin nodded remembering the whole fiasco with the doctor Michael was involved with before Ben came along. Michael became a sanctimonious, snotty, whiny fucker instead of the complaining, judgmental asshole he'd always been. "You had good reason not to support the decision with David. Though if they had stayed here you know you would have been blamed for their break-up."

"Wasn't that always the way of it? I was accused of that when Michael had decided not to go with David in the first place. I told him that he should go to at least give it a try. That blasted party was to keep him from being torn in his decisions. Debbie asked me to let him go his own way. I did and look what happened anyway."
"I remember the party and the aftermath. The later events are still fuzzy in spots but I remember when he finally decided to go," Justin said and he did. It was the weekend of Brian's thirtieth birthday; the week before Justin's prom that Michael had made the decision to begin anew in Portland. He was about to cancel his plans to move when he found out Brian didn't get the job in New York with Adam Lyons. "You had to let him go and find his way back then."

"I find myself having to do the same thing now, Justin," Brian said. "What if he doesn't come back this time?"

Justin turned in the enormous tub to look Brian straight in the eye. "If he doesn't it won't be because you closed the door. You won't be employing the infamous Kinney cliff method to get him to finally make a decision and stick to it. It will be because you gave him the choice to go his own way without compromising what you want for a change. But no matter how this plays out, I'm proud of you."

"What for?"

Justin smiled gently. "You once called me a prince and I didn't fully understand why at the time but I do now. Royalty requires a certain type of nobility and courage. You have it in ways people rarely appreciate. To them you're just a cold-hearted son of a bitch without a heart but in reality the ability to let someone go at great personal risk to yourself is a gift. Instead of asking or demanding that they choose you as you want them to, you allow them to move on and experience whatever they need to with the understanding that you're still here if they need you. That ability- your secret identity- has left you broken so many times before, Brian. Then you would rebuild and re-fortify the walls around your heart time and time again making them stronger while concealing the hurt inside yourself. I didn't understand that when I was younger. I grew up with an idyllic life but then I met you- my destiny -and all of what I thought I knew about life went out the window. I know what you are risking even though the others do not, Brian, but then again I see the real you completely and clearly as no one else does or will. So that's why I am proud of you."
Brian hugged Justin close to him and he wondered not for the first time how he'd gotten so lucky. But that was Justin's gift- the ability to see through the bullshit of *Brian Kinney- Stud of Liberty Avenue*. Justin had lost sight of that for awhile but Brian was damned happy that he'd gotten it back. *One day very soon, I'm closing the fucking door and welding that bitch shut. He's not leaving me again.* Brian rested his chin in the top of Justin's head the way his lover liked while holding their entwined fingers over his heart thinking it was going to be very soon indeed.

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It had been a long time since she'd been in the walls of Kinnetik. The office still hustled and bustled around her. Jennifer remembered the last time she'd set foot in there ten years ago. It was the afternoon before Justin's first art show in New York. Her visit had surprised Brian, who was caught in an unguarded moment within his private office. She remembered the conversation as if it had happened yesterday.

"Jennifer. Are you okay? What are you doing here?"

"Justin asked me to come make sure you were still alive." She took in his appearance-impeccably dressed with red-rimmed eyes. "Why haven't you responded to Justin's RSVP? I know you want to go."
"It's just not a good idea. Besides, I'm swamped here."

"Brian, I know it would mean a lot to my son. More importantly, I think it would mean more to you."

"I can't, Jennifer," he said despairingly. "Do you realize what tomorrow is?"

She thought a moment when it dawned on her. "Yes, I know. The anniversary of Justin's prom which is all the more reason you should go. It's a triumphant day for you both-a day to celebrate that he's still alive and well and whole. Brian please come, if not for his sake, then your own."

Brian huffed out a breath. "I'll try but I can't promise, okay?"

"Well that's all I can ask." She crossed the room stopping in front of him. "I want you to know that I know why you and he called off the wedding. It took guts after everything you and Justin have been through. Unlike the others, I won't pretend to understand why you haven't followed him but I respect your decisions. If I ever had a doubt you loved Justin before, I realize just how much you do now." She placed a kiss on his cheek and left then.

He never made it to Justin's art show in New York but recently Justin had told her he'd bought three paintings in total from the show and at least one from every show after over the years- a fact Justin hadn't known until he moved into their home. Brian and Jennifer had managed to meet for lunch a
few times a year since that long ago art show. They supported each other in a way no one else would have been able to, not even Tuck or Debbie. In retrospect and even though she had many apprehensions at the beginning of their relationship, she honestly couldn't have picked a better man for her son. Justin flourished whenever things were right between he and Brian. Even when they weren't the passion Justin felt for Brian was palpable and vice versa. Their arguments were legendary and their love for each other iconic. It was especially prevalent in the painting displayed in the front lobby of the building Jennifer helped Brian buy for the thriving advertising agency. *Who would have thought the Liberty Baths could turn into this?*

"Jennifer? Oh my goodness it is you?"

"How are you, Lindsey?" Jennifer asked embracing her warmly. "I'm surprised to see you. How are Melanie and the kids?"

"Justin didn't tell you?" Jennifer shook her head so Lindsey continued. "Melanie and I are divorcing and I've moved back to Pittsburgh."

"I'm so sorry. I hadn't heard. If you don't mind my asking, what happened? Justin said when he'd visited last year you all were doing great."

Lindsey smiled. "Let's just say, I took a page from your book all those years ago, Jenn. I needed a change and unfortunately it doesn't include Melanie. Hopefully we can come to an agreement about J.R. but Gus is very happy and has adjusted extremely well to school here."
"Well at least there's a bit of a bright side to this, right?" Jennifer knew exactly what Lindsey was referring to. Jennifer's marriage to Craig was oppressive. And although she didn't think Melanie cheated as Craig did, she remembered what a workaholic Mel was which probably strained Lindsey the way it had Jennifer. "I came to speak with Brian. I heard something rather disturbing while I was having breakfast at the country club this morning. I'd really like to speak with him about it since it involves Justin."

"Brian and Justin took the day off but maybe can help a bit since I'm Justin's business partner."

Jennifer nodded. She knew that Lindsey would keep her confidence and she really needed to speak to someone. She'd been replaying the small bits of conversation over in her mind, making sure she remembered all of it and trying to make some sort of sense of the cryptic conversation between Chris and Allison Hobbs. "Is there someplace we can speak privately?"

"Well since Brian isn't coming in today his office should be available."

By the time, Jennifer finished relating all the information she'd overheard and relayed it again to Cynthia, Ted, Colby and a man on the phone named Mr. Daniel Quinn who she'd known was Justin's personal banker, all assembled were able to put together a partial idea of the big picture. It still didn't explain why Craig Taylor was involved or who else they were using in their plot to destroy Brian and Justin. The only thing they could agree on was that where there was smoke, fire was always sure to follow and that there was a foreboding sense of things getting a helluva lot worse before getting better.
Chapter 21- Lions and Sheep by Nichelle Wellesly

Author's Notes:

Sorry it took so long...Life happened and I had to clean it up!

The piercing sound of the alarm clock woke Brian, which he immediately regretted. After a long night of fucking the last thing he wanted to do was roll from underneath Justin and head hit the shower. It had been two weeks since they made the private acknowledgment; since the category had solidly moved from non-relationship to partnership in every sense of the word. With Jennifer's help, they now jointly owned six apartment complexes bought under TK Property Management Company, thus expanding the Taylor-Kinney empire considerably. Three were designed for college students eager to get away from campus housing. One for corporate housing, one for senior citizens and the third contained condominiums in a well-established, family-oriented neighborhood. When Ted asked them if they thought it was a good idea considering all that had been happening with the threats to their finances, Justin said simply, "Lions never run from the sheep." Whenever Justin felt fear about anything pertaining to his career, that simple saying had kept him moving forward and somehow became the mantra of the Taylor-Kinneys throughout the years whether together or separated.

One of Brian's favorite morning activities other than taking care of his morning wood was watching
Justin wake up. Both of them were generally not morning people, yet it always fascinated Brian to feel the restlessness in Justin's body as he inadvertently always ended up humping against Brian's leg until he realized that whatever dream he was having was forcing him into reality. He loved to be the first thing Justin actually saw after he would blink his eyes several times adjusting to the daylight and absorbing that it was time to begin a new day. Under penalty of death, Brian would never admit these things to Justin nor anyone else but it was but just watching the process of Justin waking up beside him calmed him as no other thing could.

"Wake up, Sunshine. We both have to go into the office today so time to get ready."

"I don't want to," Justin mumbled reaching for a pillow to pull over his head.

Brian in turn chuckled. "Fine. But if you stay in this bed and not get into the shower, your morning hard on will have to stay just that...HARD." Brian silently counted to five as Justin processed his words.

"I'm up," Justin said as he moved the pillow from over his eyes, bright smile gracing his features.

Brian reached under the covers, moving his hand directly to Justin's cock and whispered softly, "I know." The groan Justin made Brian's cock stiffen even more.

"Sure we can't just stay in bed all day?" Justin shifted his pelvis trying to get Brian to stroke him instead of just holding the hand steady.

"No but then you already know that. Besides you still have to meet with Emmett today and I have another meeting before I get to Kinnetik for the joint meeting. Oh and I need you to light a fire under the Art department before I get tempted to issue pink slips again."

"What happened this time? Lindz and I are almost finished the work for the Avlossa account so that should take a load off your mind."

"I never had any doubt you would meet the deadline. The problem is that Fred and Charles are warring for dominance. Ordinarily I wouldn't give a shit but we're in a bit of a time crunch with Remson, Brown, Iconix and a few of the other big name accounts. Fred wants to do a 'blueprint' advertising package which you know is not going to work for us and doesn't fit who we are. Sure the idea has merit but that is for other companies. As a boutique operation our money is in our ability to create customized campaigns. None of our clients want to see themselves coming and going with
some standard bullshit. That's what sets us apart from companies like Vanguard although they are trying to emulate us without our success."

"So basically without offending Fred you actually want Charles in charge of the Art Department." Justin sat up so that he could see Brian's eyes when he confirmed what Justin had been thinking for a long time.

"Yes. There has to be something that can be done to increase productivity without sacrificing the talent of either man. Fred is damn good at organizing and managing the department but Charles gets the jobs done. The staff respects him especially because he will not hesitate to speak his mind to Fred."

Justin nodded. "Tell you what...after my morning blow job in the shower and on our way in, we'll discuss what I think is a reasonable solution. That way it will give me time to come up with a little spin of my own."

Brian sat up quickly and threw the covers off. "Last one to the shower is getting fucked."

Justin laughed as he climbed out of bed almost lazily, knowing that while the water was heating up on the inside of the shower, things were about to get very steamy on the outside of it

*DAPHNE WOULD NEVER BE SO HAPPY THAN TO GET BACK TO WORK. JUSTIN WAS GOING TO MEET HER FOR LUNCH but that was much later. She was spending another quiet morning of her 'enforced vacation' at home. Truthfully, she loved her home; Brian and Justin had done the right thing by encouraging her to move down the road from them. Being able to walk the trails surrounding the pond really helped to clear her mind of all that had happened with Steven. The other added bonus was Troy. He'd stayed over every night he wasn't working. They did all the things friends do; watch movies, have long talks, make fun of Brian and Justin. That thought made her smile. But there were the other things they talked about which she couldn't seem to speak about with anyone else, not even Brian and Justin, which was kinda weird. Of course there were serious debates about new treatments, controversial treatments and all other things which occupied their life in the medical field. Then the conversations went to more personal subjects about the pregnancy and Troy's ex who by all accounts was not a nice woman. She couldn't imagine how he'd fallen in love with a cold woman reminiscent of Brian's mother while he couldn't understand how she'd fallen for a jerk like Steven. It was nice to have someone to talk to who hadn't known her before Daphne Chander's' life had spiraled beyond her rigid control.*
"Hey Daph," Troy said as he came into the kitchen.

"Good morning, Troy. As you can probably tell, coffee is up. I just made a new round."

"Jesus, how many cups have you had that would require a new round? How long have you been up?" he asked as he poured himself a cup and opened the fridge for the cream.

She answered, "Probably since about four but maybe a little earlier. See why I should be going back to work?"

Troy laughed. "Nice try, Dr. Chanders. You can't wait for the vultures to start swarming again, can you?"

She had been begging him to go back early every morning he'd been there which was quite a lot. "It's not that per say. I miss the action."

"You know you could have had plenty of action these past two weeks but..."

Daphne laughed. "Nice try, Dr. Bradley. We've already had that conversation. Remember?"

"Yeah I do remember all too well. But it doesn't stop me from hoping you'll give me a chance someday. Besides, I hear I'm quite the catch."

"With an ego to match Brian Kinney's," she said smiling. "Who knows what the future holds, Troy. It's enough for me right now that I enjoy your company."

He beamed at her then. "Well lucky for you that I enjoy yours, too so this works for both of us. At least for now,"

She blushed but needed to diffuse the heat rising in the pit of her stomach. "As soon as you're finished you owe me a rematch, you know?"

"Uh-huh. I beat you to the top of the hill fair and square, Daphne Chanders."
She laughed and it was true. They had taken to running every morning that he'd visited. It was one of the other things she loved about the location of her house. "It's only gentlemanly to give me a rematch." She wouldn't tell him that she'd found a few shortcuts that would help her match him stride for stride. She was only five-six so it shouldn't be considered 'cheating' but 'creating a fair advantage' since he was the same height as Brian.

"I know you're planning something, Doc but I'll give you your rematch. Just don't come crying to me when you lose again." Troy paused for a moment. "On second thought feel free to cry all over me."

"You're incorrigible," Daphne said laughing and shaking her head. "But I can assure you, you won't win this time nor will there be any reason for me to cry."

"Oh really?"

"Yes really," Daphne said with the all the confidence she could muster.

"Tell you what Daph. Let's put a wager on this. If I win, we go on a real date."

Her smile faltered a bit. "And if I win?"

"I don't know. What do you want?"

Daphne thought long and hard about that question. There was no doubt she found him attractive. *Fuck that, he was downright sexy standing there in a wife-beater and sweats.* She could take Brian's advice and just fuck the hell out of him. It would be a one-time thing and unlike most women she was able to differentiate between sex and love. The question was what she really wanted from Troy. It was evident that he was not firmly in the 'friendzone.' He'd been sort of like a companion over the past weeks but having sex with Justin years ago had almost ruined their friendship. Was she prepared to take the same risk with Troy? He had been watching her intently during her thoughts so she finally said, "Tell you what. I'll reserve mine for after I win."

"Fair enough," Troy said. "But you won't win."

And laughing they made their way out the back door to the trail.
After Brian dropped Justin by Kinnetik and grabbed a triple non-fat Latte from Starbucks, he ended up at the first of the dreaded meetings of the morning. How he got roped into saying that he would meet Melanie Marcus that morning would always be a mystery. It was no secret that they couldn't stand each other. Well—that wasn't true entirely. They had enmity toward each other but when there was a problem they were there for each other. He understood her insecurities no matter how unwarranted. It didn't mean he excused them but he did understand them.

He went down the three steps leading to the hotel’s dining area where they were scheduled to meet. He took the time to catch up on the financial section since he'd been unable to do it after the fuck and shower session with the hot blond he was for all intents and purposes married to. He marveled that the thought of being in a committed relationship didn’t send him running and screaming like his hair was on fire. If someone had told him that he would feel content-happy even on the night he’d met and deflowered seventeen year old Justin Taylor then he would have run screaming. But it was too late and there was no going back and he was absolutely fine with that.

"Good morning, Brian," Melanie said coming to stop at the table he was sitting.

"You look like shit, Mel. Rough night?" Brian asked her a slight smirk to his lips. It wouldn't pay to be outwardly sympathetic at all but he really wished it hadn’t come to where it was leading.

"Fuck you, Brian."

"Hey if you just asked me here to insult me, I can leave now and tend to my actual business." He pushed back from the table getting ready to make good on it when she grabbed his hand.

"Please, Brian. Don't go. I really need to talk to you," Melanie pleaded looking up at him.

He sighed. The Munchers lesbianics was going to be the death of his sanity. He resumed his seat and took another long draught of his coffee. "Okay, Mel. Talk."

"I can't believe that I am about to ask you to do this but can you talk to Lindz. I know we have the hearing in a few hours and the other week I tried to talk to her but..."

Brian nodded. "You accused her of being unreasonable, Melanie. We both know that's not true so
let's just cut the bullshit there. What is the real reason you don't want to move back here? It would solve everyone's problems especially JR's."

"Brian you have to understand. My life is there. There is the practice and the house and the contacts I've managed to make while working."

"I see." Brian nodded and he did see. "So you would risk your daughter's happiness for the advancement of your career?"

"Brian, that's not what I'm doing. This wouldn't even be an issue had Lindsey not left the marriage and moved back here without checking with me."

Brian shook his head in awe of how clueless Melanie seemed to be. "Mel, Lindsey's move back here was not spur of the moment. She had been thinking about it a long time. Gus definitely has been and JR doesn't like Canada regardless that it is basically the only home she ever really knew. Why can't you practice law here again? Take a couple of classes to bring your license up to date, retake the bar and then either work for another firm or start your own. Your win-loss ratio when you worked at the firm was not bad and would make most men piss in their pants. So again, I ask you what is the real reason you don't want to move back here?" Brian looked at her, really focusing in on her. "There's someone you don't want to leave behind, huh?"

Melanie closed her eyes briefly but when she reopened them she confirmed it with a single nod.

"How long, Melanie?"

"Brian I-"

"How fucking long?" Brian's question was sternly asked and he wouldn't allow her to back-peddle.

"Since just before you and Justin visited us in Toronto."

"Does Lindsey know?"

"I don't know, Brian. I think she might because now she suddenly wants to leave and establish her
own life."

Brian shook his head. "That's a subject which has been plaguing her for years even before you began your affair. So why can't you move back here again?"

"Come on be serious, Brian. Do you have any idea how much it would cost me to fly back and forth providing I can get off work."

He raised a sardonic brow at her question. "No. I couldn't possibly understand the constant flights or fees associated with a long distance situation except that I have been in one for oh shall we say ten fucking years."

She jumped at the evident annoyance in his voice. "I'm sorry. I had forgotten about the situation with you and Justin. How's that going by the way?"

"Justin and I are fine. But back to you. You are going to have to find a way to make this work Melanie otherwise you are going to lose big time."

"What? You mean you agree with Lindsey? I should have known better than to think I could talk to you about this." She had risen from her chair.

"Sit down, Melanie," he said firmly. The tone of his voice although not raised made an immediate impact because she lowered herself immediately. "Understand this...I am not on anyone's side except Jenny Rebecca's. She loses in every way if you go back to Toronto. She loses the security of her family around her."

"I am her family, Brian."

He nodded before responding. "Yes you are her family but right now you are treating her as a pawn to get what you want. That's fucked up. The bottom line is she is happiest when she is with Gus and Lindsey. Why would you sacrifice your daughter to eat a pussy which may or may not be a forever kinda deal? JR is always going to be your daughter." Brian looked at his watch. He had exactly forty-five minutes to make it back to Kinnetik in time for the meeting. "Listen, Mel. You really need to think about what's at stake not just what you want."

"This coming from the biggest hedonist on the continent."
Brian laughed. "Yes I am the biggest hedonist in the U.S. although I suspect Justin could also claim the title. The point is that I have never sacrificed Gus' happiness just so I can be foot loose and fancy free or to show someone who's boss. You can decide what's best for you and deal with the consequences and there will be MANY or you can get your head out of your own ass and do right by JR. The choice is yours. As far as Lindz and your relationship, I don't need to tell you what I think about it but even without that other chick, I don't think she'll be coming back. She's happy with her job, amongst other things. But you need to decided what you're going to do within the next three hours. Now, I have to go."

In the two weeks since Carl Horvath came home to Pittsburgh, he'd wished more than not that he had stayed with his daughter and family indefinitely. It wasn't that he wasn't anxious to be reunited with Debbie or the other members of his family of which he'd unwittingly became the patriarch. It was all the drama which came with said family. Since he'd returned he learned that Melanie and Lindsey were splitting up and in a custody argument over visitation due to Jenny Rebecca, which thereby involved Michael. Michael is a head case all by himself. Carl mentally shook his head at that thought. He and Ben had been for all intents and purposes married for well over ten years yet Michael continued to chase after Brian. Justin had returned to Pittsburgh and is back with Brian which of course poses a problem for Michael. Meanwhile Ben has been hanging out with an old college chum who Michael also has a problem with. Someone is throwing darts at the Taylor-Kinney empire and Colby (Ben's friend) is trying to head off the attack. It was just too damn much.

Debbie had caught wind of most of it at the diner bearing witness to some of the altercations and insinuations Michael had thrown at Justin. He'd watched over the years how Debbie defend Michael's actions even knowing he was wrong. He'd called her on a few of those issues but Debbie was like a lioness when it came to her cub. She may not have agreed with his actions privately but publicly she had to defend him. That was the main cause of their own problems. He loved Deb and had for a very long time but he refused to let her live the fantasy that her supposedly grown son was perfect. She had asked him to step in and talk to Michael so to keep peace in his home, he'd agreed.

As he sat there over his morning coffee listening to him complain to his mother about the way everyone has been treating him since Prince Justin's return he finally decided that it would be a good time to voice his opinion.

"Michael, has it ever occurred to you to let Brian figure out what's best for himself? He's a grown man and has been even before he reached the age of consent. He's perfectly capable of making his own decisions."

"You don't understand, Carl. This scheming twink has been after Brian's money from the beginning."
When Justin got kicked out, it was Brian who took him in. After the bashing, Justin cheated on him but Brian took him back. Then he goes off to New York and now he's back without a place to go. In comes Brian to the rescue again. I can't sit idly by and watch him get used again until the twink decides he wants something better again. Uh-huh no way."

Carl rolled his eyes and looked heavenward. He'd always believed in prayer but at that moment it seemed God himself was on a coffee break. "Listen, Michael, I understand your concerns but it is still Brian's choice to be with Justin. You need to worry about your own life with Ben. Brian is a big boy and can take care of himself."

"Brian is my best friend. I wouldn't be much of a friend if I just let him get hurt."

Carl had finally lost all patience and raised his voice. "Well you're not much of a best friend now if you cannot respect his choices." Taking a deep breath, he immediately tried to reason with the adult child in front of him. "Look, Michael, we all understand that you want to protect him. Somehow you think this is a "Super hero-Wing man" situation but this is real life, not a comic book. From what I've seen of Brian and Justin in the last two weeks alone, they are as committed as Debbie and I; as committed as you're supposed to be with Ben. Whatever you do now is going to either make or break your friendship with Brian. Do you really expect him to make a choice between the man he loves and you who he's also thought of as a brother?"

"I'm not asking him to make a choice; I'm asking him to see Justin for what he really is," Michael whined.

"And you think that Brian is so naive that he can't see a trap when there is one?"

"Not where Justin is concerned. God, why are you all so blind to that little blond boy?"

"No one is blind to anyone and that includes you. Your jealousy would even be visible to Stevie Wonder. You have a problem because whenever Justin is around and in some cases when he isn't, you are not number one in Brian's life. Well I have news for you, Michael. You were NEVER number one in Brian's life. Brian was. The best you could have hoped for was place two or three. Truthfully you're threatened because once Justin came, even from the night they met from what I've been told, you haven't occupied the number two spot either."

"Now hold on, Carl. I-" Debbie tried to intervene but Carl held up his hand.

"No Debbie, he needs to hear the cold hard facts. The problem is that no one has bothered to really lay them out to him long before now. You all thought he couldn't handle hearing it and now look
what you have. A spoiled child trapped in a grown man's body."

"Now you just hold on a second," Michael tried to defend himself.

"No you hold on, Michael. You need to understand the difference between boyfriend and best friend. You have never and will never be Brian's boyfriend, bed partner, life partner or any other kind of partner. That position has already been filled by Justin Taylor and seriously you're not cut out for it. If you keep it up the best friend position that you have now is going to be vacant as well." Rising from the table, Carl finished off his coffee as he noted the stunned faces of both Michael and Debbie. He leaned over to place a kiss in the partially open mouth of the latter. "I'll call you later from the station."

Debbie recovered first. "Why are you going to the station, Carl? I thought the perk of being retired is that you didn't have to go there anymore."

"I'm going to see Larry Smith. His father and I were partners my first three years on the job so I've known him since he was a pup. He transferred from the NYPD right after that whole Prop 14 mess. I heard Stockwell is back in town and that could only mean one thing... and it ain't good."

Debbie nodded. "Well be safe and dinner's at six." She watched him close the door then turned to look at Michael who was still stunned from the dressing down Carl had given him. "Shouldn't you be getting ready for the hearing? Another thing you shouldn't be involved in by the way."

Michael had finally recovered his voice. "JR is my daughter, Ma. It's my duty as her father to be there."

"It's amazing that you remembered that. So far the only one I can see acting as any sort of parent in this situation- and I can't even believe I'm about to say this-is Brian. I understand why Lindsey moved back here to Pittsburgh and there isn't a doubt in my mind the move has been better for Gus. But the three of you could've settled this amongst yourselves if you and Melanie would have tried to see Lindsey's side of things."

"Melanie and I are Jenny's parents, not Lindsey. There shouldn't even be a question about visitation. She left the marriage. She decided to move back here without checking with Melanie first. She-"

"Oh I'm so sorry, Michael. I didn't realize that marriage was a short word for maximum security prison. What I also find amazing is that you and Melanie forget that if it wasn't for Lindsey, Jenny
would be a lot worse off. You two sure as hell couldn't find the time to raise her. You with your
gallivanting all over the globe following Ben and everything with Melanie is and always has been
centered on her career. In truth Lindsey IS much more of a parent to that little girl than the two of
you but no...your pride can't let you acknowledge that, can it?" After saying her piece, Debbie
moved off into the kitchen to clean up the breakfast dishes before it was time for her to head to work.
Whereas Michael had no choice but to sit and digest all of Debbie's words.

Justin walked into the conference room relieved to have finally found Lindsey. It wasn't that he was
worried she was going to miss the meeting. In truth, he had initially had reservations about her
working for him because of their shared history and entwined present. But it had turned out that
Lindsey had been a godsend as his personal assistant. She knew what needed to be done in all facets
and it took some of the pressure off of him with running the day-to-day operations of JT Designs.
Since buying the former Bloom Gallery, Lindsey and he had managed with the help of Jennifer, to
renovate and come up with new ideas on the set up of the gallery. It helped that she had an artist eye
and could catch Justin's vision easily. With her at his side he had no doubt that the JTK Bloom
Gallery would be as successful and maintain its place as the leading gallery of Pittsburgh.

"What's on your mind, Lindz?" He asked while sliding a chair out and sitting next to her. He was a
little bothered by the deer in headlights look in her eyes.

"Nothing," she said and then revised it once she noticed the all-knowing look. "Everything."

Justin laughed. "Wow, you're a veritable fount of information this morning."

Lindsey chuckled in return. "Well I do my best."

" No, seriously, Lindz. What's bothering you? I know you've received your degree from the 'Brian
Kinney School of How to Separate Business from Personal Feelings' but this is just us and the
meeting hasn't started yet. So what's up?"

He watched her gagging his sincerity and finally nodded before she spoke. "I'm a little worried about
the hearing this afternoon. I keep hoping that somehow Mel and Michael will have a change of heart
and not go through with this. No one in a custody fight stays clean but I just want to visit JR. She
along with Gus, have been my entire existence until recently. I don't think the fact that I'm not a
biological parent should negate the fact that I am her mother just as much as Melanie is."
Justin nodded in agreement. "I don't think you have anything to worry about, Lindz. Anyone who has eyes to see and ears to hear can tell how much you love that little girl. I think Melanie's pride is calling the shots with this one."

"You're right is about pride but ultimately I'm afraid that Jenny's going to suffer for it. I can't understand what is so difficult about Melanie moving back here. Jenny hates Toronto. Gus and I hated Toronto although we all tried to make the best of our situation. I'm not trying to take anything away from Michael nor Melanie but that's the way they make it sound. Michael is just in it to say he is Jenny's father which I think is bullshit but you know... As far as Melanie, I think she is using Jenny as a pawn to get me to do exactly what she wants. I'm not going to but then there is Jenny. How could I not do everything in my power to stay apart of her life? She is for all intents and purposes just as much my child as Gus is regardless of the fact I didn't give birth to her." She swiped at a tear and Justin's heart nearly broke. He reached out to take her hand.

"Lindz, I don't want you to worry about this. We will figure something out if an amicable arrangement can't be reached today. Regardless of everything and the little fights we have amongst ourselves, we're all still family. Although I shudder to consider Michael Novotny family in any way."

That earned a laugh from Lindsey. "You know what that's about."

"Yeah I do. He wants to be the one on Brian's lap but that position is already filled and will be filled again today."

"Promises, promises," Brian said coming through the conference room doorway. Justin got up to kiss him hello as Lindsey sat in the chair laughing. He held Justin around the waist nuzzling at the sweet spot behind his ear. Letting him go, Brian took his place at the head of the table with Justin resuming his seat by Lindsey's side. "I've had a very interesting meeting prior to coming here."

"Oh? New account?" Lindsey asked.

"Not exactly," Brian responded. "I was actually trying to lay out all the reasons that Melanie should move back to Pittsburgh."

"I take it she wasn't happy with your recommendations," Lindsey said feeling a fresh round of tears forming but determined to hold them back. Brian would be too unnerved and it would cause him to yell. She was already a bundle of nerves and knew she couldn't take that.
"No she wasn't exactly happy with my suggestions but I think she'll have to take each one of them into consideration before the hearing this afternoon. I'll tell her that I would even be willing to pay the relocation costs and help her enroll in school to get her started."

Justin and Lindsey's mouth gaped open but it was Justin who spoke. "Who are you and what have you done with Brian Kinney?"

Brian chuckled remembering hearing that from his partner not too long ago. "Don't worry, Sunshine, I'm still me. The invasion of the body snatchers hasn't happened yet."

"That's rather generous of you, Brian but why would you do that?" Lindsey asked. "I mean it's no secret that the two of you really can't stand each other. She does everything to undermine your role in Gus' life and our lives in general not to mention blaming you for everything that's happened between she and I. Why would you want to help her establish herself here?"

Brian nodded at everything Lindsey said but his reason was quite simple and the most important to him. "Jenny and Gus are my reasons. I don't give a shit what happens between you two. You're adults but JR and Gus are different. They are siblings no matter that they aren't blood related. They are life related. Both of you know how I grew up although you don't know the full story and for this you don't need to. What you do need to know is that I would never wish the feelings I had during that time on any kid especially not Jenny and Gus. So that's why I'm offering that to Melanie. No child should grow up in misery at the hands of their parents."

Justin couldn't help the bright smile that lit his face when listening to Brian. He knew from many conversations with Brian that he would try to solve the problem even though he'd told Justin he wouldn't. It was one of the things he loved most about Brian although if Justin ever mentioned how generous Brian really was he would probably be drawn and quartered. Lindsey however, had no such perplexity.

"You really are amazing, Brian and I can't thank you enough for this. I hope she sees the wisdom and value in what you're offering and takes the deal."

"It's an investment. Hopefully she's as smart as she thinks she is and does, too."

"That will only leave the problem of Michael to deal with."

Brian sighed. "Leave Michael to me. There are some things only one father can say to another one
and thanks to your uterus, Lindz, that leaves you out of it. I'll have Cynthia invite him to lunch after the hearing this afternoon."

"Why after?" Justin asked for both him and Lindsey.

"We need to know what Melanie has decided before I talk to him."

"Wait-you're going?" Lindsey.

Taking a page out of Justin's book, he said, "Well duh...how can I make the offer if I'm not there? Besides, my presence will also keep Michael in line towards you. He's been a bit of a fucking brat lately."

"More like a twat," Justin mumbled but Brian heard him and nodded.

"However true that is, Sunshine, he still has to be reasoned with. He wanted my attention so I'll give it to him even if he doesn't like the end results." Brian shrugged at the last which Justin nodded to in return.

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As Brian finished his last statement, Cynthia, Ted, Jennifer and surprisingly Myrna filed into the conference room. The latter flitted over to Justin and Brian, giving a kiss on the cheek to the former and a wink to the latter. Brian, who had liked her instantly when they were meeting over SKYPE, now fell in love with the five-foot-four inch dynamo and understood instantly why Justin was so enamored of her.

"When did you get in and how long are you here for?" Justin asked her.

"It's nice to see you, too." She chuckled then grew serious. "I got in late last night and I've decided to stick around for awhile especially since I fired my assistant."

"You actually got rid of that queen? Has the Apocalypse occurred and I didn't know it?"
Myrna laughed and shook her head. "It turns out that someone from one of the known threats to your finances had managed to build a relationship with him through another of my clients. You remember David Cotton?"

"Yeah, I remember him. Uptight asshole but relatively harmless so what happened?"

"You might want to sit down for this one, Justin."

"I would rather stand," he said already feeling his hackles rising.

She nodded then taking a deep breath continued. "Perhaps I should wait for Aurora and Daniel to come in before explaining all this."

Brian cut in then. "No just tell us now. Colby is on his way and it's best that we have a clear understanding of what you found. Don't worry, we can handle it." He grabbed Justin's right hand feeling the tension already begin in the muscles.

"Okay. You already know that this whole business with your finances is personal. Well my jackass former assistant tried to access your file. I'm glad that you advised me when we first met to put it on a separate network. However there was some information he was able to get hold of and passed the information on to Daniel Cotton's associate. So Samuel Hobbs, Junior has more information than he should about you. He knows that you own JT Designs, JTK Bloom Gallery and newly opened TK Properties."

"That's all public knowledge so I'm not quite following," Justin said.

"He knows that the last two are also owned by Brian Kinney. There are certain rumors floating about in New York about Babylon and the explosion that happened there some years ago. Some people suspect that the Hobbs family helped the person responsible to escape prosecution."

"So you think whoever the ass hat was would try something like that again?" Brian asked.

"More than likely," Myrna confirmed. "The good news is that there isn't a statute of limitations on murder and eight people died that night. The bad news is that no one knows who's responsible."
"There's more isn't there?" That question came from Lindsey. Ted and Cynthia also sat on the edge of their seats listening avidly to the exchange.

"Yeah. There is unfortunately. A certain former police chief recently got sprung from federal prison and has moved back to Pittsburgh. He is currently staying at his good friend's house per Aurora. We already know that Craig Taylor is involved but we don't know the extent."

"Just the fact that he's involved in this at all is a disgrace," Jennifer chimed in.

"There is also the fact that Brian and Justin hold the deed to the building where Taylor Electronics is located. It was mixed in with one of the property companies we just took over and merged with our own." Ted added.

Myrna again nodded in agreement. "So there are two ways you can play this hand, Brian and Justin. Either you can evict him which will of course incur his wrath."

"Well we already have that, don't we." Justin said sardonically. "The other option is to let him stay and see where all this leads. That is what you were going to say, right?"

"That's exactly right. The good thing is that you actually have the upper hand over Craig Taylor. You could demand that he stop trying to undermine your businesses in exchange for his own or you could wait and find out what he's up to with the Hobbs family and Stockwell."

Aurora and Quinn walked into the meeting. After exchanging greetings with everyone assembled and being brought up to speed on the conversation thus far, Aurora spoke for she and Quinn. "The thing is we don't know how far into this Craig is. We don't know what his motive would be."

"I can answer that," Jennifer said. "Craig blames Brian for 'turning our son gay' which is absolutely ridiculous. Justin always knew he was not into girls. The other problem Craig has is that he blames Justin for breaking up our marriage which is also ridiculous. He was unfaithful so really once Justin came out and he decided that Justin had no place in our family, there was really no reason to stay. He is currently unhappy with the success of Brian and Justin and somehow feels that payback is due especially since people have long memories. They remember when he had Justin arrested during a peaceful protest to stop Proposition 14 some ten years ago. His business has since fallen off considerably. So much so that if Molly hadn't won a partial scholarship to Dartmouth, Craig wouldn't have been able to pay the outstanding balance of the tuition. Molly keeps up their relationship solely for her little brother and for no other reason. Whenever Justin and Brian are mentioned he is known
to rant and rave about how unjust it is that he, a God-fearing man has a harder time than those "unrighteous fags." Never mind that one of the people he speaks of is his firstborn child who is happy with his life. He hates Brian and he hates what Justin has become—his words not mine, Honey—and can’t stomach the fact that they are successful or the fact that I am now married to Tucker, operate a successful business and am happy. He is also disappointed that Molly has chosen her career over raising a family. You don’t even want to know who he advocated her marrying. He is a blatant homophobe and he is extremely bitter; a truly dangerous combination."

"So again, guys, it's all in your court how you want to play this out," Myrna said. "If it were me, I would evict him and let the chips fall where they may."

"I agree with you, Myrna," Brian said. "But their son is only about seven and his wife is a former debutante."

"More like a twit," Jennifer said causing a sudden burst of laughter throughout the room.

Brian smiled. "I certainly agree with your assessment, Mother Taylor but if we leave him without any income that kid will suffer. No matter how much I hate him, I can't abide that so we have to come up with another option."

"I'm honestly more concerned with how to stop Samuel Hobbs and the unknown threat there. If what they say is true about the explosion, how can we protect our businesses and residents from a repeat occurrence? We can't." Justin said.

"Debbie told me that Carl was going to see the new Police Chief this morning. Maybe he'll have some insight of what to do," Jennifer informed the group.

"But he doesn't have all the information we just acquired."

"No but one of Carl's former associates is the head of our security for Kinnetik, Corp. Everett Hamilton has been with us for the last six years and has always done well by us. So between Everett, Carl and Tony, I think the security portion should be well handled." Brian squeezed Justin's right hand in reassurance. He was pleased to note the action calmed Justin down immediately. It wasn't that Justin was afraid for himself or for Brian but the others involved both directly and indirectly. "Theodore, I need you to work the security details into each of the property expenses and let me know the final figures. Also I need you to run me figures for a relocation from Toronto and some law school information as well. Jennifer, how close is Molly to finishing her degree?"
"This is the last semester and then she is finished. She'll be graduating in January."

"I need her to talk to the Dean of the degree program she's in to find out if there is a way to accelerate the program. I don't trust Craig farther than I can spit."

"Wait...you don't think he would harm her do you?"

He shook his head. "I don't but I'm pretty sure the people he is currently playing nice with won't have any problems doing so. I will not have her or anyone else being used as a pawn in this sick twisted game." Everyone heard the determination in Brian's voice and the same look registered on Justin's.

"Have you two been able to make heads or tails-no pun intended-of the situation within the art department yet?" Cynthia asked.

Justin smiled brightly at her innuendo. "Yes. Brian and I discussed it this morning on the way in. In fact we think the idea will actually benefit the entire company as opposed to just the Art Department. It will also benefit the gallery and give Jennifer some much needed assistance where TK Properties is concerned. Brian and I decided that the best way to handle the situation within the art department is to take the top three interns from PIFA and give Fred charge over all the interns within the building thus creating another department and title. He would keep his current salary but he would be out of Charles' way on the creative side. Since we hired him for his management skills it shouldn't be a problem. We'll also be looking at the top five students from Carnegie Mellon as well in their chosen fields as long as it's beneficial to Kinnetik such as Accounting and Marketing. These particular students should already be on scholarships so that the money we give them can be put to use for when they graduate and need housing. We already fund several scholarships and grants for the under-served in the community through the Vic Grassi Foundation, so this is strictly as life experience for these students. Also if they do well, we will offer to keep them on after graduation if that's what they want. They will also be under Fred's direct supervision. Because this is a customized boutique operation, I think that even if they choose to go somewhere else, it's valuable learning experience. Lindsey, I would want third year art students to work the floor of the gallery and the fourth year students to learn management skills in the gallery. These are lessons I had to pretty much learn on my own but it never hurts to pay it forward. So really we would need a total of six. Once you come up with a short list, we'll decide together."

"Cynthia and Ted, does this work for you?" Brian asked them.

"It does," Cynthia answered. "I had to break up another disagreement before this meeting so the sooner we can get this done, the better for me."
"Myrna, I would need you to draw up specific non-disclosure agreements for these students. I would really like it if they aren't allowed to even discuss that they are working for Kinnetik, Corp. or any of the subsidiaries. Based on the current situation in mine and Justin's personal lives and with the incessant pain in the ass, Kip Thomas hanging around still trying to gather information, I don't want them to be put in an awkward place."

"That won't be a problem, Brian. I can have those to you by the end of the week."

"Good because I would like this program started by next week before Cynthia enters kick ass mode. Ted, Justin and I have seen that mode and we're not anxious for a repeat performance. By the way, Cyn, can you and Ted fill Colby in when he arrives? I was supposed to meet with him this afternoon but I'm going with Lindsey." She nodded her assent and threw him a understanding look stamped with her approval. Cynthia knew what Lindsey would be up against having to face Melanie Marcus and Michael Novotny. They were never a catalyst for patience but together they would push Lindsey over the edge and she would automatically lose, lawyer present or not.

The meeting adjourned with Lindsey and Brian heading to the hearing to decide Jenny Rebecca's fate. Justin headed over to the diner to meet with Emmett about "Commitment Weekend" and Jennifer and Aurora headed to Vittorio's for lunch to renew their acquaintance. Ted and Cynthia left the meeting feeling like a lot was accomplished. The only one mildly worried was Daniel Quinn. Mark Townsend had tried the accounts again that morning and although he had heard from Colby Butler directly, Daniel knew Mark was drawing closer to breaking the encryption codes. He sent up a silent prayer as he stepped into the sunshine that everything would work out.

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Ethan emerged from the liquor store when he spotted Justin walking into Liberty Diner. Brian wasn't with him so he thought it would be a perfect chance to make his case of why he and Ethan should resume their relationship. Cutting across traffic he dodged several cars in his quest to get there before Justin had a chance to engage in conversation with someone else. He deserved all of Justin's attention not just some.

Stepping into the diner, he noticed that Kiki the waitress had just finished taking Justin's order and moved silently through the thrum of patrons leaving. "Well this is a nice surprise," he said to Justin, inviting himself to the other side of the empty booth. Justin continued to look over the documents in front of him.

"For whom is it nice, Ethan? Certainly not me."

He deliberately ignored the abrasive remark Justin made, determined to maintain control and to make Justin want him back. "I see your guard dog isn't with you today. Are you expecting him?" Justin looked up at him then. Good.

"If you mean Brian then let me assure you first that he is anything but a dog. You, however, are a bitch. Now that I have that comparison out of the way, what do you want?"
"I want to talk with you."

"Well then start talking and make it fast. I'm meeting someone I actually want to speak with for lunch."

Ethan could feel his blood begin to boil at Justin's dismissive words but he was determined to remain cool. "I want to know why you are with Brian instead of me."

Justin sighed and huffed out a decidedly annoyed breath. "I thought this was explained thoroughly the last time, Ethan. You and I have been finished for many years. Move the fuck on. I have and am extremely happy with my decision to do so. You would think the fact that I erased every single one of your numerous text messages before bothering to answer them would have told you all that you needed to know. I am NOT interested. I am, for all intents and purposes, MARRIED to the man who has always held my heart in the palm of his hand and have been in my world since I was seventeen. You were an affair; one mistake in a long line which I cannot erase no matter how much I would like to. I cannot be any plainer than that.

Just then, Justin was saved from saying anything else but he knew trouble was on the horizon. Debbie came over to say hello and was surprised to see Ethan. That could be explained but it was the triumphant, arrogant and malicious look on Michael Novotny's face which caused Justin's heart to beat hard. Fortunately, Emmett came in behind them and he too stopped short when he spotted Ethan.

Floating over to where Justin sat, he leaned down and kissed his cheek. "Hey, Sweetie. Everything okay?"

Justin visibly relaxed. "Everything is fine, Em. Ethan was just leaving, weren't you?"

Ethan shifted out of the booth, squeezing past Emmett and Debbie. Michael still stood at the end of the counter looking smugly at Justin. "This isn't over Justin. I want you back and I will do whatever it takes to have you."

"There is nothing you can possibly do, Ethan. Now for the last time, leave me the fuck alone."

Ethan exited the building forming thoughts and plans when a voice called "Hey" behind him. Ethan tried his best to place the familiar face but was unable to at that moment.

"Do I know you?" Ethan asked.

"Probably not directly or you don't remember me. Debbie is my mom. I'm Michael Novotny. I couldn't help but see you with Justin."

"Yes. What of it?"

"What was that about?"

"Why does it concern you?" Ethan had turned to walk again but Michael wouldn't give up.

"He just happens to be involved with my best friend."

"Brian Kinney is your best friend?" Ethan began to walk a little faster.

"Yeah since we were fourteen. Look, I have a proposition for you but this has to stay between us. I don't want them together and apparently neither do you."
Ethan stopped walking suddenly interested in what Michael had to say. "So what are you proposing? Justin has made it clear that nothing and no one is separating them."

"Do you drive?"

"Yes I do but what does that have to do with it?"

Digging into his pocket he pulled out the small notebook he usually carried and a pen. "I want you to be at this address on Friday night at eight-thirty. Don't be late and wear a suit. And for the love of God, do something with your hair and shave. Oh and bring your violin. I think it will be a nice surprise for Justin."

"You really think so?"

"Oh I know so. See you." Michael left Ethan to walk home then while humming Paganini's Cantabile in D major.

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"Are you sure everything is okay, Baby?" Emmett asked. He had walked into the diner to see Justin more than a little agitated by Ethan Gold's presence. "What the fuck was he doing here anyway?"

"I wish to God I knew, Em. He ran into Brian and I the other week when around when I'd comeback from Rochester I think. I told him then that there was no fucking way we were ever going to get back together. He was with Cody and frankly I was glad they found each other. I was kinda hoping Cody would talk some sense into Ethan. Guess I was wrong there, huh?"

Debbie had come back to the table just then. "You know, Sunshine, if he's a problem I could probably have him banned."

"As much as I relish the thought of never seeing him again, he's still gotta eat and if memory serves me correctly, he doesn't live too far from here." Justin let out a deep sigh. "No I just need to tell Brian about it which is what we agreed on. If I don't with everything else happening around us, he'll freak
out and that is the absolute last thing I need or want right now."

"Wait what do you mean ‘with everything else going on’? Everything is alright with the two of you isn't it?" Debbie asked sincerely.

"Yeah, Deb everything is fine. Brian and I are as tight and committed as we've ever been and that's not going to change. It's just business and this weekend and Mel and Lindz situation." Justin shrugged. "It's just a lot to deal with all at once but you know Brian and I. We'll always survive it."

"Yeah, I know you will, Honey. Two things the both of you have is guts and balls. Life is messy but you both will survive as you've been doing...beautifully." She pinched Justin's cheek like she used to when he was a kid working at the diner. It almost seemed like a lifetime ago and the gesture was something he really needed in that moment.

"Aww thanks, Deb. I needed to hear that just now." Picking up his phone, he left Brian a quick voice message followed up by a more in depth text message while Emmett and Debbie engaged in conversation. "So Emmett, have you come up with anything for this weekend yet?"

Have you decided what you wanted?"

"Since everyone except a few are staying over for the whole weekend, I figured we could do the vows just before dinner so I would like everyone formally attired. Saturday is mostly for family, business associates and a few of Gus' friends and parents from school so it's casual. Really just an indoor house party especially since it's so close to the holidays. The pool and hot tub will be available which makes me especially happy that we decided on enclosing it even before I left for New York. I'm glad Brian followed through with it." He smiled softly remembering their first trip to Britin even though they held both bitter and sweet memories for him. They planned and redesigned; talked about the future and made love. Shaking himself out of the past, he continued, "The game rooms and bar downstairs will also be available as well as the bowling alley. Thank God the house is big enough. By Sunday all who don't live at Britin should be gone by then except those who Brian and I have a meeting with on Monday morning. Bethany Chambers and Sharlene Brandt, the owners of Avlossa, have a meeting on Thursday and Friday evening with Vanguard so it seemed best to have them join the festivities over the weekend. I met them briefly when I was in Rochester last. They reminded me of Mel and Lindz in the early days when I first met them. Anyway, after that meeting the house will once again be an empty nest. Have you received everyone's RSVP?"

Emmett nodded. "First, I really hope you guys land Avlossa. Drewsie is partial of course to their mens line while I go back and forth. Their name means ‘Fire Off’ and believe me their clothes bring the fire and give much attitude. They're sexy, orgasmic even, for a fashion guru such as myself and they can go from the Boardroom to the Ballroom without batting an eyelash. We won't even speak about their casual and club gear, Sweetie, or I might go into raptures. Anyway back to your non-
nuptials, surprisingly everyone responded almost immediately. For Friday, the count is about twenty-five but I'll prepare for fifty anyway plus staff. For Saturday, we're looking at about eighty people but I'll prepare for one hundred and twenty. You never know with these types of gatherings and Sunday the same amount as Friday. Have you and Brian decided what you're wearing?"

Justin laughed. "If you think we're wearing matching white suits you're sorely mistaken."

"Brian will probably wear his standard Armani tux which I must admit he looks damn hot in but what about you, Sweetie?"

"I guess I'll figure it out right before it happens. Off the top of my head it will probably be the midnight blue Armani. It holds a special place in my heart and it's only two years old but I've only worn it once."

"You're sure it still fits?"

"It should but why wouldn't it?"

"Now Justin, don't take this the wrong way but Godiva always used to say she could tell when someone's been riding the top a bit too much lately."

Justin felt his cheeks get hot but he couldn't help but laugh out loud at the insinuation. "Well what can I say except that Brian is my very favorite stallion." That ushered in a whole new set of laughter from Emmett and Justin.

"Well tell him to put your bottom on the bottom for the remainder of the week and definitely try the suit on tonight so that we have time to set the alterations if necessary."

Justin nodded as he and Emmett took care of other little details. Everything was going to be suave and elegant just as the-for lack of a better term-grooms themselves. It was definitely going to be a celebration no one could forget.

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As Brian parked the car at the courthouse, Lindsey was assailed by memories. Back then her life was pretty much in shambles thanks to one ill-advised indiscretion in the form of Sam Auerbach. Brian had warned Lindsey not to tell Melanie when she confided in him about the situation and the events surrounding the affair. He didn't tell her to lie; just to withhold the truth because in the grand scheme of things it was irrelevant. Sadly, Sam came to the house to ask Lindsey to run away with him to Milan and although she told him no, she couldn't deny that the offer was tempting. But she remembered that the life she chose was waiting for her on the other side of the door. Unfortunately Melanie had witnessed the entire scene and confronted her the next day before her Lamaze class. Melanie said that although she couldn't hear the words spoken, their body language said everything. Things between them went in a downward spiral from there. Melanie used Lindsey as a verbal punching bag and Lindsey started not to care that she was. It took the bombing of Babylon for them to get their shit together and they had for ten years. But it was proof that once something is dead, sometimes it's best not to revive it. Lindsey also faced another hard truth in that moment. She would never stop loving Melanie; she just learned to love and value herself more than Melanie and learning that life lesson a little too late, it my cost her Jenny Rebecca.

"Relax, Wendy," Brian said softly. "I'm right here with you."

"I know, Peter. You've always been." She squeezed his hand tightly as they walked into the building.

Brian pushed Lindsey forward a bit as he felt his cell phone vibrate. "Go on, I'll catch up." Dialing into his voice mail, he skipped over the voice mails from Cynthia and Ted knowing that he would have to deal with whatever the situation when he got back to the office anyway. The third message was from Justin advising him to check his text message for a full accounting of Ethan showing up at the diner. He ended the call by reassuring Brian that he loved him as he always did. There was no need to doubt Justin's ability to know his own heart anymore. He'd proven it to Brian in more than one way over the years and even in his willingness to let him go before agreeing to stay in the Pitts and share his life as Justin Taylor-Kinney. Brian couldn't help but chuckle and mentally marvel at the way things had changed between them. Touching the 'close' app on the touch screen, Brian immediately saw the message icon lit and tapped it. The first in the row was Justin's.

Hey, Stud. There are two things you should know: First, I love you. We made an agreement-a vow-to be honest about things which bother us and so here I am...being completely honest and open. I see no reason to disregard that even knowing that you won't like what the other thing I have to say is. So here it goes...

The second thing: While I was sitting here at the diner (I'm just now beginning my meeting with Em to set everything up for the weekend), Ethan approached me. I have no idea why or how he knew I was here. I think it must have been planned or something because he didn't order anything which struck me as a little strange. Anyway, he pestered and annoyed me but Deb, Emmett and of course Mikey walked in while I was trying to get rid of him. The former two were concerned and rightfully so. Ethan is a persistent pain in my ass. However, Michael didn't say anything but I know you'll hear about this so as per OUR agreement sealed with lots of kissing, loads of sex and quite possibly the hottest blow job you've had in your life (your words, not mine), I'm letting you know. No surprises but most of all NOTHING to be alarmed about. I am exactly where I want to be but most of all I'm
Brian read the message twice more before moving toward the room where the hearing was to be held. He was glad that Justin had kept his word and gave full-disclosure. It wasn't that Brian was worried about him straying. That was their shared past. But he didn't like to hear things which were a surprise to him especially coming from Michael who seemed more determined than before to split Brian and Justin up. Brian wondered if there would ever come a time when Mikey would realize that his efforts were futile. He heard the clacking of heels behind him and knew they could only belong to Melanie Marcus. Turning slowly she stopped short before she ran smack into him.

"What the fuck are you doing here?"

"Now geez, Mel is that anyway to treat me after our little talk this morning. I wasn't rude then and I refuse to be an asshole now. So hello, Mel. May I have a word with you?"

"Brian, I'm going to be late," she began to protest.

"No you won't. It will only take a minute or five I promise and I want to get this said before Michael gets here."

"Michael? What's he got to do with anything?"

"Outside of being Jenny's father that is my point EXACTLY but he does love to interfere." Taking her elbow, he pulled her off to the side where he could keep a watch on the main entrance but she could focus solely on him. "I have a business proposition for you directly related to our conversation this morning." He laid out his offer to pay her moving and living expenses along with the tuition for the classes as long as she was willing to move back to Pittsburgh and be reasonable in regards to visitation for Lindsey, Gus and Jenny.

Melanie was stunned silent briefly before finding her voice again. "Why would you do that, Brian? Not that I'm not grateful but what do you want in return?"

"God haven't you been listening? I want for Lindz, Gus and Jenny to be happy. If this makes you happy in some small way then so be it although it is not my intention. I'm perfectly fine hating you but not at the expense of the kids. Think about it for a few while we get through the hearing. If need be talk it over briefly with your attorney but understand this: the offer is in no way, shape or form coming from Lindsey but from Justin and I."
"Justin? What's he got to do with it?"

"Melanie you're a smart woman and able to figure out what some, meaning Michael, has not. Justin and I are not only business partners but life partners. He's just as financially stable as I am. More importantly he agrees with the plan I came up with. He and I both want what's best for Gus and Jenny. They are the only two that matter in this. If that means we help you, then again so be it." He saw Michael rushing up the hall. "We better get in there and remember this has to be your decision alone. You can't look to Michael to do what's best for you and your daughter. This has to be good old-fashion, selfish Mel's decision."

Melanie rushed passed him into the conference room at the same time her attorney arrived. As Brian suggested she began to lay out his offer and advised that the offer came from Brian as Gus' father, not Lindsey.

Meanwhile outside the conference room he was asked what he was doing there again by Mikey. It took a lot for him to be civil in lieu of Justin's text message but if there was one thing Jack Kinney had taught him (besides taking punches and surviving beautifully in spite of them), it was to never let the opponent see the hand dealt. With that in mind, Brian raised his eyebrow accompanied by his customary smirk and said, "Why Michael, hello to you, too."

Michael smiled back, the tension leaving his shoulders. "Seriously, what are you doing here, Brian? This is a hearing for Jenny's parents."

"I'm well aware of that but as Gus' father I have a vested interest in hearing all sides to this. What you all do today affects him and I have to be ready to answer any questions he may have."

"Really? Like you would actually do that? You're hardly a father, Brian."

Brian mentally took a deep breath while staring blankly at someone who was supposed to know him so fucking well. Plastering on a smile he responded. "Actually Michael I am very much in Gus' life as I am in JR's. If you doubt what I am saying to you, you should probably pay attention to Lindsey's lawyer who also has the accounting of the child support I pay which, wouldn't you know, it covers your daughter, too. You'll be amazed at what you find out during this hearing. Come on, Mikey. I'm going in."

Brian moved passed him, leaving Michael looking dewy-eyed and confused. As he sat next to Lindsey, he gave her an imperceptible nod to let her know that he'd spoken with Melanie and that the
offer is on the table. He watched the tension once again leave her body before it ratcheted up again with the entrance of the Court appointed Referee, Miranda Cleaver. Each of the occupants of the room were required to give their names and addresses for the transcript of the hearing. Melanie’s attorney and former partner represented both hers and Michael's interests while Bill handled Lindsey's. When the official questioned Brian's involvement in the case he plainly stated what he'd told Michael in the hallway and he was allowed to stay which immediately put Lindsey at ease again. Marty Rabinowitz stated that originally his client was inclined to keep her residence in Toronto but upon further review and the offer of assistance from Mr. Kinney, she'd decided that it was in her daughter's best interests to relocate to Pittsburgh the following week. Michael, who had not been informed of the change in circumstances was the only voice of objection to Melanie's decision.

"I thought you said that you would rather die before you let Brian influence your decision, Mel."

"This is not as cut and dry as all that, Michael. If I move here, we all can be apart of Jenny's life and like it or not, that includes Brian as he is Gus' father. You'll have your time with her which should be easier when you're in town and maybe you'll be able to pay more in support since you won't have to worry about a plane ticket to Canada. Lindsey and Gus can stay connected with her and I'll be able to get re-licensed to practice law here in Pennsylvania. It's a win-win for all of us, Michael."

"It's not Brian I'm necessarily worried about but his twink boyfriend's influence over our daughter."

Lindsey chimed in as Brian just looked. "Really, Michael, Justin wouldn't do anything to harm JR and you know it."

"I know no such thing. Just look what he's done to Brian."

"I'm sorry what exactly has he done to me, Michael?" Brian couldn't help but ask the question. For some reason he just needed to hear the ignorance aloud. My God, I think Justin has turned me into a masochist since I suddenly crave hearing the pain of stupidity. He mentally chuckled at the thought before tuning in to the "Dumb Ass Mikey Show."

"...brainwashed you, took from you and a host of other things that shouldn't be mentioned in here." Great now we have the "Repetitive Dumb Ass Mikey Show."

Before Brian could answer Michael, Melanie chimed in. "Michael, you are being completely unreasonable and judgmental. For the record, Justin has been to our home on Toronto more than you have and he was always polite and kind to both of the kids. You only see JR once a year but no one at this table is assassinating your character. Brian actually could, you know, but he hasn't. He has paid thousands in child support even over what he and Lindsey agreed upon to make up a large part
of what you couldn't or wouldn't do. So yes, I will take him up on his offer because it's what's best for everyone involved. And Justin isn't going anywhere, Michael, so you may as well get used to it."

"I'm her father and I should get a say about who she can be around." "The Arrogant, Repetitive, Dumb Ass Mikey Show."

"Really, Michael? You have no trouble with Ben being around your daughter yet he poses much more of a danger than Justin does."

"Why is that, Mr. Kinney?" the court referee asked.

"You want to tell her or should I, Mikey? Apparently you have forgotten one very important lesson about courts and hearings, Michael. No one stays clean, not even you. So since you want to throw dirt which has nothing to do with the case at large, would you like to tell her?" Brian would never have pushed Michael off the Kinney cliff except he was asking to be dropped from the highest peak of Mount St. Kinney.

Michael narrowed his eyes at Brian who sat there expressionless. "My partner is HIV positive and has been for more than ten years. Currently he is doing well."

"Does Justin ..."

"Taylor. His name is Justin Taylor, ma'am and he is twelve years my junior which seems to be Mr. Novotny's biggest problem. He and I have been involved since he was seventeen, which is the age of legal consent in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. That's information for the man at the end of the table who would probably have bought that up next. We were in an on again-off again relationship for the past fifteen years-ten of those fifteen years was while he was building his career as a successful artist and now owns several business both with me and apart from me. His record is public knowledge. He has had only two run ins with the law. The first was fifteen years ago when he was bashed and his attacker got off with community service. The second was five years later outside his father's electronics store during a peaceful protest against anti-gay legislature; a piece of filth that would have denied each of us rights to even have this meeting. As far as the man himself: He's young, blond, gorgeous with blue eyes, intelligent, in love with me, disease free and has a great ass. So again, Michael, how is Justin a danger to JR?"

Silence. Ah finally the main event of" The Petulant and Churlish, Arrogant and Repetitive Dumb Ass Mikey Show." I knew it would begin sometime."
Referee Cleaver cleared her throat of a distinct chuckle before speaking. "I am familiar with Mr. Taylor's portfolio, Mr. Kinney and I thank you for your candor. As far as this case goes, I think it was generous of you to come up with an amicable solution which would help Ms. Marcus to provide the best for her child while seeing to her own needs instead of the other way around. In future, Mr. Novotny, I hope you can put aside whatever unfounded reservations you have and simply view things from your daughter's standpoint. It is hard enough being bounced between three homes without the added drama of slanderous accusations. Now I think it's best that we come up with a schedule which will benefit the three parents."

"If it's all the same to you, Referee Cleaver, perhaps it's best to wait a bit before formalizing a set schedule. With Ms. Marcus' eventual relocation and school registration it may be near impossible to make it work on such short notice," Lindsey's attorney, Bill Eldridge, spoke up quickly to take the pressure off of his client and Ms. Marcus who was in the mood to try for a solution.

"Fine Mr. Eldridge, if Ms. Petersen and Mr. Novotny are inclined to wait, we can reconvene in one month's time. In the meantime, Ms. Marcus, Ms. Petersen and Mr. Novotny, Jenny must be registered for school. Although she is in a home tutoring situation right now, it is still best to get her acclimated to how things work here in Pittsburgh as I imagine they work a bit differently than in Toronto. She's already missed a little over a month of school as it is and then there are the placement tests to get through. Have you decided which address to use?"

Brian said, "If I may make a suggestion to all three parents. Since Gus is attending St. James, although I wish to God he wasn't for obvious reasons, perhaps it's best to use the loft's address until Melanie can get a stable address of her own as the primary parent on file."

"I don't have any objections," Lindsey quickly stated as did Melanie. They turned to look at Michael who sat there with his arms folded and vibrating with impotent frustration.

"Yeah. Fine. Whatever," is all he said. The three chose to ignore him from that point on.

It was decided that Jenny would spend the following week with Lindsey who would start the process of getting J.R. registered while Melanie returned to Toronto to pack up the house along with taking care of other necessary things in order to make a clean break with Canada. Although things would never be the same as they were between Melanie and Lindsey they were at least willing to try and be friendly toward each other for the sakes of Gus and Jenny. Michael was still silently fuming when the hearing adjourned and angrily stomped out into the hallway. By the time the other three emerged from the conference room, they could already see he had reached the main entrance. None called out to stop him.

"I thought you were going to invite him to lunch," Lindsey said.
Brian shook his head. "That was before he insulted me both out here before the hearing and then during it. If we didn't have to invite him to the dinner and festivities over the weekend for Deb and Ben's sakes, Justin and I wouldn't."

"Why would you have to, Brian? I'm sure Deb would understand," Melanie said, feeling much lighter than she had in weeks.

Brian sighed deeply and shook his head. "No she wouldn't. It's clear that Mikey is pushing for me to make a choice and I've already made it."

Lindsey leaned in closer to him, giving support without acknowledging it. "We know, Brian and honestly it's a damn good one. Don't fuck it up."

When they were sure that Michael was on his way wherever he was going, only then did the three of them exit the building.

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No doubt Michael was fuming all the way to the bus stop, then on the bus and on to pay a visit to his store, Red Cape Comics. The nerve of Brian to compare Ben to Justin. Ben was noble and honorable and decent. He was a mature man unlike the trick turned permanent pain in the ass, Justin. Ben was perfect whereas Justin was little better than a prostitute trying to dupe Brian out of everything he'd worked for over the years. A blond bubble-butt trick could never compare in any way, shape or form to Benjamin Bruckner. Justin should have come with a glaring red sign that flashed "WARNING!"

In his pique, Michael conveniently forgot that had it not been for said trick, Red Cape Comics would have gone under many, many times over the years. Thanks to the drawings in the notorious and now classic Rage Comic Books, the residuals received exceeded the revenue bought in by sales five times over every single month. The funny thing was that Brian had talked Justin into continuing to do the comics for a number of years even after he left for New York, which resulted in a failed movie deal but boosted both Justin and Michael notoriety as the creators of Rage to the upper echelons of Comic Cons across the globe. Although Justin never attended, Michael did and still reaped the benefit of mainstream yet controversial success. It would have also surprised Michael to know that Justin knew all of this and graciously let Michael continually ride in the tailwind of his own global success, never directly mentioning his work on the comic but reflecting his infamy onto the writer, noting it was the brainchild and passion of one, Michael Novotny.
As Michael continued to use his mental number two pencil to both erase and re-write history as he knew it, he blood began to boil for another reason altogether. His husband was currently walking down the street with his old college buddy, Colby and they looked closer than a married man should be. He watched out of the large display window as Colby draped his arm around Ben and both men threw their head back in laughter. What the fuck is so damn funny? It would have amazed and maybe even caused Michael to guffaw himself if he knew that Ben was actually regaling Colby of the tale of Michael and Ben's love story; specifically Michael singing "Ben" by Michael Jackson and then the later tale of supporters of Prop 14 showing up on their doorstep and asking Michael to speak to his ‘wife.’ He watched as still laughing uproariously, Ben and Colby disappeared down the street in the direction of the diner still arm-in-arm without a care in the world. It never occurred to him to go out there and insinuate himself into the conversation (as he would have if it was Brian and/or Justin) so that he may be able to add to their hilarity and possibly even lighten his own mood. Instead, he chose to act as a peeping tom and draw his own conclusions; an act that was about to come back to haunt him.

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Surprisingly, Melanie and Lindsey had agreed to have lunch at the diner. Brian had to go back to the office and both Mel and Lindz thought it was a good time to clear the air between them. Melanie finally accepted the fact that Lindsey was happier with her life as it was. Melanie couldn't deny the hurt but in lieu of what she shared with Brian that morning, she knew there was no point in trying to tie Lindsey to her anymore. The question now was what to do about Marianne but that was for a later time. Right then it was enough that Mel that she and Lindz were able to indulge in a conversation without yelling and hurt feelings.

"So what do you really think about the way the hearing went?" Lindsey asked her.

"I think it went surprisingly well. Accepting Brian's offer was indeed the right thing to do. I think I had more trouble with the other 'family business' that surfaced."

Lindsey nodded. "It's sad really. Years of friendship is about to end over years of unrequited love and blatant jealousy."

"I don't know what the hell is wrong with Michael. He couldn't change the connection between Brian and Justin then and he certainly can't change it now. But let me ask you, Lindz, do you think there is any truth to what Michael was saying?"

"About what specifically?"
"About Justin taking advantage of Brian's money." As Lindsey began to laugh, Melanie was truly puzzled. "What? What did I say?"

When Lindsey finally calmed enough to answer Melanie, she had to dry her eyes before doing so. "I can assure you there is absolutely no truth to Michael's accusations. Justin is a multi-millionaire in his own right. He need never draw again if he doesn't want to although we all know he will. He does not need nor want Brian's money. My salary is paid directly from Justin; Brian has absolutely nothing to do with it. True, they own some things together including the equal share in each other's companies but honestly, they are both financially independent of each other. What Justin has managed to accomplish over the past ten years with minimal guidance from Brian or myself would be considered a miracle if we all didn't know how hard he worked to get there. Even now he works to the point of exhaustion and it pisses Brian off to no end which is also funny because Justin accuses Brian of doing the same thing. Their entire dynamic is perfectly complimented and balanced. They keep their partnership as lovers separate from their partnership as businessmen. They make the necessary business decisions together but I think if Brian had to sue Justin, he would and vice versa without hesitation. Those of us who work for them are actually in awe of them."

"Lindz, I know you work for Justin but how do you know all of this? I mean I know you are his friend and he hired you but geez, that's a lot to entrust anyone with."

"I'm more than an employee to Justin, Mel. I am his personal assistant. I function in the same capacity as Cynthia does to Brian which means we're literally at their backs ready to guard against certain bullshit. That is what Michael refuses to see. Justin really has worked his ass off to be on the same level as Brian. Sure Brian is still much better off but it has always been Justin's goal to never have Brian's money thrown in his face or bought up as a source of contention between he and Michael. Did you know that when Brian and Justin were together the first time, it was Justin who made Brian sign a contract stating that he would pay back every cent of his college tuition that Brian put out for his education?"

"Why? Brian would have done anything for Justin including pay the damn tuition."

Lindsey nodded again. "Brian tried to offer Justin the money the first time which is how he ended up working as a go-go boy at Babylon for a time. Justin was determined to do it himself. His father refused to pay for PIFA even though he would have jumped through hoops for Justin to attend Dartmouth. Anyway, Justin finally relented but not without that contract between the two of them in place. Then when the whole Ethan episode happened, Justin tried to break the contract but Brian told him "A deal's a deal," and once again Justin relented. It wasn't like we all thought initially. I only know most of it because when Brian and Justin broke up, he went to ask his dad for the loan. He had completed his first semester at PIFA with honors despite the consistent issue with his hand but his father still refused and tried to force Dartmouth on him again. Thanks to Daph, I found out that he was going to the Registrar's office the following day to ask for an extension or to drop out. So I called Brian and told him the situation. It turns out that Brian had already filled out the check and was about to mail it when we called. So that business arrangement was the first of many between Brian and Justin and it has always been the case. And Justin has honored and cleared every single
loan even though Brian objected vehemently. Justin and Brian have always been able to separate business from pleasure. Michael is just seeing what Michael wants to see as he always has especially where Justin is concerned."

"It's almost like he wants-no, needs-Brian to be the Stud of Liberty Avenue. What I can't understand is why," Melanie said, shaking her head.

"He needs Brian to remain isolated so that in his mind he can believe that Brian is waiting for him."


"Unfortunately it is also true. In Michael's mind as long as Brian is free and clear there will always be a chance that Brian will love him the way he loves Justin especially because of Ben's situation. Don't get me wrong. I'm sure he loves Ben but in his mind it's nothing compared to what he feels for Brian."

They both grew silent for a time before Melanie broke it. "I miss talking with you, Lindz."

"Me too," Lindsey answered softly.

"You think we could become friends again...I mean like we used to be?"

"Anything's possible, Mel. Anything is possible."

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On the other side of the diner, the two women had no idea they were under scrutiny by the occupants closest to the luncheon counter.

"Well this could be a good sign. They haven't killed each other or caused World War III," Debbie said to Emmett who in turn looked at Ben. Colby sat silently observing the body language of the two women engrossed in conversation and oblivious to the blatant stare of his companions. He'd always been good at reading people so it was a natural thing for him to do.
"You would think after twenty years together they could get through anything," Emmett said.

Ben nodded. "It's funny how life works sometimes. The ones with the most seemingly perfect relationship are actually the ones with the most problems."

"Speaking from experience, Son-in-law?" Debbie asked. "Where is Michael anyway? We know the hearing is over because the girls are here."

"I know it's about the time he takes inventory so he's more than likely at the store," Ben answered. "But as far as I'm concerned, Michael and I are fine."

Colby guffawed then to the amazement of everyone at the table. "If you don't get that husband of yours under control, friend, you'll be singing those two chicks are singing."

At Ben's incredulous look, Emmett agreed. "It's true, Ben honey." Then Emmett told Ben of the conversation between Carl and Michael that morning. Michael was unhappy with what was said and needed someone to talk to. Then they walked in to see Justin being pestered by Ethan and Michael left shortly after to go to the hearing. "I honestly agree with everything Carl said because it's what we've all-including you-have said to him."

Ben looked to Debbie who brushed an imaginary speck of dust from her apron. "Debbie, what are your thoughts?"

"I don't have any."

Ben laughed. "The day you don't have a thought is the day I stop reading books and we know that's not going to happen. You can be honest with me, Deb. I'm a big boy."

Debbie looked at each of the faces at the table stopping at Colby. His kind eyes encouraged her to say what was on her mind. "Although Carl was harsh, he was absolutely right in what he said. I couldn't defend Michael or find fault with anything other than Carl's tone. He yelled at him but not without good reason. Honestly Ben honey, if we don't find a way to understand that Brian and Justin are a forever kind of deal, he is going to self-destruct."
"The question is how do you stop a freight train without brakes and already on a collision course with another train? Well Superman that's what you have to figure out." Emmett said, reaching across the table to touch Ben's hand in support.

Ben suddenly felt like doing something he hadn't done in many years...he needed a smoke.

Justin ventured from the studio in search of food. He had worked a number of hours on a commission which was due to ship the day before he could spend the weekend in (sort of) wedded bliss. The painting originally had to be shipped from New York and it had taken a number of weeks just to reorder the design based on the fact that the customer kept adding on to the order. He'd finally told his client, a well-known CEO of a Fortune 500 company, that he was not doing anymore add on pieces to the mural already done for his office space. It was one of the few times over the years, he'd had to do that. One of the other times was Brett Keller who was trying to take advantage of their former friendship (as far as that goes in Hollywood anyway). He really loved his career but then there were times....

Arriving in the kitchen he was surprised to find Anita and a face he would have recognized blind since it looked just like his father's.

"Gus-Gus, what are you doing here?" Justin asked approaching him to give a good squeeze.

"Just kinda wanted to see you, Jus-Jus," he said smiling. "Besides do I really need a reason to stop by?"

"Well I don't know. You're a teenager which means you're usually embarrassed to admit that you actually have parents, let alone coming to see them."

Gus laughed. It was true of most of his friends but not him. He'd always loved hanging out with his father and Justin. "Well I need some advice."

"You sure I can't offer you money instead," Justin said half-joking. It wasn't long ago that he was a teenager but it had been long enough in the past for him to forget the angst of being on the cusp of adulthood.
"You can certainly offer me money and I would happily take it but seriously Justin, I need to talk to someone. Mom and Dad won't do for this one."

Justin nodded. Due to long years of familiarity, he had in fact been like a second father to Gus while still keeping the approachable vibe. And truthfully at fifteen, Gus had fewer problems than Justin had at that age for that he was grateful. "You hungry?"

Gus beamed at him. "I could always eat. I'm a growing boy."

That made Justin laugh and immediately dispelled his reservations. "Anita, could you make us some grill cheese sandwiches please?"

Anita, the housekeeper, stood there watching the exchange with a soft look in her eyes. She had been around part-time during Brian and Justin's non-relationship years and was beyond happy that they were making things official in their own way. Consequently, she also remembered the night Brian and Justin met and the subsequent mess she'd had to clean up due to strong 'E' and the youthful exuberance Justin had inspired in her employer. Seeing Justin and Gus together after all the years of separation between Brian and Justin was not only amazing but gratifying since she had roundly cursed Brian out about drinking to excess to dull the pain of not having Justin with him in Britin after their meet-up in Toronto.

Sitting on the stools in front of the counter, Justin broke the ice. "So what's going on, Gus-Gus? Everything alright at school?"

"Oddly enough, school has been great. I thought it would be hard getting settled here but it was fine. Some of the kids remembered me which was kind of unbelievable and they were really interested in my life in Toronto. Mr. McCafferey, my Guidance Counselor said that my SAT scores from last year were good enough to land me some scholarships for academics. Soccer is going well. There were some scouts there last game and Hockey and Lacrosse seasons are coming up. I'm glad Mom and Mama let me skip those grades when we were up north. It put me ahead of schedule."

Justin nodded happy to hear things were going in a positive direction for the son of his heart. It wasn't likely he would have one of his own, so Gus was it for him. "Your dad and I are very proud of you. I remember when your moms called him about the first grade skip. That took a lot of hard work on your part but then to have a second and pass with honors was fantastic. I'll never know why you're one of those kids who actually like studying. I guess Lindz and Brian rubbed off on you in one of the best ways since both were also scholars. So what else is happening? Prom's coming up."

"That's kinda what I wanted to talk to you about Jus-Jus. I don't know who to take. You see the
"You spit it out." Justin laughed. "I don't think there is anything you could say that might shock me. Hell, there shouldn't be anymore shock value left for you. You have two gay dads and lesbian moms, what's left?"

"I think I'm bi."

Justin took a sip of his juice. When he spoke he was very calm. "Okay, so why do you think that?"

"The thing is I like Gary and Carmela in the same way but for different reasons."

"Well that's life in general. You mean you want to have sex with both of them." Gus nodded in agreement. "Okay so let's take a few pages from your dad's book and one from mine."

Anita brought their sandwiches. "I'm going to the market, Justin. Do you need anything while I'm out?"

"Just some more water for the fridge in the studio. I didn't realize I was out until I went to grab a bottle. It was part of the reason I came down." He thanked her as she made her way out the door. "Do you still draw, Gus?"

His eyes lit up. "All the time, Justin. It's a compulsion that I can't stop."

Justin laughed. "Believe me. I understand. With that in mind, I want you to do me a favor. Look behind the counter and see if I left some art supplies back there." At Gus' puzzled look, he laughed again. "Don't look at me like that. You look too much like Brian when you give me the blank stare."

"What can I say? I am my father's son." Sliding off the stool, he did as Justin told him. Sure enough there was a sketch pad, colored pencils and charcoal on the lower shelf of the counter-space.

Justin had learned many years ago to put them in every room of his house. He carried the same habit to Britin and it was also an extra dig at Brian since he was borderline-OCD about neatness. He knew it drove Brian crazy but he would never begrudge Justin the habit. It also provided a sense of irony
since watching Justin sketch always had a calming effect on Brian. So did blow jobs but those weren't always convenient or conducive to forming coherent thoughts let alone speaking.

"So while we talk, I want you to draw them," Justin said.

"And this will help how?"

"We'll answer that after we're done. In the meantime, I'm curious to see how much your skill has developed so this exercise has added benefits. So tell me about Gary first."

"Where do I start?"

"C'mon, Gus. Tell me about him. What does he look like?"

As Gus began to draw, Justin could see the little frown lines in Gus' forehead and the focus of his hazel eye as he sketched out the facial features of Gary Brandt. Well-spaced eyes and Gus added the sparkle he said Gary always seemed to have in his gray eyes. He was blond haired and wore his hair in short curls but the were soft and had a bit of a wave to them. His nose was long, reminiscent of Norman-Welsh descent and thick eyebrows. Full sensual lips, a lot like Justin's. Gus continued to draw as he described his body. Swimmer's build reminiscent of Brian and Gus' body type, muscular arms which were much stronger than the looked, long well-proportioned legs, big hands and a bubble-butt. Gus had drawn him in his soccer gear. Gus then layered the picture with facets of Gary's personality: the slight laugh lines at the corners of his mouth which would only deepen as he aged and the elongated dimples. He smudged the lines around his eyes giving him a mysterious and edgy look which Gary could display when he wanted.

They moved on to Carmela Kelly. As Gus began drawing, again Justin noted the frown lines and focus of eyes so much like his dad's but there was a subtle difference. They were more green than brown which with the Kinney men indicated a spike in emotion be it anger or intense pleasure. Justin kept that thought to himself as Carmela came to life. Cafe-au-lait complexion, kind and innocent eyes with a bit of an oriental slant and long lashes. Cute button nose, full and sensual lips. In the picture, Gus drew her dark hair with auburn highlights straightened but he explained that she would wet it and wear it curly from time to time or if she was running late and didn't have time to blow dry it that morning. He concentrated a bit more when sketching her decolletage area. Justin almost laughed aloud when he got to the full breast and tiny waist which flared out into wide hips with a butt to match. Her hands were delicate with long fingers. She was a concert pianist and an artist according to Gus but she was also one helluva volleyball player. She had long legs and from what Gus verbalized was just a bit shorter than he was. A fine sheen of sweat had broken out on Gus' forehead as he added little odd characteristics to the sketch like the little almost imperceptible mole which graced her upper lip and the one slightly larger at the corner of her left eye. She had what most would call a determined little chin which indicated a hint of stubbornness and dominance even if she
didn't know it yet. He added the smattering of freckles which graced her skin. He returned to her eyes to smudge and give the mysterious look but there was also an all-knowing element in the eyes reflected back at Justin and Gus as they studied the two pictures side by side.

Justin knew which one he thought Gus should ask but he wanted to know a bit more before giving any advice. "So Gus-Gus, how did you feel drawing them out? Did you have the same feeling as you put them on paper or were there subtle differences?"

Brian walked into the house at that moment forestalling Gus' answer. He ruffled his son's hair and hugged him briefly. When he got to Justin, he leaned in for a long sip of the lips he'd needed to taste since getting out of the hearing. Brian could feel the stress of his altercation draining from him as he heard Gus' clearing his throat.

"Hey you two remember there is an impressionable kid in the room watching you swap spit. Other than that carry on," Gus said causing Justin and Brian to laugh while separating.

"Point well taken, Sonny Boy. What are you guys doing?" He grabbed up the sketches, beaming a little at the budding talent showing from Gus. He could see touches of Justin's tutelage over the years as well as both Justin's and his mom's attention to detail. Gus had major potential to flourish in art if that's what he chose to do.

"Well Brian, Gus came to visit today for a very specific reason. Why don't you go on grab a quick shower and change then meet us in the family room." Justin smiled brightly at both him and Gus causing a few alarm bells in the former.

"No one's pregnant are they?"

"Dad-"

"Brian, seriously?"

"Just checking," Brian defended. "We've had the whole safe sex talk awhile ago so I'm not completely worried but as your father I'm not completely at ease either."

"It's bound to happen someday, Dad."
Brian let out a deep sigh of relief noting his son's choice of words. "I know. Just give me another few decades, okay?"

"Dad, you know you're still as silly as when I was a kid."

"You're still a kid, you know. In my eyes you always will be since I refuse to grow old."

Gus got up to hug him before pushing him toward the stairs to get more comfortable. Justin and Gus engaged in other conversation while Brian was busy shedding "Business Brian" in favor of "Less Business Brian", a running joke within the family because he could never fully detach from work. Anita who had returned from the store advised that dinner would be ready by seven and served them another round of iced tea. Brian returned in record time to know what was going on with Gus. He settled himself on the sofa next to Justin while Gus moved to the overstuffed arm chair opposite his two dads. Outwardly he was genuinely happy that Gus still felt comfortable to go to Justin with his issues but secretly he was a little jealous because he wasn't there for the beginning of the conversation and had to be brought up to speed. He had to admit having Gus indulge his talent for art was an ingenious way of getting to the root of his problem. Brian always admired Justin's talent for that reason and was always happy to know that he could read between the brush strokes to find out what Justin was thinking subconsciously as he painted. In a lot of ways Justin's work acted as Brian's GPS to navigate through the ups and downs of their history.

"So Sonny Boy, which do you like better in this area? Let me just inform you that it's okay to like pussy and it's okay to like dick, just not at the same time."

Justin shook his head and Gus just laughed. Brian was never one for putting life's situations in riddles and that was to the good for Gus. Even though Justin did a great job putting him at ease to talk about the confusion he was feeling, his father's ready acceptance meant the world to Gus. "Well Dad, that's the problem. I don't know."

"Okay, Gus let's get back to the drawings," Brian said. "Justin always told me that artists feel things on a subconscious level. It's almost like a trance when they're painting and it's much like writers and composers describe their experiences. I imagine it's a lot like I am when I'm creating a concept for a campaign. So how did you feel while drawing Gary?"

"I felt like if given the chance I could really like Gary. He's smart and fun and we have a lot in common."
"But?"

"But the connection is different with Carmela. My relationship with her is like Jus-Jus and Aunt Daphne but I feel a very different...I don't know-something-with her."

"Is it like what you would imagine your dad and I feel for each other, Gus?" Justin asked secretly hoping that he was correct. Carmela really did remind him of Daphne but it was more than that. Based on the picture Gus drew she would always challenge Gus to be better and to do better while cheering him on. Much like Justin had been to Brian and vice versa. When Gus nodded, Justin mentally cheered. He had noted the fine sheen of sweat when he was drawing Carmela and it wasn't born from exertion. It was pure attraction-completely raw, untapped and primal. He may like a man in the future but right then it was all centered on Carmela Kelly.

"So now what do I do?" Gus asked nervously.

"Has Gary made a move on you?" Justin asked.

Gus shook his head. "No but I know he wants to."

"Oh? How do you know?" Brian was genuinely curious.

"First, I'm a man so I know what desire looks like from another man. Secondly, I'm your son. That's enough said on that subject. Thirdly, my gaydar and heterodar, if there is such a thing, works in equal measure. So yeah, I know they are both interested."

Justin laughed. He sure was Brian's kid equipped with sarcasm and just enough borderline arrogance to even stun the Stud of Liberty Avenue to momentary silence. The beauty of it was that Brian and Gus looked so much alike and wore the same sardonic expressions that they basically provided a mirror for the other.

"So, Smart ass Extraordinaire, what are you going to do? The one thing I will say is be honest. You can evade the truth or answer questions only when directly asked but never, ever lie. The only exception to that is if they make you lie because they can't see beyond their own truth but that mostly applies to homophobic heteros and is not applicable here. The bottom line is that you like them both but Carmela attracts you in an instinctual way. Now you have to decide whether you like to fuck or get fucked. There is a difference and based on the vibe I got from the picture of Carmela, it is a question you'll be expected to know sooner rather than later."
"What do you mean?" Gus was generally puzzled so Justin explained.

"It means a girl like Carmela, even though she may not realize it yet, is what we would call a dominant or a domme for a female. It will take a man emotionally stronger than her to gain her respect and trust. Consequently, it will also take a keen intelligence to keep it. It does not mean that he would be abusive or mean to her; she would never tolerate such a person. If the look of her is correct that behavior will earn some man a direct jab in the nose and possible a few other broken body parts. She may look delicate but I'm willing to bet last year's tax return that she can defend herself." Justin smiled thinking that the picture Gus drew reminded him more and more of Daphne. People often mistook her kindness for weakness, too and that was always a big mistake. He continued, 'For some misguided reason people tend to think the connotation of 'dominant' only extends to the bedroom but never out of it. True, some leave that particular role in the bedroom but there are a select group of the population who function the same way in their everyday lives as well. Brian is one of those people with a dominant personality. Although it is a hardwired trait, it can be fine tuned and tweaked over time. They can learn to compromise but they won't do it unless it is something they want to do. Having and maintaining control of themselves and thereby everything else around them is the biggest part of their world; the key which keeps them driven to be the best. That being said, every now and then they meet their match in control and determination but who also provides balance and stability. I'm his because I don't let Brian get away with shit or hide from me. I challenge him on every possible level which holds his interests. I can be argumentative but I'd rather just make him think most of the time and vice versa. It's too soon to tell if you're hers and honestly you shouldn't think or worry about that now. It took your father many years to get to the point where he and I are. You're too young for that and both of you have a whole lot of life to live before you'll discover who your match is. In the meantime, have fun with her and learn as much as you can about human nature while doing it. Every person who comes into or through your life is meant to teach you something, be it good or bad, so pay attention. The good news is that you already have a measure of her respect because you are intelligent which believe it or not is what's keeping her enthralled. Good looks will only take you so far with an intelligent person before they begin to look for stimulation elsewhere. It's why I'm still with Brian."

"Wait? I'm not attractive anymore?" Brian asked laughing earning him a quick swat and laugh from his lover.

"You're a stud and you know it, Brian but honestly if you were stupid our meeting under the street lamp all those years ago would have ended right there. I could never be attracted to a man without an intelligent mind. I find your brain the most sexy thing about you."

Brian smiled remembering the events of the night Gus was born. He nudged Justin's shoulder. "We didn't have much conversation the night we met but likewise, Sunshine. And other than the fact that Justin has a great ass, he's right, Gus. Justin and I would have ended a long time ago. You have to have something beyond sex to hold on to, Sonny boy. Justin, even at seventeen, had wisdom and knowledge in areas that your Uncle Michael did not. Now that's not to say that he's stupid before you get the wrong impression but there were things that I would need to hash out regarding business that Michael would have listened to but not understood because his interests lie in another direction."

Although Justin didn't have an interest in graduating with a business degree, he still had an innate ability to see the bottom line, a working knowledge of what a contract should entail and learned tricks of the trade to now successfully operate his own businesses. Given all that and the same drive and determination to see his goals come to fruition, Justin is the best fit for someone like me who has the same motivation and again it doesn't hurt that he's goddamn gorgeous with an ass to match." Brian winked and both Justin and Gus chuckled before he grew serious again. "To give you something you can relate to, let's take the SATs for example. A perfect score on that test is 1600, right?" When Gus nodded for confirmation, Brian continued. "Justin scored 1500 on his."

"I got 1490 on mine which is a good score. What did you get on yours, Dad?"

"I can't remember but it was high enough that my academic scholarship was assured. My soccer scholarship was separate." Brian evaded the truth a bit. His SAT score was 1580 but he wouldn't tell Justin that because he would feel compelled to explain why he still remembered it all these years later. It was one of his truly proud moments because it meant that he could escape the Hell Hotel otherwise known as the Kinney household without asking for a dime or looking back. "So you see why I couldn't be with someone with the IQ of a feather duster? I liked having Justin around because, contrary to popular opinion, we didn't just have sex. We talked about business and the stock market amongst other things that affected our lives and the people in it. I needed someone like that and still do although it took me awhile to admit it even to myself. It also helps that we hash out concepts for campaigns and he gets my vision. If there is a problem within the art department or if the concept won't work on paper, Justin isn't afraid to tell me and offer a suggestion or eight thousand of them. We have a true partnership and we drive each other to make the other better. Even though every person is smart in their own way in something, I still could never do what I do and be with someone who is intellectually challenged in this area."

"I think I understand, Dad. So how do I ask her out?"

"Tell you what, invite her and her parents to the reception on Saturday. It's a social setting and very casual so you'll have room to breathe without Gary being in your space and technically you can consider it a first date of sorts," Brian said and Justin agreed.

"Okay. I'm going to call her right now. Thanks Dad and Jus-Jus."

They watched him jet off through the house. "Good job, Dad," Justin said.

"Then why am I suddenly depressed?"

Justin looked at him and mentally chuckled. He knew what Brian was thinking but it would be
amusing to hear it anyway. "So what's wrong, Brian?"

"I'm old."

Justin couldn't contain the laughter anymore. "You are not old. You're just older than me. I still see you as the hottest man ever to suck me off. When I look at you I also see the man I have spent the better part of my life loving beyond all reason. He also happens to be my addiction for which I never want a cure and everything right in my world."

"Aw that's sweet, Sunshine."

"What can I say? I'm naturally sweet and you old man have your sweet moments, too."

"Shh...don't tell anyone that," Brian whispered playfully. "I much prefer being looked at like an asshole. People expect less."

"Don't worry, Lover, your secret is safe with me." Justin moved over on the sofa until he was straddling Brian, staring into his eyes before leaning in and kissing the sensual lips which haunted his dreams for the many nights during their separation.

Lindsey followed Melanie to the hotel where she and Jenny Rebecca were staying. She actually felt relieved and thankful that Melanie had decided put past differences with Brian aside and take him up on his offer. Despite Michael's behavior, Lindsey was hopeful that everything would work itself out and ultimately create less stress for the children. Based on the time of day, Melanie informed Lindsey that their daughter would be keeping up with her swim schedule and they found her by the hotel's heated indoor pool. Melanie called out to her but based on the string hanging off of Jenny's swimsuit, Lindsey could guess that the waterproof Ipod Brian sent her for Christmas was being put to good use.

Jenny finally brought herself up out of the water. Lindsey noticed the subtle changes in Jenny's physique: she was stronger, leaner and taller. Lindsey and Melanie smiled at each other when their daughter finally registered that she wasn't exactly alone. Lindz was gratified seeing Jenny's face light up once her vision came back to normal from the tint on the blue-lensed goggles. She would never admit that she was nervous having been away from JR for so many weeks but the bright smile the little girl bestowed on both her moms allayed any misgivings Lindsey had. For Melanie's part, she
was just relieved. Jenny had given her a fit at every turn barely acknowledging her or speaking in a monotone voice. She stood to the side as Jenny launched herself at Lindsey. Tears of happiness flowing between the two until Lindsey found her voice.

"Go get your things, darling. Your mama and I have some news I think you'll be interested in," Lindsey said.

"Where's Gus? Shouldn't he hear it too?"

"He will later, Jenny, I promise. He said he was going to his Dad's house after practice, which means he should just about be there by now."

Jenny gathered all of her swim gear, opting to take her shower when she got up to the room. Melanie and Lindsey rode the elevator with her in silence but smiled again at each other, sure that this was the right thing to do for all of them.

"Now what's going on, moms?" Jenny asked as she shook out her towel placing it on the radiator by the window for future use.

"You're sure you don't want to have your shower first, so that you're not itchy from the chlorine?" Melanie asked already suspecting what her headstrong daughter would say but needing to try anyway.

"I'll peel my skin off if I have to. What's going on? I know the hearing was this afternoon. Can we stay in Pittsburgh? I don't want to go back."

"Well lucky for you, JR, you don't have to," Lindsey answered smiling although the little girl looked as if she was waiting for the other shoe to drop. Lindsey almost chuckled aloud. He may not be related by blood to Jenny but she definitely carries some of Gus' and thereby Brian's mannerisms with her.

"Listen, Honey," Melanie said kneeling to Jenny's height. "Your Mommy and I are still getting a divorce but that's not going to affect you because you will get to see her and Gus all the time. I have to go away from about a week but when I come back, we'll get to do a little house shopping."

"You mean it?"
"I most certainly do, Jenny. We're moving back here to Pittsburgh." Melanie almost cried when Jenny threw herself into her arms. It was the most physical contact she'd had with her daughter prior to Lindsey leaving.

"Wait, Mama, if you're going to Canada, will I get to stay with Mommy and Gussie? Or do I have to stay with Michael and Uncle Ben?"

"So far you get to stay with Lindsey and Gus. You know if you slip up and call your father anything other than Daddy, he's going to have a fit, JR."

"If he acted more like a Daddy like Uncle Brian, I would call him ‘Dad' all the time but since he doesn't I call him Michael when he isn't around."

Melanie looked at Lindsey who immediately found something interesting on the ceiling. "You know, you're not slick or helping, Lindz." She couldn't help but laugh and agree with her daughter about Michael.

"Okay, Jenny, we'll let you have your truth when it is just us but you have to be respectful to him. Agreed?" Lindsey asked.

"Agreed. So Moms when do we blow this Popsicle stand. The only thing I'll miss about this hotel is the pool but I am ready to go."

"How about we go tomorrow sometime to see where you will be living when you're not staying with your dad."

"You mean I actually have to stay with him, too?" Jenny groaned and rolled her eyes heavenward-something she'd seen both her moms do frequently.

The Moms suppressed a laugh silently agreeing with her but as adults they had to show diplomacy. "It's only fair Jenny. We all share in the responsibility of taking care of you so that means occasionally you have to go over there too," Lindsey said much to Melanie's relief. "So tomorrow I'll give you a tour of my house. Then Friday and Saturday we have to be at Uncle Brian's and on Sunday your Mama goes back to Canada for a brief time. Okay?"
Jenny smiled widely, "Agreed!"

Two nights later, Daphne and Troy lay on the couch watching Netflix eating popcorn and debating the finer points of who actually won the race up the hill.

"I didn't cheat, Troy. I just used the built in short people advantage."

He laughed at that. "You really are something else, Daphne but I like it. So since it was a tie, what do you suppose we do about it?"

"Considering we'll probably have the same result as we did on Monday, I say we call it a draw and we compromise."

"You still haven't told me what you wanted if you won so..."

"I'm not calling that in until I decide but I can give you an option as far as the real date goes. Brian and Justin are having a commitment ceremony on Friday night with the party lasting the whole weekend. So since you have off this weekend, why not come with me?"

"As your date?"

"I'll leave that up to you but I know Brian and Justin wouldn't mind you being there especially since Friday night it's just going to be family and close friends. They happen to think you're one of the good guys. I have no idea where they got that impression." She laughed when he bumped her shoulder. Being with Troy like that was becoming easier and easier for her. She was happy she had a true friend in him whether it turned into more or not.

"Fine. What should I wear?"

"If I know Brian and Justin, it's going to be at least somewhat high end. Brian is a total label queen and he makes sure that Justin ventures passed the GAP at least some of the time. So at the very least wear something cocktail party-ish."
"This should be fun," he said grinning like a fool.

"What exactly?" Daphne couldn't help being attracted but she was also a little leery of what that smile meant. She knew that the ever-so-serious Chief of Surgery Dr. Bradley was very different from the practical joker with a wicked sense of humor sitting on her couch in sweats, a wife-beater and barefoot. Ironically she couldn't decide which one she liked better.

"Do you realize that since I've known you, I haven't seen you in a dress once? I would like to see that since it would be a complete change from how we usually see each other."

What he asked wasn't that unreasonable to most but since she'd spent all of high school in skirts due to the dress code of St. James Academy, they were the least favorite thing in her closet. "Tell you what...I will go in a dress but I reserve the right to carry a pantsuit just in case." She explained why and was pleased to note that he laughed but didn't ridicule her as Steven had done.

He held out his hand. "Deal?"

"Deal." She took his hand and was surprised when he pulled her closer, capturing her lips before she had a chance to think or protest.

What started off as a chaste kiss quickly escalated to a mind blowing, tongue-tangoing and toe-curling exchange. Daphne found herself struggling to get closer, practically crawling in his lap as his arms closed around her. Her breath hitched as his hands tangled in her hair bringing her even closer, holding her head prisoner for his oral assault. There was no doubt her senses were addled as she finally heard the doorbell and her phone ringing at the same time. She pulled back abruptly, staring into his eyes wondering what the hell happened and why the hell she wanted it to keep happening...like NOW! She looked closely at him, pleased and fearful that he was just as affected by the kiss as she was. Just as she was about to push herself off the couch to finally answer the door or the phone or both, Justin walked into the living room.

"Oh hey, I just assumed you were..." He stopped short at noticing Troy was sitting on the couch with a deer in headlights expression. "You know what...never mind. I can just-"

"No! Don't," Daphne said hastily. "Yeah. What did you want?"

Justin folded his lips under to keep from laughing at the two of them. They were like naughty high
school kids who got caught fucking under the bleachers while indulging in a bad trip from damaged E. "It's fine. Emmett just needed another colander and I was coming to high jack yours rather than have him drive back out to his place tonight only to come back. So..."

More awkward silence...

Justin couldn't resist the opportunity to say what he thought which is the same thing Brian had already told Daphne. "I'm going to go into the kitchen now and get what I came for. Please fuck already. You two are...I don't even have words at this point for the two of you. Perhaps if you go ahead and do it, these little awkward, jittery moments will stop. Just wait until I leave cause hetero sex isn't my thing." With that he chuckled on the way to her kitchen and made his way back to the front door. "Good night, children. Play nice. Have fun and I'll see you both on Friday." He patted Daphne's head as she swatted his hand.

"I hate you, you know," she muttered as he leaned in to give her a peck on the cheek.

"You're friends with Brian and I for a reason, Daph. Deep down you're one of us. Keep that in mind."

"What? A gay man?" Daphne and Justin burst out laughing.

"You wish. But it is time for you to expose the inner freak. Let that bitch out! For the record, Brian and I wouldn't have hesitated riding on the salami express. So get your ass in there and jump on him."

"Call you tomorrow," she called out as he got into his car. As she looked back over at Troy, she got that tingly feeling again she'd had only moments before.

"You okay?" he asked as she sat down next to him. The concern in his eyes was sincere and almost fearful.

"I'm fine, Troy. No worries. In fact, I'd like to do it again."

He didn't hesitate taking her face into his hands, capturing her eyes as he lowered his head and finally making contact with her lips again.
John Townsend was in trouble. He would never know what possessed him to join a group of known homophobes instead of just keeping his dislike of all things gay to himself. He was perfectly happy with his decision until it was discovered that the one person John loved in all the world was a closet case. He couldn't even begin to describe the panic that had risen in him when the list of targets presented to him gave the name of his brother, Peter. Sexuality was nothing ever openly discussed with their grandmother, Joan and their mother, Claire except to constantly repeat that their selfish and narcissistic uncle, Brian was on a fast track to hell because he was a homosexual. Although it was what John was taught as early as he knew what a dick was, he couldn't see his sweet-natured brother meeting the same fate as his uncle.

"Come on, Petey. We gotta keep moving," John encouraged Peter.

Somehow the group thought it was a good idea to enter Babylon, a known gay club who just happened to be owned by Uncle Brian and target Peter. Unfortunately, Peter was never much of a drinker, a gin and juice coupled with a known date rape drug which had been slipped into his drink, had John worried that not only would they get caught but they would also end up dead. Peter would have been too easy a target for the torture the Knights of Liberty had planned for him. John waited until the guys went to dance while the drug took effect. He'd managed to whisk Peter away before his legs gave out but now that they had, John and his brother were sitting ducks unless they could make it to Brian's house or office, which ever came first.

Readjusting Peter's arm over his shoulder and getting an extra grip on his pants, John moved as quickly as he could. Pete's almost dead weight and going go through the back alleys on his way to find Brian seemed almost like the worse idea possible. But I have to find him for Petey's sake. Their relationship with their uncle died years ago when John had accused Brian of molesting him. It wasn't true but Brian had caught John stealing from him and he was pissed about it. Instead of owning up to it and admitting that he was wrong, John took a page out of his grandmother and mother's book, citing that all fags should go to jail and then burn in hell. He was sorry that his change of heart had come too late and it may cost him and the only person who ever cared about him as well as his own life. The Knights were not only dangerous but the people they answered to were downright vicious.

As they passed the diner, John almost panicked when the door opened but was immediately relieved when he saw the loud, red-haired lady he remembered from years ago when he last visited with his uncle. He admitted he wasn't nice then but he didn't have time to rehash old news. So he took the biggest gamble of his life in calling out to her by name in the hopes that she would remember him.

"Hey! Watch it," Debbie called out as John and Peter bumped into her. Raising her head, she said. "That boy looks like he needs a doctor."
"No. No, please Miss Debbie, I can't take him to the hospital."

"How do you know my name? I don't know you." Debbie searched his face.

John debated on whether to tell her his name. The last time they saw each other it wasn't under the best circumstances. She was with Brian's boyfriend and a cop. He couldn't remember his name but if she was still in touch with him... Meanwhile, Peter was moaning as if in pain. From what John knew of rophynol, it was very possible especially since Peter wasn't a big eater. His moans coupled with the danger they were in decided John. He would do anything to save his brother even if that meant swallowing his fucking pride and accepting her disdain.

"Miss Debbie, I know you probably don't remember me and that could be a good thing in your eyes. But right now, I need to get to my uncle Brian. Peter is really sick and I need his help."

"Brian? Brian Kinney?" Her eyes widened. "Oh my God, you're Joan's grandson, John aren't you?"

John nodded and dropped his eyes. He couldn't remember the last time he'd felt ashamed about anything but this was certainly one of those times. "I am. Please, Miss Debbie, I'm begging you. Call Uncle Brian. I would but I don't have his number."

"Wouldn't you rather have me call Claire or your grandmother. Brian doesn't live in town anymore and it could take awhile to get back here. Let's get him inside."

"NO!" John shook his head violently. "This is the first place they will look. And please, please do NOT call Claire and Joan. They will do nothing but bring misery to both Peter and me."

"Look, John. Let's just get Peter inside the diner. We'll keep him out of sight long enough for me to make the calls but make no mistake I expect answers. You got it?"

He nodded relieved that she was willing to help him in whatever way possible. Debbie and John settled Peter on the cot in the back office usually reserved for the overnight staff. John lightly kissed his brother's feverish forehead urging him not to fall asleep. Now that they weren't damn near running for their lives, the impulse to drift off would be greater for Peter. He listened to Debbie's side of the conversation:
"...Jennifer, hey it's Deb. I know it's late and I'm sorry for it but could you come down to the diner. I have a little bit of a problem that needs fixing pronto."

"...I'll explain when you get here although neither Brian nor Justin are going to be too happy but I need you to take a look at this for us to have a good way to approach it. The bottom line is we are going to need Justin's help to get through to Brian."

"Okay. I'll see you in about twenty minutes."

"Who's Jennifer? She isn't a cop is she?" John asked panicked and preparing to gather Peter up to make a run for it.

"Calm down, John. Take a deep breath. Jennifer is for all intents and purposed is your uncle's Mother-in-Love, since Justin and Brian aren't legally married."

"Okay but why call her? What has she got to do with anything?"

"Sweetheart, she's your best hope of getting Brian to agree to help you. What you did all those years ago really hurt him although he would never admit it. Joan and Claire were bad enough as was your grandfather for many years before he died but you accusing him of that, was worse than all the physical and emotional abuse he endured because of them." John lowered his eyes knowing in his heart that she was right. Debbie continued. "So do you want to tell me what the fuck you were doing practically carrying and half dragging your brother down the street?"

John knew that he had to tell her something. He couldn't divulge all of the information to her because it wouldn't only put her at risk but him, even more than what he was already. "I'm apart of this group that hates gays. I didn't think anything of it at the time because I thought it was right. I mean growing up with mom and grandmother didn't exactly make for a very liberal and tolerant environment."

"Well I can't argue with you there," Debbie agreed before encouraging him to continue.

"The way the group works is that they do intel on those perceived to be gay and arrange for...I guess you can call it a *redirection* of sorts. Anyway, I was at the meeting earlier tonight when they were handing out information for the next ‘target.’"

"You mean Peter-"
John nodded. "Yes. My brother was the next target. I didn't even know he was gay until a few hours ago. It was just something we never talked about especially within our household. He was at Babylon and had gotten a drink. One of the guys approached him like he was interested. Babylon is the gay night-"

"I know what it is. I also know that your Uncle and his partner, Justin, own it. Why would you let them create that kind of trouble?"

"They don't know that I'm related to Uncle Brian and truthfully I would have been happy not to tell them. There's no love lost between he and I. He hates me."

"Brian doesn't hate you, John. In any event you knew to seek him out for help."

"Yeah. Some help he's going to give me if you have to involve his boy toy's mother."

Debbie shook her head. He really didn't know his uncle at all but that was another thing which could be laid at the door of Joan and Claire Kinney. "So how did you manage to get Peter out of there?"

"Once the guy struck up a conversation with Peter to distract him and the other man slipped a date rape drug into Pete's drink, they moved off to the dance floor to wait for the drug to take effect. I grabbed Peter and snuck out while their heads were turned and now here we are. The drug didn't start to take effect until he was out in the night air which helped speed up the process of getting him super high. The pure oxygen works as an accelerator at that point but I couldn't leave him there."

"So what happens with this drug?"

John thought back to what he'd learned about it. Contrary to many people's belief, he was actually intelligent and was good in school—not that his family noticed. Peter was much smarter and was in college on scholarship. Whereas John decided that university wasn't for him and was saving to go to a trade school. Claire and Joan hadn't supported his or Peter's decisions but they decided to take a page out of Brian's book and do what they wanted regardless.

"The drug usually takes about a half an hour to take effect. It is known for being a paralyzing drug in which the person can see and hear everything that is going on around them but unable to move their limbs to stop any danger to themselves. It can be ingested by pill or dissolved in a drink which is what they did to Peter. Also it can be injected which they would have done later until they were
finished torturing him."

Debbie was shocked and mortified at what she was hearing. "And you're proud to have been apart of this...group?"

"Look Ms. Debbie, I won't tell you that I didn't have a few laughs or engage in some of the tortures. I did but I would never allow anything to happen to Peter. I couldn't bear it if anything did, especially if I was able to prevent it in some way. He endured the same living hell that I did. Part of the reason I was so angry at Uncle Brian was because he got out and stayed gone. Even now, I can't understand why he never came to rescue us."

"That's something you're going to have to ask him yourself eventually, John. You may be surprised at the answer."

John was saved from responding by a delicate, blonde lady rushing through the door of the back room. From what he remembered of his uncle's lover, there was no doubt that the lady was related to Justin.

"Debbie what was so important that I had to rush over here?"

"Calm down, Jennifer. Sorry to have scared you. I want you to meet Brian's nephews. They are the reason I called you. John, I would like you to meet Justin's mother."

John shook her hand and she was moved by the look in the young man's eyes. Desperation mixed with fear."My brother is in trouble and I-I need Uncle Brian's help."

"Well why haven't you asked him yet?" She asked genuinely confused.

Debbie chimed in before John had a chance to explain, noting his relief. "There hasn't been much love lost between the two. Their history is long and varied but I can tell you a lot of his views have changed mostly because of the young man lying on the cot over there. John is or was a homophobe until he found out his little brother, Peter, is gay." She went on to explain about the surface issues of Brian's history with Jack, Joan and Claire Kinney and how Peter and John figure into that situation. "So you see Jennifer without Justin's help to convince Brian to take this on..."

Jennifer looked at the two faces looking at her and at the young man writhing and sweating on the
small cot in the room. Picking up her cell phone, she dialed Brian directly. He may be able to tell the rest of them no but she'd be damned if she would let him tell her that.

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Ironically the topic of their conversation and his partner were still awake and having fun with tickle torture and a camera. Even though they weren't formally getting married, the commitment ceremony was equally important to them and as per Brian deserved no less (go figure). Usually when Brian wanted pictures of Justin he had to sneak them. He did it often in the morning or when Justin was zoning out while sketching or painting. He'd already had one of their first pictures they'd ever taken together-the one at the GLC on the night of his Pittsburgh art debut some fifteen years ago-blown up to catalog their lives together. He was planning a special surprise for Justin and he needed some shots but of course his blond was making it difficult. Brian didn't have huge sentimental moments often but when he did, he would go to any lengths to make them happen including straddling his favorite bottom, fully clothed and enduring a massive hard-on while his man tried to buck him off.

"Hey it's only fair, I get pics of you since you're always drawing my cock or me, or me and my cock," Brian said while jabbing Justin in his side causing another round of giggles in which he snapped three photos in quick succession.

Justin struggled even harder which was difficult without the use of his arms and hands which were penned under Brian's legs. Otherwise Justin would certainly be retaliating. Brian reached out to tweak a long lock of blond hair which covered Justin's beautiful blue eyes. He kept it back in a ponytail until bed that it was a rare pleasure to see it hanging long while he was fully clothed. The sudden and slight hitch in Justin's breath caught Brian's attention; awoke the predator in him. All the writhing the younger man did underneath Brian must have aroused the sleeping beast in his partner as well. Brian gently laid down the camera and slid his body down Justin's. He watched his lover's pupils dilate as he moved into position on top of him. Taking Justin's hands in his, he entwined their fingers together while his eyes continued to devour Justin. He'd always loved how responsive Justin was to his touch. Even the simple act of holding hands would bring Justin such pleasure and arouse him. It did the same for Brian too but only with Justin.

"So Mr. Kinney, what do you want tonight?"

A slow smile curved Brian's lips before he answered. "I think I want to watch you get off on me, Mr. Taylor-Kinney."

"Ah- you trust me to ride you again after how we ended up the last time?" That question caused a new round of laughter for both of them.
"Well I know your ass has fully recovered from your round at the Kinney Rodeo Show but keep in mind, after the ceremony I expect to get laid quite a bit."

"Is that so?"

"It is," Brian said and leaning for a long draught from Justin's plush lips.

He ran his tongue over Justin's lush bottom lip coaxing and begging for entry. Justin complied eager for it but Brian held still at first, allowing their breaths to mingle a moment and reminding him of their first kiss. Brian lightly licked the corner of Justin's mouth before swooping in and claiming what's been his all along. Brian couldn't help thinking of how that special boy had grown into this irreplaceable man and now his-all his, point blank and the period. Brian ran his tongue over every surface of Justin's mouth, unable and unwilling to get enough; swallowing the moans and whimpers from his partner in every way imaginable. Justin grew wilder with every second that passed and Brian cursed clothes in that second because in order to remove them he had to stop kissing Justin.

"Justin, what is your phone doing in your pocket? It's vibrating against my dick and I would rather that be you," Brian said as he continued the assault on Justin's senses.

"My. Phone. Is. On. The. Dresser, Brian. Yours is not." Justin moved his lips around to the spot just over his jugular vein which he knew drove Brian nuts. Sucking the skin into his mouth briefly but not enough to leave a mark, he was gratified to hear the moan escape Brian. He continued sucking and licking Brian in the same spot, as he fumbled for his phone.

"Kinney." Brian answered on the back end of a slight moan. Justin was working his magic and being *Business Brian* was definitely the furthest thing from his mind.

"Sorry to interrupt Brian," Jennifer said decidedly uncomfortable but amused at the same time. "I need you and Justin to come to the diner, immediately. We have a situation and it requires your presence."

Brian halted Justin's progress as he worked his way down to his collarbone. "Everything alright? Is Debbie-"

"Debbie is fine Brian. I promise you but there is another...I just need you to come okay?"
"We'll be there in a half hour, Mother Taylor. You're sure she's okay?" Once Jennifer mentioned she was at the diner, Brian couldn't stop the sudden spike in fear that jabbed at his heart. He remembered some years ago when Debbie had collapsed from exhaustion. He never wanted to feel that way again in reference to Deb and even though he would probably never tell anyone, she was one of the most important people in his life. If anything happened to her...

He hung up the phone, giving Justin an abbreviated version of the short phone call and a long kiss of a promise for later. He and Justin were out the door and into the car in a matter of minutes. The drive into Pittsburgh was uneventful and they arrived just after midnight. A few patrons straggled in behind Justin and Brian as they made their way over to their favorite booth. His two moms were waiting for him, for that is how he thought of both Debbie and Jennifer. Neither were afraid to call Brian on his bullshit or interfere in his life whatever the cost to themselves. They surely made up for his lack of mother in the form of Joan Kinney. Jennifer reached over to take Brian's free hand; Justin held the other and Debbie gave him a reassuring look which put him at ease somewhat.

"Well what's going on that I had to get off of my very handsome playmate without getting off?" Brian asked with his usual bravado and his signature smirk.

"We brought you here for two reasons. I asked Justin along because I know you two make important decisions together and this can't wait as it involves John and Peter as well as Babylon." Brian stiffened at the mention of his nephews and Jennifer stroked the hand she was still holding.

"What has the spawn of Satan done this time? And what's Peter got to do with anything? He was never the trouble maker John was but...what's going on, Jennifer?"

Debbie chimed in. "Look, Brian, I know firsthand there isn't a whole lot of love between you and John but in this case, he really needs your help. And believe it or not, you need his, too. So cut the shit and just listen to what he says. He's in the back with Peter. Can you do that?"

"No! The last time I had any dealing with John could have very well made me someone's bitch in prison from his lies. How can you even think I could listen to anything he has to say? We're leaving." Brian moved to do just that when Jennifer told him to sit down in the sternest voice he'd ever heard her use. Even Justin snapped to attention with that tone, which was rare since he rarely flinched when Brian yelled.

"You're not leaving, Brian. This is too important and besides that they are your family. You of all people know that they are just as much a victim of your mother and sister as you were. Abuse is abuse no matter the form it takes. I wouldn't have called you if I didn't think it was important or needed to be addressed right now. So you will go back there with Debbie and I and you will listen to what John has to say. Am I clear?"
Although there was a mutinous expression in his eyes and he could feel Justin's slight tremor from suppressed laughter at his expense, he reluctantly agreed. The four of them entered the break room where John sat by Peter talking softly to him. The drug had Peter in its grip and he couldn't move anymore.

"What the hell are you doing here, John?" Brian couldn't take his eyes off of Peter. He got a pretty good inclination from the look of the young man what the situation might be but he held his silence.

"Uncle Brian, thanks for coming." John took a deep breath, pulling himself together. "Peter and I are in trouble. Especially Peter. I never would have reached out to you if it weren't for him but I didn't know where else to go. As long as you help him, you don't have to speak to me if you don't want to." John couldn't stop the rush of words or the sudden burst of emotion pouring from him.

Brian watched as Jennifer and Debbie went to comfort John, while Peter just laid on the cot, conscious but barely breathing. Justin blinked twice, he had a good idea of what was going on but he needed confirmation. "John, what did Peter take?"

"He didn't take anything, it was what he was given."

"Rophynol? The date rape drug? Peter can hear everything but can't move." Justin said. John nodded.

Brian looked at Justin with wide eyes. "What the actual fuck? How do you know its effects, Justin? And John, you'd better start talking."

Justin just looked back at Brian. Later. Brian nodded in confirmation that he'd received the silently given message. John told them everything he'd spoken to Debbie. The young man was clearly distressed and although Brian didn't want to feel for him, for them, he couldn't stop himself. He knew firsthand what Joan and Claire were capable of in mentally beating down the Kinney men, especially Joan. She had done nothing to stop Jack's abuse of his person except crawl between the pages of her bible and hide inside the bottom of her bottle of vodka. She turned a blind eye time and again as long as it kept Jack from hitting her and Claire. He was supposed to take it and not be affected by it, no matter how bruised, bloodied and broken his body became. His mother would tell Claire that Brian was meant to suffer the cause of Christ because he was a man and a gay man at that. No matter how dominant his personality or intelligent his brain was, he was still bound for hell according to the gospel of Jack and Joan Kinney. To know that Peter may have endured the same fate had Jack been alive was unnerving and it angered him that because of the blood-related bigots, both John and Peter had gotten themselves into something they can't handle; something they shouldn't have to handle. By the time John finished his tale and was pleading with Brian for his forgiveness, Brian felt wetness he
wasn't even aware of sliding down his cheek.

He wiped his face quickly. "Debbie, is Carl still in town?" At her affirmative nod, he continued. "John, I want you to tell former Detective Horvath everything you just told me so that he can relate it to his contacts within Pittsburgh P.D."

John shook his head. "I can't, Uncle Brian. They will kill me. They'll kill Petey and I can't let that happen."

"No one is going to kill you or your brother. If you want my help, this is the price of it. There is a lot more to this than you can possibly imagine. Justin I need you to call Tony and get his ass here now. If they managed to infiltrate Babylon even passed the security we have in place, we're about to enter into a shit storm."

Justin took out his cell phone and dialed. While he was taking care of that side of the business, Jennifer walked over to him. "Will you forgive me for being to vague and demanding, Brian?"

He took her hand and kissed it. "It's okay, Mom." At her sharp intake of breath and the quick tears appearing, he smiled gently. "Debbie couldn't have even done what you did in getting me to listen. If what I suspect is true, Jen, this is about more than waging a war on the homos. Even though John, Peter and I don't share the same last name, it doesn't take a lot of digging to find out that we're related. This was also personal."

She nodded. "I thought it might be which is why I couldn't let this wait. They not only targeted your business but your family, one of which is gay. So what's next?"

"We continue with business as usual. Justin and I get married...without getting married," he said smiling which caused her to laugh. "From there, Justin and I work on securing our future and that of those we care about. With John's veiled reference to the people the Knights answer to, I can well imagine Stockwell and Hobbs are mixed up in there somewhere. They wouldn't have been able to get away with so much without someone in law enforcement turning a blind eye and that includes the cold case of the bombing. If we don't find out who's behind this soon, Justin and I will be fucked royally and without lube."

"It's amazing how you work anal sex into every conversation, Brian," Debbie said coming over. "So you're really going to help them. I'm proud of you, Brian."
"Aw thanks, Ma. I need a huge favor from you though. Everything you've heard tonight, I need you not to say anything to anyone. Of course Ted, Emmett and Colby have to be told what's going on. Even Drew has to know because it's directly related to Justin and my business interests."

"You mean specifically, don't tell Michael," Debbie said sadly.

Brian nodded. "He and I aren't on the best of terms right now." He deliberately didn't tell her about their altercation at the restaurant or about the one at the hearing although he suspected she already knew about it. Michael always ran to her when there was a problem but he was glad she didn't blame him for their problems as Debbie was wont to do.

"Now you listen to me. I think what you are doing for my granddaughter in getting Melanie settled is a great thing. Whether my son agrees with it or not, doesn't mean a fucking thing in the grand scheme of it all. It was a smart thing to do but most importantly, it was the right thing to do." She playfully slapped his cheek and threw her arms around his neck.

"Tony's on his way over, Brian," Justin said. "What are we going to do with them? They can't stay here in Pittsburgh."

"They're going to stay with us for the time being," Brian said before he turned to look at John who was sitting by Peter watching him to make sure he stayed awake. "I know Peter has school, John but what have you been doing with yourself."

John shrugged. "I've been taking odd jobs here and there trying to save for trade school. Mom and Grandmother don't know that I've been doing that. They've been wanting me to go work at the mill but I don't want to."

"So what do you want to do?" Brian asked genuinely curious.

"Originally I wanted to fix cars and motorcycles but I discovered I like detailing them more."

Brian nodded. "Interesting. You any good?"

"I'd like to think so." John smiled. "At least on the computer I am. I designed a graphics program to work on."
"Wait-you designed a graphics program?" Justin chimed in.

"Yeah. I couldn't find one that did what I wanted it to do. It didn't have the design patterns or colors I wanted to use. So I created one."

Justin and Brian looked at each other. "Where's the program now? I'd like to see it when we get home."

"Home?"

"Yeah. John if it's okay with you and Peter, we'd like you both to stay with us. At least until this all blows over."

"The loft is too small for all of us, Justin."

"We haven't lived at the loft for awhile now although we still stay there from time to time. We live on the Pennsylvania/ West Virginia border. It's a little out of the way but a lot safer than where you probably have been living."

John nodded and his relief was palpable. He was dreading going back to Travis Murphy's apartment considering everything that happened regarding Peter. He reached for his keys showing Justin the six flash drives. "The program is on the blue one. I don't trust leaving things on the hard drives and I haven't had time or money to patent the idea but it works."

"What's on the rest of the flash drives?" Brian asked amazed at the conversation. Debbie and Jennifer were also very interested.

"Other programs I've tinkered around with that aren't quite perfected yet."

"So let me ask you something, John. If you do this as a hobby, why not go to college so you can get paid for it?"
John shrugged. "I didn't get a scholarship like Peter and besides, Mom and Grandmother expected me to graduate and begin working immediately. By me doing that, it kept them off of Peter's case when he got the scholarship. If I didn't, they would have made him give it up and Peter is too brilliant to have to do that."

His answer reminded Brian why he left and never looked back. Jack and Joan had tried to get Brian to do the same thing. When he refused, Jack broke three of his ribs. Brian covered it up so that his soccer scholarship couldn't be revoked because of his injuries. He remembered playing through the pain and also blowing the doctor when he was rushed to emergency after a game so that he would keep the secret. Brian would have done anything not to return to the House of Horrors and that included using sex when he had to.

Tony arrived in the company of Everett who was the head of security for Kinnetik and Carl Horavth. At Brian's questioning look and John's clear unease, Justin shrugged. "I figured it was best to have this relayed now so that John and Peter can be involved as little as possible later. It's bad enough that he will probably have to tell this story again soon but if I can help it, he won't anytime in the near future."

Brian pulled him in for a quick but heated kiss in gratitude. If anyone understood what it was costing him to listen to this, Justin did. He didn't know that Justin was reliving his own nightmare through Peter's experience. Justin had been in a similar situation with the date rape drug, only it involved an over-amorous classmate whose advances Justin had overlooked because he was still fervently involved with Brian. If Daphne hadn't arrived home when she did, Justin would have been raped. It was then, Justin asked Brian to not see him as often and they settled on seeing each other for two weeks every two years. Brian would have taken one look at Justin and seen the panic attacks and relived the nightmares as Justin had-remnants from both the bashing and the new situation and he couldn't do that to Brian. Justin couldn't stand to be touched for a long time after that and often wondered if he would ever crave Brian's again. He'd taken out a restraining order and switched his class schedule in addition to quitting his job at the Museum of Modern Art. He and Daphne moved three times during the first two years until she finally put her foot down and told him that he wasn't going to continue running. She went with him to his therapy sessions and held his hand at night until he could fall asleep. Daphne even arranged her schedule to fit his so that he wouldn't be alone until he was ready to be much as Brian had done the first time. He knew Brian had suspected that something was wrong and was determined to come to New York and see him but Justin would tell him he was busy with work. It wasn't a lie but it wasn't the full truth either. He managed to get showings in Toronto, Los Angeles and of course New York which built his career rapidly. It was the only thing Justin could do that wouldn't cause abject horror. Art had literally kept him sane. When Justin and Brian finally met up for the first time after the incident it was in Venice where Brian was meeting with his first international client and Justin was doing his first overseas commission for the same company and that's when the first of their business partnership occurred. Until seeing Peter sprawled out on the cot, Justin had planned to never tell Brian about the incident but he knew he had to. Justin figured it was better he find out from him than someone else which was another reason he had no objection to John and Peter staying with them. Peter was going to need all the support he could get, not just about being accidentally-on-purpose outed but because of the trust issues he was bound to have after the drug wore off.
Shifting back to the present, Justin listened as John told his story again. Peter was trying his best to stay from the effects of the drug but only had minimal movement at best. The good thing was that it shouldn't be long until full use of his faculties would return. The only problem would be the short-term memory loss. For Justin, it was easy to identify his would-be attacker because he remembered making the study date and all of the events leading up to him taking the fateful drink and he'd known Sean for awhile prior to the attempt. The question would be how much could Peter remember to identify his. Carl wrote down information as he would have if he was still working, advising that he would pass the information on to the new police commissioner who he considered a personal and personable friend. Brian gave orders for Tony to pull the surveillance tapes from the entrance and over the bar to see if they could spot the guys John identified or at the very least who slipped the drug in Peter's drink. They all knew that it may not have been the supplier of the drug but it would be a start. John in turn told them that he didn't know some of the guys or how many there were. He only rolled with a certain few and had yet to meet everyone. Everett was advised to bring Cynthia and Ted up to speed as it could have direct bearing on the answer of who was launching an attack against Brian and Justin. The impromptu meeting adjourned, Jennifer went over to John and hugged him advising that she would gather some clothes and supplies and bring them to the house the next day along with two suits. Since they were staying at Brian and Justin's, they would definitely be attending the dinner party and would be considered her guests. Brian and Justin knew better than to argue with her. Both of them agreed that they would inform Emmett, Drew, Daphne and Lindsey since they would have contact with all of them sooner than if they were coming back to the Pitts. They all left the diner via the back door to avoid the crowd in the front. Again, John was relieved and thankful to everyone but especially Debbie and Jennifer. Without them, he knew Brian wouldn't have been available to listen and ultimately help them. Everett and Tony helped get Peter into Justin's car asking if Brian needed them to follow him home. He advised them that Drew and Emmett were spending the night at Britin so they would be able to care for both of the guys and that he would be in touch with both of them first thing in the morning.

Lindsey checked in on Gus as well as Melanie and Jenny before making her way down to the kitchen. She smiled to herself acknowledging that having Melanie in the house the past few days had been a good thing. No, they would never get back together but it reminded Lindsey of old times before they had children and were friends first and foremost. She was pleased with herself that she was grown up enough to invite Melanie to stay at her house instead of using the rest of the money in the account for hotel fees. Gus and Jenny were thrilled to be reunited and fell asleep re-watching Independence Day—a favorite of both of theirs.

Colby came into the house as Lindsey was pulling turkey, cheese, lettuce and mayo out of the fridge and laid it on the counter. She opted not to turn on the overhead lights by working by the open fridge instead.

"Want a sandwich?" she asked cordially and by way of greeting.

He nodded. "Yeah. Thanks. I haven't had a chance to eat yet."
"Not surprising considering the amount of tapping I hear whenever you're home. Any closer to getting the new program and encryption ready?" She took in his appearance and immediately knew he went for a run. She noticed he did that a lot especially when he was under pressure.

"I'm getting closer but it's tough trying to play beat the clock with a bunch of unknowns. It needs to be just right so that their accounts are unprotected for the least amount of time. They also need a few firewalls and fail-safes incorporated so that this doesn't happen again." He reached into the open refrigerator and pulled out the apple juice. Shifting passed Lindsey, he grabbed two glasses and poured.

"Well if anyone can get it done, you can. I'll just be glad when it's over and things can get back to normal." She clinked her glass with his and took a long draught of the cool liquid.

"I agree. I'm all for subterfuge-keeps life interesting after all-but this shit is too much."

"Language," Lindsey automatically corrected but Colby laughed.

"Like you haven't said much worse. I've heard you on the phone with your ex. By the way, how's that going?"

Lindsey swallowed a bit of her sandwich as she contemplated his question. She took another small sip before answering, "You know...surprisingly well. We haven't argued and it's almost like when she and I first met. We became good friends largely due to Brian constantly pushing us together. It was in subtle little ways at first. He would take me somewhere and miraculously remember he had someone to do. Melanie would be there and he'd ask her to take me home."

"Sounds like he's always been a good friend to you."

"He has been. He still is. What he's doing for Melanie, the kids and I is no short of amazing but then he is often like that. Perhaps that's why I couldn't let the friendship go no matter how much it pissed Melanie off."

"Did she have a reason to be jealous?" Colby couldn't hide his curiosity.
"I suppose in a way she did. There were times they would argue and trade insults over the dumbest things and I would side with him or stay neutral and that would bother her. It wasn't done intentionally but I just understood Brian a lot better than most do. Melanie felt like she was in constant competition for my affection whereas Brian knew his place in my life."

"Twenty years is a helluva long time to be insecure about your place in someone's life."

"It is, Colby, but what are you getting at?"

Colby put down his sandwich and looked directly at her. "I'm saying that there is more to you than you are willing to admit, Lindsey."

"I don't know what you mean," she said while fidgeting.

Colby took a step closer, watching as she instinctively took a step back. He pushed his hair back over his shoulder just before his arm snaked around her waist. He pulled her closer so that she couldn't escape looking up at him. "I think you know exactly what I'm talking about Lindsey." He didn't give her a chance to respond before he bent stealing a kiss from her lips.

He took advantage of her sharp intake of breath by shoving his tongue in her mouth. Her body stiffened at first and he silently willed her to calm down and enjoy the sensation. She gradually relaxed into him as he pulled her closer. Lifting her, he placed her in front of him on the counter top, never breaking the contact. It was his turn to gasp as he felt her hands digging into his hair holding him to the kiss which was spiraling out of control quickly. It was hard for Colby to keep restraint when all he wanted to do was loosen her robe, discard her silken pajamas and fuck her right there...but he wouldn't. Lindsey Petersen was one of the few women in his life he'd ever wanted to take his time to get to know. He found everything about her fascinating including the fact that she was definitely bisexual and didn't know or understand it. She was locked into thinking she had to be one or the other. That was the problem with labels; they served no purpose except to categorize and confuse. Even as he kissed her, he could feel her confusion but he could also feel that she didn't want it to end.

He pulled back from the kiss to search her eyes. "Do you understand now, Lindz? You've been suppressing yourself and I think Melanie knew that. That's why she always felt threatened by a bonafide gay man. He's still a man. You are not a lesbian although you like women. And you're not a hetero either although you surely like kissing me."

Her eyes widened at his implication as Brian's words from ten years ago flooded her mind. "It's okay to like cock and it's okay to like pussy, just not at the same time. So which one do you like?" She slid
off the counter with Colby's help. "I-I better go lie down."

"You do that. Good night, Lindz."

He watched her walk dazedly toward the stairs acknowledging to himself that it a mistake to kiss her. He couldn't help himself though, he had to know what she tasted like and if she would be responsive. As a result of his curiosity, he had one helluva a fucking boner that he was sure a shower nor hand would cure. He sighed deeply. He could always go to Babylon and pick up a man to fuck or even go to one of the hetero clubs for a woman but none of them were Lindsey. Her body screamed at him to take it but he wouldn't until she was ready for that. So it was going to be a long and unsatisfying night. _Fuck!!_

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_Emmett Honeycutt, Event Planner Extraordinaire_ was a fucking marvel. As Emmett stood inside the living room of Britin he was pleased with his work. Out of all the events he’d ever done, this one mattered to him the most because it was for two people who deserved every fucking bit of happiness which came their way. Standing there looking at the photos Brian requested hung at various points throughout the room, he reflected on the night they met. OH God he, Ted and especially Michael was pissed. They were at Babylon, of course, and had waited for Brian to finish getting his dick sucked (yet again). They were about to finally go get something to eat after Michael hunted him down but then under a street light across from the club, Brian Kinney met what would ultimately become the best thing that ever happened to him. He met Justin Taylor. Emmett remembered everything throughout the first five years of their relationship including the night Craig had showed up to hurt Brian and Justin had stood up to his father on Brian's behalf. It was the first night _Possessive Brian_ made an appearance in relation to what was originally supposed to be a one-night stand. He remembered the road trip to find Justin after he'd run away because Brian's place got robbed. Brian would never admit it but Emmett knew he was worried about the little twink. He nearly laughed out loud at the look on Brian's face during Justin's pole dance for the King of Babylon contest and the discussion of it the morning after. Brian was sure pissed that Justin had fucked the twink he had earmarked for himself. _Jealous Brian was hot_.

Emmett continued to walk around the room which was set up like a gallery full of photos and paintings of Brian and Justin that they had done for and of each other. _Protective Brian_ had shown up the night Justin confronted Chris Hobbs, although he would never acknowledge the look he gave the punk who dared touch Justin. _Loving Brian_ had shown up to Justin's prom regardless of the traumatic events following. _Nurturing Brian_ took care of Justin after the bashing and _Romantic Brian_ gave Justin a dance in the middle of Liberty Avenue that he wouldn't ever forget. There were so many facets of Brian Kinney's personality brought to the forefront specifically for Justin Taylor who wouldn't let Brian hide from him. Contrary to Michael's belief, the only one capable of knowing Brian totally and completely was Justin-not because Justin forced his way in but because Justin was the only one who wouldn't take advantage of it. They had both made mistakes during their relationship and they still would but it was a known fact that although Brian and Justin were strong individually, they would always be indestructible together. They drove each other, pushed each other
into areas of greatness but most of all they loved each other and Emmett felt blessed to be apart of their history.

Daphne's reaction to the room was much the same as Emmett's as she went to greet him and take her date Troy on a circuit of the room. She related to Troy the finer points of a romance spanning fifteen years and where it all began for her—the morning after. Justin had arrived at school in a Jeep with the word FAGGOT painted on it in purple. That was the event that inadvertently outed Justin at St. James Academy. The car sped down the street causing kids to duck and dodge out of the way as she'd looked on in confusion and horror. Justin was in the backseat but she couldn't take her eyes off the driver. One of the asshole students, Tommy said "Hey Taylor, you wanna suck me off?" Before Justin had a chance to respond, Brian did. "No but I'll kick your tight little virgin ass so hard you won't sit down for a week." The sparkle and look of admiration in Justin's eyes was impossible to miss. When Daphne had handed him his uniform and asked him who that guy was, Justin's response was simple. 'I just saw the face of God and his name is Brian Kinney.' She remembered the first time she officially visited the loft and laughed easily telling Troy the story of naked Brian and guava juice and Justin's slight foray into petty thievery to run away to New York to become a Go-Go Boy in Chelsea. That was the plan until Brian found him the next day thanks to charges on his Visa. Of course Justin took the one with the highest credit limit and the least amount of charges on it. Then there was Brian and Justin at the prom in the most beautiful dance and moment ever. Save the Last Dance for Me would forever be etched in Daphne's mind as the night Justin and Brian first got married because to her and in her heart, they did regardless of everything that happened before or after. She wanted to gut-punch both of them during the Ethan episode of their tumultuous relationship but she understood why it had to happen. She really couldn't stand that rat bastard and she made it a point to tell that to Justin often. She smiled again remembering the advice she gave Justin to get Brian back. Even though it didn't work for her and she'd moved on to greener pastures, she was still so happy that it worked for Justin just like it did on the night she went to Babylon for the first time and the nipple piercing. Too many adventures with Brian and Justin for her not to be especially happy that her favorite two assholes finally are getting it right.

Jennifer stared at an over-sized picture taken recently of Justin sleeping as Brian looked up at the camera and the slight smirk on Brian's face. She knew how much Justin hated taking pictures, preferring to paint instead. True, Justin wasn't a baby anymore but looking at that picture with him sleeping, she realized that no matter how old he got, Justin would always be her baby. Now I have two sons. Yeah. She considered Brian her son, too. Her initial reaction to Brian and Justin's relationship was that of any other parent...shock, anger, devastation and horror. But over time in getting to know him, she acknowledged that he was the best thing that could have possibly happened to Justin. He knew it right away which is not something that happens for everyone—certainly not Brian nor herself. Yet she couldn't regret Craig because without him she wouldn't have had Justin nor Molly. Still having Brian around helped Justin grow into a man and in turn Jennifer had gotten to know the phenomenon that is Brian Kinney. He honored her and respected her and called Justin on it when he tended to forget that she was still his mother. Considering his own mother and her actions, it was a miracle that Brian was a whole person. The same could be said about Justin's father but she wouldn't think of it. Instead she would remember the afternoon after the Babylon bombing and how hurt Brian was after he'd asked Justin to marry him and the proposal was turned down. It resulted in the purchase of what had become Britin. She remembered when she and Brian looked at it together and his nervousness in asking if she thought Justin would love it. Brian was immediately taken with the property mostly because of words Justin had said he wanted: Country Manor with stables and a pool. He had taken those words to heart and enlisted her help in finding it. They called off the wedding and Jennifer was about to re-list the house when he asked her not to. He couldn't let it go.
He'd taken his loft off the market and rebuilt Babylon but this was Justin's house. When she reminded him that Justin was living his life in New York, Brian just simply said, "He'll be back." She didn't understand his statement at first especially considering he hadn't gone to see Justin for the first year and a half that he lived there. It wasn't until later that she discovered that Brian was personally overseeing the renovations and decorations for Britin during that time. She now understood that it wasn't that Brian was going to hold back Justin's dreams or interfere with them; just that somethings were meant to be. Looking at the photographs and paintings displayed, she got that message loud and clear. She smiled at Debbie and Carl's approach.

"Wonderful display, isn't it?"

"It's like a gallery showing. I don't have to wonder who did the paintings but these photos of Justin with Brian mixed into some of them...WOW!"

"I know. Brian is quite the photographer especially considering Justin hates taking pictures."

"Wait-you mean Brian did these?"

Emmett came up next to Debbie. "Yep, every last one. Just when you think they couldn't get any more perfectly matched, they go and do something to prove it even more so. I mean yeah, Brian is in advertising and has access to all sorts of photographers but to know that he himself does professional quality work...well no wonder he demands excellence."

They stood in front of a large photo which was done in black and white but showed the blue of Justin's eyes. The picture presented innocence with the innate sensuality Brian found so appealing. Next to it was a painting of Brian which seemed almost life like equipped with the freshly fucked hair and that ever present sparkle in the hazel eyes.

"My God," Debbie said. "Looking at these two alone you almost feel like you've been watching them do it." Everyone laughed and agreed. It was definitely clear how they felt about each other.

The rest of the gang arrived. Ted and Blake; Cynthia in the company of Colby; Melanie and Lindsey with Gus and Jenny and Ben. Even John and Peter were in attendance and stood next to Jennifer and her husband.

"Where's Michael?" Melanie asked.
Ben dropped his eyes. "Either he's still on the phone or outside having a major queen out, I don't know which."

Debbie crossed over to Ben. "Honey, is everything alright."

Ben gave her a slight smile. "I'm sure everything will be fine, Debbie. Somehow he's still convinced that Brian will back out of this at the last minute or it will be a situation like the last time where they call it off. Based on the way this place looks, neither scenario will be taking place. Emmett you've done a fantastic job in here."

Em blushed at the compliment. "I just followed the demanding couple's instructions. You know that tall one is a damn tyrant." Everyone laughed again at his reference to Brian who came in on the tail end of Em's statement.

"I heard that, Honeycutt."

"Just speaking the truth, Mr. Kinney. And don't call me Honeycutt," Em said laughingly.

"I know that Justin and I ran you ragged but it was certainly worth it. Emmett this is amazing. I can't wait for Sunshine to see it. Oh were you able to-"

"Yes, Brian. It's behind that sheet over there."

"What is it?" Debbie asked.

Brian and Em smiled wide at the same time. "A little surprise for Justin. He hasn't seen this room yet either so..."

"Well where is he?"

Emmett chimed in. "I'll go get him. If I know him, and I do, he's having trouble with his hair."

"We were in separate rooms-some lesbianic thing he insisted on-but I suspect you are right. Judging
by how long it takes him to get ready in the mornings when he actually has to venture out in a suit, I'll be willing to bet money he's fussing with it."

"You know, Brian. If you'd let him cut it, maybe he wouldn't fuss so much," Emmett tried his best to look innocent.

"The hell you say. He's not allowed to cut it..at least not yet. I like pulling it."

The men, both gay and straight burst out laughing while it the ladies of the group tried not to laugh or to be disgusted which didn't work. They knew how Brian operated and they knew that Justin wasn't exactly Mr. Goody-Two-Shoes either. If he was, there was no way in hell he'd be with Brian. Besides everyone in the room with the exception of a select few, had witnessed the hair pulling on both sides many times over the years. Debbie, Jennifer, Emmett and Daphne had even gotten an eye full of Brian and Justin in action over the years. They learned quickly to knock or announce themselves before entering a room where there was potential for Justin and Brian to have sex. For Emmett's part, he'd learned to stay out of the backrooms at clubs whenever hanging out with Brian and Justin. Fucking in public was one of the couples favorite past times much like baseball or football to most people and they made n secret of it.

Emmett made his way up the stairs to the guest room nearest Justin's third floor studio. He could hear Molly and Justin arguing about time and the fact that she was hungry as hell.

"Emmett has this place smelling like a five-star restaurant and you're still fumbling with your goddamn hair. I swear you're worse than any woman I know. If you put it up and take it down one more time, I'll scalp you my damn self!"

"Shut it, Mollusk and just answer the damn question. Up or down?"

Emmett entered the room trying to contain his laughter. Usually it was Justin yelling at Molly to hurry up. It was funny to see the tables turned. Crossing the room over to Justin, he released Molly from her role of bridesmaid and told her to sneak down to the kitchen and have a few crab cakes but not to let anyone see her except maybe Drew. When the door closed, he turned his attention to Justin.

"You okay?"

"No. I mean, yeah, Em. Just nervous, I guess."
"Why? Today you are technically marrying the man of your dreams; someone you have known practically your entire life. More importantly, someone who loves you beyond rhyme or reason and who returns your feelings a hundred fold. Why the nerves?" He began to straighten Justin's midnight blue silk tie against his sky blue shirt.

"I don't know exactly, Emmett but I know it has nothing to do with Brian. He and I have worked toward this for so long. I just don't want anything to go wrong or Brian to get cold feet. I can't help but remember what happened the last time we were taking a step this big."

"First, let me set your mind at ease about Brian. Your man is downstairs waiting for you and he sent me up here to make sure you haven't jumped out the window, Rapunzel." The Disney princess reference earned him a watery chuckle from Justin. "Secondly, I've gotten to know you pretty well over the years, Justin and I know that you can only be talking about one thing—or should we say person—going wrong. Debbie is here so Michael shouldn't act up too bad. It would ruin his image in her eyes but in any event the rest of us are right here with you to keep him in line, okay?"

Justin nodded and took a deep breath. "Thanks, Em. I needed that and couldn't ask Brian for it right now. He thinks it's a silly tradition to get dressed in separate spaces but I can't help thinking that if Mel and Lindz had on their wedding all those years ago, things may have been different now. I just don't want to tempt fate you know."

"I do and I understand but you can't let what happened between them dictate yours and Brian's future. The situations are completely different. For one they eat pussy," Emmett said gagging causing Justin to laugh again. *Good the color is coming back in his cheeks.* "Secondly, you don't need the assurance that Brian loves you and only you. He is a man to love only once and you're the lucky winner of his heart. He's never been more sure. So take that thought with you as we go downstairs and get you committed-in a good way. Now let's see about your hair. If we leave it down, you look like a mafia prince. If we put it up, you'll look like a bouncer." Emmett thought about the photographs downstairs that Justin had yet to see and decided to put his hair up to provide a contrast. So leaving it in a long ponytail as opposed to the bun Justin usually wore while out and about or painting seemed the best option. He clapped at his handy work and turned Justin to the mirror.

"Oh my God, I look nice."

"Yes you do, Sweetie and your man is going to think so, too. The RL suit sets off your eyes perfectly and the shirt accents them. All in all, I'd say Brian is going to want to rip that suit off you the minute he sees you."

Justin chuckled. "He always wants to rip my clothes off."
"Too much information. I don't need the reminder of your backroom activities. Thank you very much."

Justin laughed as they left the room and headed downstairs.

Brian was feeling impatient as ever especially standing there with Michael listening to him drone on and on about how he should call this farce off and a multitude of other infractions to his pride especially regarding the hearing.

"I can't believe you brought up the shit you did, Brian. That was low even for you."

"Michael, I didn't pick that fight. You did and here you are again, trying to pick another fight. On one of the most important nights of my life, you're standing there calling my-for lack of a better term-wedding a farce. What the actual fuck is your problem, Mikey? And don't hand me any shit about how Justin is a user and that other such bullshit. For the record, Justin's net worth is in the millions just like mine is. He owns several businesses both with me and apart from me, so your claims that he's a gold digger is not only wrong, it's slanderous and if he wanted to he could sue you. All of the money you've made and continue to make from Rage, do you give Justin his due? After all it was his art work that put you on the map?"

"Why should I give him anything? It was my stories."

Brian shook his head. "You sure they were your stories, Michael? The very first issue as I recall was Justin's very personal struggle surrounding the bashing. There were also subsequent issues which our life together was put on display for the world to see and judge. Yet you stand there and disparage his character especially when he is allowing you to keep all the royalties from Rage so that you could live and pay the mortgage on your comic book store. Those royalties also allowed you to travel behind Ben although you might have considered sending a chunk of it to Melanie for the care and well-being of Jenny but you stand here and pronounce judgments on Justin."

"Did you know he's cheating on you again with Ethan? I saw them at the diner earlier this week. They looked cozy and having a private conversation when Ma, Emmett and me arrived at the diner."

Brian folded his lips. "Really? And you're just telling me about this now?"
"I would have told you about it after the hearing but I was too pissed at you."

"So why tell me now?"

"Because you're about to make the biggest mistake of your life. I don't want to see you hurt, Brian. You can do much better than the blond, scheming trick that wouldn't go away."

"I can? Who would you suggest, Mikey?" Brian knew the answer even before he said it.

"I always thought we were going to retire in Palm Springs together."

"Sure. Ben and Justin can come too. That's what husbands do you know."

"I meant after Ben..."

It was taking everything in him not to choke the life out of Michael. It was ridiculous and honestly Ben deserved better than someone who was planning and pining away for someone else waiting for his partner to die off. "For the record, Michael, people die all the time and they don't even have to be sick. As far as Ben goes, he's doing well and his viral load is virtually undetectable. As far as me being free and waiting around for you, get that thought out of your head. I love you like a brother-nothing more. You are about to lose even that. You could never fill Justin's shoes. He is it for me just like Ben is supposed to be for you. There was no one else before Justin and there will be no one else after Justin. By the way, I already know about the whole issue on Monday between Justin and Ethan. Justin told me himself what the situation was. Enjoy the party, Mikey."

Brian moved over to the bar area, hoping to calm his racing heartbeat. It was as he was about to order that Justin entered the room. Any small doubt that Brian might have subconsciously had about committing to Justin wholeheartedly and completely, dissipated as soon as he laid eyes on Justin Taylor. His eyes lit in wonder at the photos and paintings limning the walls of the room which was exactly what Brian asked Emmett to aim for. Brian stood in place studying the emotions on Justin's face as memory after memory assailed him and that sunshine bright smile shone between lips he would never tire of kissing. Justin's eyes searched the room until he found Brian. Both knew they were being watched but neither cared as they came together in the center of the room.

"You look-" Brian began.
Good? Bad? Laughable?"

"Beautiful."

Justin smiled brightly at him remembering the last time they said those words to each other in preparation for another night long ago. Finally the timing was right between them and they knew it beyond a shadow of doubt. Justin raised his hands to Brian's face as Brian's arms circled his waist. "You too," Justin finally said before Brian claimed his lips.

A wealth of feeling poured from them as the onlookers witnessed a significant piece of Brian and Justin's history-a culmination of hard work, dedication, sacrifice and finally unity. Emmett cleared his throat to address everyone which ended the exchange for a brief time.

"As you all know, both Brian and Justin were very hands on in planning this outward show of their commitment to one another. Although in Pittsburgh and over two-thirds of the country, same-sex marriage is now legal, our dear friends have opted to hold true to themselves. Now that's not to say they will never tie the knot in front of a judge or clergy but they are married in every way that matters. The officiant will of course preside over the commitment ceremony but Brian planned a special surprise for Justin to commemorate this special occasion. Drewsie darling, can you and Ben do the honors of the unveiling."

Emmett moved out of the way and stood on the other side of Justin as Brian held him close. In the corner of the living room stood a replica of the street light they met under along with a mural of the scenery. On the mural were the words they first spoke to each other before deciding to hook up:

Brian: "How's it going? You had a busy night?"

Justin: "Just-ah-checking out the bars, you know. Boy Toy, Meat hook.

Brian: "Meat hook? Really? So you're into leather?"

Justin: "Sure."

Brian: Where you headed?"

Justin: "No place special.

Brian: "I can change that."

No one in the room, not even Daphne and Michael, were aware of what was said during that first conversation between Brian and Justin until then. Brian's gesture was sweet and endearing because he actually remembered every single word of the conversation which changed their lives. Justin was
moved to tears which he valiantly fought back; Michael was moved to anger which showed in his stiff and unyielding posture even as Ben tried to embrace him. Justin and Brian stepped up to the platform and the officiant followed suit. When she asked if they took each other as husband and husband, there was no hesitation or any doubt left amongst the occupants that it was really happening. She asked if there was anything either of them wanted to say and Justin spoke first.

"Brian, it seems like it has taken forever to get us to this point and I guess in some ways it has. We have fought hard for what we wanted most...each other. I will continue to fight for you and with you; sometimes even against you if I have to." The assembled guess chuckled knowing that Justin meant every word. He would challenge Brian at every turn. "If ever you have a doubt that I love you with every fiber of my being, remember all that we’ve gone through to get here: the good times, the bad, the ugly and the beautiful moments like this one and know that I will never leave you or forsake you. You are my muse, my inspiration, my constant source of strength and weakness; my welcomed distraction and eternal craving. I am yours and only yours forever and a day. I love you, Brian Kinney."

"Justin, I am not always good with words so I'll let this tell you what I need to say." Emmett pressed play on the CD player and the song most in Brian's heart began. He led Justin into the center of the room as the melodic Jon B. and Babyface began to sing "Someone to Love."

*Don't even like to think about it*
*I don't know what I would do without it*
*I only know I live and I breathe for your love*
*Baby, you came to me in my time of need*
*When I needed you, you're there for me*
*Baby, the love from you is what got me through*
*It was because of you I was able to*
*Give my heart again, You give me*

*Someone to love, Someone to touch, Someone to hold, Someone to know*
*Someone to love, Someone to trust, Someone to hold, Someone to know*

*I thought I'd never love again*
*I thought my life was over and*
I didn't want to face or see another day

Suddenly from nowhere, Baby, you appeared

You dried my tears, you cared for me

Baby, your love for me, truly rescued me

It's because of you I was able to

Fall in love again, you give me

Someone to love, someone to touch, someone to hold, Someone to know

Someone to love, someone to trust, someone to hold, someone to know

For so long in my life, I wouldn't let love inside

But I swallowed my pride the day you arrived

Now that you're by my side, everything is alright

It's because of you, I was able to

Give my heart again*

After the dance was finished and the officiant declared that Brian and Justin was married in their eyes, they sealed their union amid applause and congratulation from the people who meant the most to them. Looking down at the man he affectionately called, "Sunshine," Brian felt the part of himself he always kept aloof click tight sealing Justin inside of it. He belonged irrevocably to Justin and Justin finally belonged to him. He accepted the hugs, kisses and bawdy humor with good grace which was unlike the Brian many of them knew. Emmett outdid himself with all the preparation, right down to the groom "non-wedding" cake which was a combination of Brian's favorite chocolate-chocolate chip and Justin's favorite of Dutch chocolate with butter cream frosting. Michael excused himself from the table and headed off into the kitchen for another bottle of wine when the doorbell rang.

Anita answered the door and made the announcement of who it was but they were all laughing at Melanie and Ted were relaying the story about when Michael was with the Doctor and they had gotten back from France and Justin and Brian spent the entire time French kissing instead of watching the presentation. It wasn't until they heard the first strands of Paganini's Cantabile in D Major that all conversation and movement ceased with the exception of Michael coming back into the room. The next series of events happened as if it slow motion to some but lightening quick to others. Emmett, Ben and Drew could not move fast enough to catch Brian before his fist connected with Ethan's jaw. Nor could they prevent the knee to his midsection or the other well placed kick in the ass as Ben finally got grabbed the hand that was swung back to land another blow, while Drew
literally picked Brian up to get him away from Ethan. Emmett grabbed violin boy's person and ushered him out, taking care not to damage his instrument as Brian would probably already be facing a lawsuit.

Justin on the other hand already knew who was responsible for the mayhem before the culprit even said one word. His mistake was that he did.

Michael clearly drunk said, "So. Boy Wonder, did you enjoy your wedding present? It was great seeing your lover at your wedding. I told Brian before that he should have left you alone you know...especially after the bashing. I told him he should have left you there to die because you were a worthless piece of shit. But you just wouldn't leave him alone. Well now maybe he'll leave you alone now that E-E-Ethan is back in your life. Y-You and he are m-much better suited. Both liars and cheaters and sluts. You-u-u deserve each other."

Before anyone even thought that Justin would act, Michael was looking up from the floor, his left eye already red from Justin's left fist. And Justin wasn't done. Before anyone could pull him off Justin, who normally didn't condone violence, unleashed a series of punches to Michael. Ted, Tuck and Emmett tried to contain Justin and help Michael but there was almost no stopping Justin from the rage he felt. Colby was determined not to stop it feeling like Michael needed to take his punishment like a man and told Lindsey as such when she questioned it. Cynthia sat still, silently laughing behind her hands. About fucking time, she thought to herself. Both Debbie and Jennifer were literally in shock having never seen Justin act like that. Daphne on the other hand, had seen Justin fight once or twice and encouraged the ass beating wholeheartedly as did Molly who knew all about Michael and his jealousy of Justin. Finally Drew, Ben and Brian reentered the room only to witness the mayhem. Justin had Michael up by the collar and was about to land another blow when Brian caught his fist.

"No, Justin."

"Let me fucking go, Brian. NOW!"

"Fucking no. It's enough," Brian said softly while looking him in the eye willing him to let Michael go. His position was a difficult one no matter that Michael deserved what he got. He was still Brian's best friend, the boy who at fourteen befriended another lonely kid. Most of Brian's memorable moments had Mikey in them. They shared a history before and after Justin. Although there was no choice or side Brian had to take, it still hurt to have to witness his husband and his best friend come to blows all because of jealousy.

Justin registered what his actions were doing to Brian but he was so fucking angry. What was supposed to be the best night of their lives was ruined by a fucking little jealous imp. "Get this piece of shit out of my house. Get him out now before I finish what I started Brian," Justin said very quietly. Brian knew that tone and it didn't bode well for Michael or anyone else who would talk out
of turn to him in that moment.

"It's not your house you fucking cunt. It's Brian's house."

Justin turned back quickly intent on finishing Michael off but Brian caught him about the waist and began dragging him toward the stairs while Ben and Carl tried to contain Michael.

"Brian. Brian! Where the fuck's he going?" Debbie called after him but Jennifer stepped in.

"Debbie. Now is not the time. He's saving your son's life."

"Michael's drunk. He didn't mean a word of it. He was never able to hold his liquor very well."

"He meant every word of it, Debbie. God, when will you stop defending him?" Emmett said. "Here's a little something that Ted and I knew that we never mentioned and maybe that's our fault for not wanting to become involved in the fight that landed Michael a punch to the face at Mel and Lindsey's party right after Justin and Ethan got together. Michael had said the exact same things he said tonight that day. That Brian should have left Justin for dead after Chris Hobbs bashed him. That's what caused him to hit Michael but Brian just let himself be blamed like he always did to cover Michael's faults. No one bothered to ask what led to it. You, Mel and Lindz just automatically assumed that it was Brian's fault. Ben was ready to defend him without knowing all of the history and that's understandable but the three of you who should have known something was off about the whole exchange didn't ask one question. Again, Ted and I thought that he would say something but he didn't. So yes...Michael meant every word because it is not the first time he's said it. As far as everything else, he meant that too because it's all he's been saying since he found out that Justin was back for good."

"Right now, Debbie, Brian needs to be with his husband," Jennifer said. "If anyone can get Justin to see reason and calm down, it's Brian. We both know that. You should go with Ben and help him take care of Michael. He's going to need it."

She nodded and kissed everyone good night advising that she would see them in the morning.

Lindsey looked at the other occupants of the room and said softly and simply, "I think the Brian and Mikey Show may have officially just ended."
What no one at the table said but all of them thought was *Good Riddance*. He had been warned time and again and whatever the consequences he would have to face this time.

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Meanwhile upstairs there was a different kind of war going on....

"I mean fuck, Justin, did you have to hit him? You knew he was drunk off his ass."

"What would you have had me do, Brian?"

"Overlook him. You were never prone to violence...well at least not a lot. What the fuck possessed you to hit him?"

"Oh fuck if I know Brian. Perhaps it was when he said I should have died in the bashing." Brian stilled at the mention of the bashing. "And low and behold, I find out that it wasn't the first time he's said it or thought it. You are NOT about to stand there and make me feel bad or guilty for punching the motherfucker, Brian especially not considering your own behavior regarding Ethan."

"That was different."

Justin laughed humorlessly. "Oh really? How so because as far as I'm concerned violence is violence."

"He deserved that ass whipping years ago."

"And so did Michael for far worse offenses. Look just keep your *best friend* away from me or I will not be held responsible for what I do next time."

Brian crossed over to Justin who held himself stiffly. He knew it wasn't personal but that Justin was still feeling belligerent and murderous. If it had been anyone else except Michael, Brian would have been proud of his husband. Guiltily he was proud of him for standing up for himself and couldn't
fault him. Also the appearance of Dom Justin was just too fucking sexy for words. Looking out over the vast grounds of the estate from the bay windows behind Justin, Brian kissed his neck gently. Brian kept kissing Justin until he felt his body relax marginally.

"Brian, I..."

"I know." And he did.

On the rare occasions that Justin was in full-blown dominant mode, topping became the only thing that could calm him down. Consequently, Brian was the target this time since they decided to be monogamous. The good news was that Brian knew Justin would never intentionally hurt him. Instead he would use every ounce of his will to bring Brian pleasure which in turn would help clear Justin's mind. The bad news was that Brian would have to wait to fuck Justin senseless which was what he really wanted to do every since he laid eyes on him when he finally entered the living room.

"Get undressed," Justin said low. Brian knew he was still angry but he also knew it wasn't directed at him.

He was relieved to know that even though Justin was mad as hell, he could still read him and his moods. Contrary to popular belief, Brian was the more even tempered of the two, meaning Justin could go from loving to nuclear in the blink of an eye whereas Brian would give a warning or two before he exploded. The dinner party was a prime example of how quick Justin could change.

Justin clicked on the CD player, just in case their guests were still downstairs. Janet Jackson's sultry voice singing, "Rope Burn" came through loud and clear and Brian knew exactly what he was in store for. Justin wasn't only in dominant mode. He was in the mood for a little bondage and discipline. Brian couldn't suppress the shiver that wracked him. The little sardonic smile on Justin's full lips confirmed Brian's guess. Brian loosened his tie, laying it across the chair before unbuttoning his shirt. Justin watched his every move. Brian made every action deliberate, watching as Justin's breathing became a little more even with every inch of skin he revealed.

"Aren't you going to get undressed?" Brian asked softly.

"In time," was Justin's only response.

Brian toed off his shoes while undoing his belt and pants which he let fall fluidly off his narrow hips. He kicked out of them and his socks. When he hooked his thumbs into his underwear, Justin told
him to leave them. Part of him was disappointed as the black silk rubbing against his hard on was becoming irritating. Justin instructed him to get on the bed and grip the headboard. He untied his tie while grabbing Brian's among the discarded clothing from the chair. Justin made quick work of securing Brian before divesting his own clothes and loosening his hair. Brian swallowed hard as Justin's impossibly blue eyes devoured him. Everywhere Justin looked felt like an actual caress which made Brian shiver in anticipation and just a hint of fear. It was incredibly seductive and not a little bit unnerving to be the complete focus of an angry and horny Justin Taylor-Kinney.

Justin crawled onto the foot of the bed, stopping along the way to deliver little stinging bites to Brian's body beginning at both arches on his feet and other erogenous zones before finally reaching his lips. The initial skin-on-skin contact had Brian's back bowing and ready to explode. He almost felt like a little green youth with little or no dick control. Justin shoved his tongue in Brian's mouth roughly drawing a low moan from Brian's throat. He had no choice but to let Justin control him; Justin wasn't giving an ounce of it up. He explored every crook and crevice of Brian's mouth and throat with his tongue, taking his time while Brian tried his best to hold absolutely still. For the first time in what seemed like forever, Brian was unsure of his ability not to come quickly and all because of the twink on top of him. Justin was a walking, talking, breathing aphrodisiac on any given day but in his current state he was a living wet dream. He gave Brian's lips one last nibble before sitting on Brian's chest, his dick close but not close exactly where Brian wanted it to be able to kiss it. He felt the wetness on his fingers as Justin leaned forward to suck each digit slowly and sensually into his mouth. Each swipe of Justin's tongue shot sensation straight to Brian's groin. He could feel the precum dripping from the head of his dick creating a wet spot on the silk underwear still covering his pelvis. Brian shifted a little trying to escape the wetness which was beginning to seep copiously and steadily.

"Don't come yet," Justin whispered while continuing to lick each finger.

"If you keep that up, I just might," Brian said through gritted teeth.

"Fine. I'll do something else then." He teased.

Justin began to slide down Brian's body and he got the feeling that he should have let Justin continue licking his fingers. The wicked gleam in Justin's eye made Brian second guess his decision. Justin flipped his hair over his head making sure it laid on Brian's body as he aimed straight for Brian's nipples. Between the bites and licks from Justin's mouth and the tickling torture of Justin's hair as he moved between each nipple, Brian was near a screaming orgasm. It didn't help that his silk clad cock was stabbing at the fabric trying desperately to glide against Justin's naked one. The hair covered the visual of Justin's tongue flicks but it didn't lessen the sensation at all. He placed little biting kisses along Brian's belly leading to his groin. Brian's back arched in an effort to get Justin to wrap his succulent lips around his leaking cock. Instead Justin climbed off of Brian and flipped him over before seating himself on Brian's back. He couldn't stop the groan that escaped him as Justin pulled Brian's hair to expose his neck. Justin applied his tongue and teeth in the way that often left Brian panting and moaning while he whispered the nastiest and dirtiest things in Brian's ear. He couldn't stop himself from rutting against the sheets in an effort to get some relief.
"Keep still," Justin whispered while applying a hard smack to Brian's ass.

"Then fuck me already," Brian answered back. He groaned deeply when Justin reached under him to take one of his ultra sensitive nipples between two fingers. Justin squeezed it while applying several heavy handed smacks to Brian's ass.

"Are you trying to be a bossy bottom tonight, Brian?" Justin asked softly while still applying the pressure to Brian's nipple. Brian couldn't answer from being overcome with the sensations as Justin's finger was rimming his hole while his nipple was still clamped between Justin's firm fingers. "Feels good, huh? You're almost ready for me."

Justin went about preparing Brian in earnest, stretching and filling Brian with his fingers. He slid further down his body to finally remove Brian's boxers much to his husband's relief. Justin spread Brian open, watching intently as his fingers disappeared and reappeared before leaning in with his tongue. At the first contact, Brian jumped a little from the wet sensation. Justin settled in, intent on making Brian whimper and beg for his cock. Justin licked, sucked and tongue fucked Brian repeatedly changing rhythm and speed so often Brian felt as if he was going crazy. He pulled against the bonds and rutted against the sheet while Justin continued to taunt and torment him.

"You better not fucking come, Brian until I say so," Justin said as he delved back in.

Brian once again couldn't answer. He was constantly bombarded with wave upon wave of dueling sensations-sharp pleasure and equally sharp pain. Justin kept him hanging in the balance between heaven and hell-fucking sexual purgatory; he showed no signs of mercy. And Brian fucking loved every goddamn second of it. When Justin crawled under his body taking his member into his mouth, Brian released a loud groan he was almost sure they heard downstairs. As Justin sucked him and his fingers pummeled Brian's ass, he found he couldn't give fuck what was going on downstairs or if he took his next breath. All he wanted was Justin. All he could think about was Justin. All he needed was Justin. And Justin knew it.

Justin flipped Brian back over onto his back and reaching over grabbed the lube and a condom. He watched Brian watch him roll it slowly down his own leaking dick and taking a generous amount of lube into his hand he once applied it to the rubber and using the excess to coat Brian's heated channel. Aligning himself, he spread Brian's legs wide, never losing eye contact. Both of them moaned loudly at the first breach.

"Do it," Brian breathed.
"Take it," Justin demanded. And Brian slid down Justin dick until he was fully impaled.

Justin pulled out and pumped back in shallowly the first time, then deeply the second time. Thus began what would be a semi-long but deeply satisfying lesson for Brian. Two shallow- one deep. Three shallow-two deep strokes. Four shallow- three deep. Five shallow- four deep. Justin made sure to caress the prostate gland on every single deep penetration into Brian. Six shallow- five deep. Seven shallow- six deep. Eight shallow- seven deep. Brian was alternated between whimpers, curses, moans and groans but Justin wouldn't release him. Nine shallow- eight deep. Ten shallow-nine deep followed by another ten deep and one shallow. Justin repeated then process in reverse. He leaned in to kiss Brian deeply, moving his tongue in rhythm to the thrust of his hips. Brian was drenched with sweat and shivered under Justin's body. He was never so happy to hear the words "Come for me, Brian" as he was in that moment.

Brian released and trembled and released some more while moaning and shouting Justin's name. Justin in turn came with a smile on his face, knowing deep down that Brian was satisfied and he himself was at last stress free. Justin gently pulled out and tied off the condom, dropping it in the garbage by the bed. He untied Brian's hands and was gratified when he felt Brian's hands come around him. Brian reached down and grabbed the duvet covering them as Justin massaged Brian's wrists briefly before settling back on top of him.

"Thank you, Brian," Justin said softly.

"You're always welcome, Sunshine. Love you."

"Love you, too," Justin said sleepily.

Brian smiled in the semi darkness of the room, too exhausted to roll over or reach to turn out the light. The aftermath of Hurricane Michael could wait until another day. For tonight all that mattered, all that was important is right here. And with that thought, Brian contentedly joined his husband in much needed and well-deserved sleep.

*Someone to Love- Kenneth Edmonds

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End Notes:

Well!!! Let me know what you think of Chapter 22. I sincerely hope you enjoyed reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it. As I'm sure you're learning with me, there are a lot of twist and turns coming
and also, I will continue to set up Time's Up Part II in the process. Some of the foundation appears in this chapter.

I'm posting the link to "Someone to Love" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WsBfHais7c) in case you want to listen to it. As you can probably see, I couldn't NOT use this song for Brian! I absolutely adore the dynamic of Brian and Justin and I hope the non-nuptial ceremony showed that. I'll be posting again soon on both works. Thank you all so much for the encouragement and enthusiasm for my stories!! Much Love!

P.S. One more short note (or PSA if you're Justin-LOL): The SAT reference is very accurate. Although they changed the scoring system about five years ago, they are changing it back to where a perfect score is 1600 (instead of the 600-2400 which they changed it to). Many states have already made the changeover but as of June, 2015, ALL states will adhere to the original scoring system.

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This story archived at http://www.midnightwhispers.ca/viewstory.php?sid=3187
The next several chapters will be dedicated to POV responses to the "PRIZE FIGHTS" of Chapter 22. After those are done, onward to Day 2 of the festivities.

**Chapter Summary**

Daphne invited her unexpected guests in for the night. She couldn't see them driving all the way back to Pittsburgh from the Penn/West Virginia border in the pitch black dark with snow steadily falling. Staying at Brian and Justin's was definitely out of the question with Michael's ultimate fuck-up.

Ben shifted through the door with the passed out burden of his inebriated husband. Michael smelled and felt like he'd ingested the entire Kinney wine cellar.
"The guest room is at the very top of the stairs and to your left Ben," Daphne said quietly, Troy, Debbie and Carl standing by her side."We really appreciate it, Daphne," Ben said equally quiet. He turned to make his way up the massive staircase when she spoke again.

"I'm only doing this because of you and Debbie, Ben. There isn't a need to thank me because if it were up to me, Michael would walk back to Pittsburgh tonight. It's times like this I regret being a doctor."

He nodded and moved up the stairs, understanding her sentiments exactly. He was not in the best frame of mind to be compassionate toward his husband either but love made one do strange things. Like stay and fight for a relationship now in question of being worth saving. Arriving at the room, he put Michael on the bed and began to undress him for bed. He went into the bathroom and grabbed the garbage pail, knowing that Michael would eventually need it and tucked Michael under the covers. For Ben's part, he knew sleep would be elusive; his brain wouldn't stop trying to rationalize actions which by all accounts were not.

I can't believe this has gone as far as it has. I mean, I've tried patience. I've been patient. I've tried reasoning with him. Hell, I've been reasonable in understanding his feelings for Brian. What the fuck has been so difficult about letting the man live his own fucking life? I used to hate the name Brian gave me of 'Zen Ben' but I've learned to accept it because he was right. I've cultivated myself to be patient and kind, loving and accepting and most of all a peace loving man. But right now all I want to do is wake Michael up and finish what Justin started tonight. I can't even be angry with him for punching Michael repeatedly. I think that's what saddens me most of all...is that I can't defend what was done to my husband like I did when Brian hit him all those years ago. But then to hear from Emmett what Michael had said to earn that punch in the eye...Who the fuck did I marry? It's turning out that the man I thought I knew, I don't know anymore-or maybe I didn't know him at all. I could never in a million years think that the man I have been with for thirteen years and married for eleven of those years could have ever done something as heinous as what he did tonight. Why would you invite Ethan Gold to Brian Kinney and Justin Taylor-Kinney's wedding knowing the history of bad blood between them except to wreak havoc on their marriage before it even began? Ben shook his head in disgust. For years, I have played second fiddle to Michael's obsession with governing Brian's life. What's worse is that Brian hadn't really tried to interfere in our own marriage beyond wanting us to come hang out with him once in awhile. I remember the argument Brian and Michael had where Michael said that Brian disrespected his choices and mocked his need to move away from Liberty Avenue and into a more family-friendly neighborhood. The irony is now that Brian is ready-or in Brian's case has been ready for more than ten years-Michael has a problem with Brian shedding his 'Stud of Liberty Avenue' persona in favor of spending it with the man he loves. Brian Kinney did what Michael never thought he would do...he grew up and my husband has a problem with it. What fucking possible problem could he....oh fuck no. NO! He can't possibly be still harboring a fantasy of Brian ultimately choosing him, could he? You know what...it doesn't even matter anymore. It's going to hurt like hell but it has to be done. When we get back to Pittsburgh, I'm leaving. I refuse to live like this-whatever this has been- anymore. I deserve better for whatever time I have left and I'm going to find it. And whether I ever find another man to love me or not, I love me enough to not continue to feel like I'm lacking within my own marriage. No fucking more!

...See I've already waited too long
And all my hope is gone

...I am human and I need to be loved

Just like everybody else does.*

*How Soon Is Now- Morrissey, Steven Patrick/ Marr, Johnny

Brought By Smartbar×

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“There are two ways to be fooled. One is to believe what isn't true; the other is to refuse to accept what is true.”

- Soren Kierkegaard

"Whew what a night," Carl said beginning to peel off his dark blue dinner jacket and loosening his tie. He was glad that the offending garment was no longer part of his daily ensemble. "The ceremony was great. I mean, who would have taken Kinney for a romantic. That he remembered their very first conversation was simply amazing. Based on what was written, I can see why Justin made such an impression on him."

"Are you just going to ignore the rest of what happened, Carl? You don't really believe what Emmett said was true do you? I mean it was Brian and Justin's house, after all. Perhaps he felt he had to defend Justin punching Michael. You can definitely tell Brian's influence on him. The Justin I know would never have done that."
Carl looked at Debbie half in shock, half in amazement. "Debbie did you actually listen to what Emmett said? That was not the first time Michael had said those vicious things about Justin. If someone had said those things about you, I sure hell would have punched them in the mouth."

"Carl, you know Michael. He would never really say all those mean things without being drunk."

Carl crossed the room and pulled Debbie onto the bed beside him. "Let me tell you about drunk people, Deb. Most times, alcohol doesn't make them say hateful things out of the blue. They don't call it liquid courage for nothing. Michael said what was in his heart. What's more is that he said it before I even came around. And then to invite Justin's ex-boyfriend there knowing that Brian and Justin would be angry about it...Yeah, Michael meant every action he did tonight and every word he said."

"After all I've done for Brian and Justin, you would think they would ignore Michael or overlook his behavior because he was drunk. And then Brian didn't even help him, going with Justin upstairs like nothing happened."

Carl shook his head. He would never understand how an intelligent person and able to read people as well as she did was constantly blind to her own son's machinations. "Are you listening to yourself? 'After all I've done for Brian and

Justin they should have overlooked or ignored Michael...’ Are you serious? The problem is that they have been ignoring Michael in favor of living their own lives as they see fit. That's what Michael can't handle. Kinney made a decision that he was expressly and most vocally not pleased with and Michael decided to act like a child, pulling pranks. Well I guess he'll remember the grown man ass whooping Justin put on him tonight." Carl chuckled unapologetically. He didn't even bother to address the second part of her statement.

"You think this is funny, Carl? Justin could have killed Michael tonight and you're standing there like this is some fucking game."

"You're damn right I think it's funny, Debbie. He was warned by everyone, yourself included, not to interfere in Brian and Justin's relationship. When are you going to let him be a man and face his consequences like everyone else? Michael deserved what he got tonight. I mean, saying that Justin should have died in that bashing. That was low, even for him. He's lucky he's not meeting St. Peter at the pearly gates right now." Carl continued to disrobe and ready himself for bed. He was tired from having to deal with the excitement of mayhem brought on by Michael Novotny and Ethan Gold. "Has it ever occurred to you, Debbie, that Michael has an inappropriate fixation with Brian and his decisions? Every time Brian does something that Michael doesn't agree with, he pouts and stomps around. He whines but then that's nothing new."
"Brian and he have been best friends since they were fourteen...more like brothers. Of course he's going to give his opinion about what happens in Brian's life."

"And it doesn't bother you considering Michael has been married to Ben for the last eleven years? Also they haven't exactly been close during that time but nothing seems odd or out of place about that?"

"What the fuck are you getting at Carl?" Debbie nearly shouted.

"I think your boy is mentally sick and needs to talk to someone is what I think." There it's finally out there. "There's no way a completely rational person would have pulled what he did tonight."

Debbie's eyes widened at Carl's implication. "Michael is NOT sick, Carl. I'm his mother, I would know."

"The same mother who is standing here defending more actions of her wayward son. But hey what the hell do I know? I've only seen cases like this countless times but those others weren't as lucky as your son was tonight and Justin not as violent as those arrested for committing the crime. Now I'm going to bed."

"No you're not," Debbie shouted at him. "You can't just throw something out there like that and say you're going to bed."

"Actually I can and I am."

"Well you're not sleeping here," she folded her arms across her chest. Now I know where Michael gets that from.

"Yes I am. Since we were unceremoniously asked to leave Britin by one of the owners what normally would have been our room with a couch placed in the suite, those types of accommodations are not here. I am climbing into this bed because God only knows what we will have to deal with come morning in the wake of Michael's actions." He closed his eyes deliberately ending the conversation.

Debbie took the hint because Carl felt the sink a little under the weight of Debbie's bottom. Carl let out a little sigh of relief, hoping that someday she will finally see her role as enabler.
Chapter 25- Sharing....Something- Daphne and Troy by Nichelle Wellesly

Daphne was hanging up her dress as Troy entered her room. He watched her pajama-clad form flit to and fro, reorganizing her existence, the bun on top of her head bouncing with every determined step she took. He shook his head, suppressing a laugh while marveling at her efficiency. Daphne Chanders was nothing if not orderly and near obsessive about keeping it.

"You're sure it's okay if I sleep in here...with you?" Troy asked giving her one last chance to relegate him to the couch in the den. "I mean with all of your added guests, it might get a little uncomfortable for you."

Daphne laughed. "Or is it that it will be uncomfortable for you? Well let me ask, do you snore?"

"No."
"Do you hog the covers? Or kick unsuspecting people out of bed with your long legs and big feet?"

Troy laughed at her. "No I do not and you know I would look pretty funny being my height with small feet."

"I guess you would," she responded laughingly but sobered. "Need I remind you that we've fallen asleep together before, Troy so really what's the big deal? We're friends and colleagues. We'll be sharing a bed unless you'd like to sleep on the floor. Besides I used to have slumber parties with Justin regularly from the time we were five. This isn't much different."

"But Justin is a gay man. I am decidedly not gay."

She laughed. "I'm well aware of that but if you'd like we could tell them that you are. If that's not an option stop being a big ass baby and get into bed. Besides, I'm not sure I should be left on my own tonight. I may be tempted to pull a Norman Bates on the psycho down the hall and his husband be damned."

"Well that wouldn't be a good idea, Daph. I'd have to help you hide the body."

"Great. We could be partners in crime with silly nicknames only we would be the surgical Bonnie and Clyde."

He looked at her smirking, strangely liking the idea of being her partner in crime- of the legal kind anyway. He was so happy he'd found an instant friend in her. With their lives as trauma surgeons it was difficult to form and build lasting relationships; someone always felt neglected. So making lasting friendships was not easy. It was nice to have someone to talk about work with who didn't look at him like he'd grown another head but it was nice just to laugh with someone cool like Daphne.

"By the way, you looked really nice tonight. It was nice to see you out of scrubs and sweats," Troy said and Daphne blushed at the compliment nodding her head. One of the things he liked about her most was that unless it was work related she was uncomfortable accepting compliments. It was weird to him because she was beautiful. He found her sudden shyness at the oddest times completely adorable.

They pulled back the covers and settled in, putting the pillows in a sitting position since neither was ready to go to sleep.
"I'm sorry you had to see Justin and Brian like you did tonight. I mean after the ceremony, which was absolutely beautiful. Brian swears up and down that he doesn't have a romantic bone in his body but after tonight's display, he quite dispelled the myth that he doesn't have a heart. Justin had never told me of their first conversation fifteen years ago."

Troy shrugged. "They sure dispelled myths about gay boys not using their fists to fight." He blushed at the unintentional comment but Daphne's laughter put him at ease immediately. He guessed being friends with Justin Taylor she was exposed to far more than the average straight woman. Just looking at Brian and Justin interact would give that opinion. "Maybe you can answer something for me, Daph. What exactly sparked that whole thing? I mean from the bits and pieces I gathered, Michael is the best friend and Ethan is the ex-boyfriend of who?"

"How to explain all of this...okay so here it is the absolute truth of it all. You know about the start of Brian and Justin's relationship and the fact that everyone was against it but the biggest mouth against it was Michael Novotny's. He was Brian's best friend and somehow thought that he should have a say in who Brian dated or in Brian's case didn't date. Michael has carried a torch for Brian since they met in high school but Brian would never do him. I have my own reasons and belief for why Michael was never an option for Brian."

"And they are?" He was genuinely curious as to her thoughts.

"Michael is too weak for the like of Brian Kinney," she said bluntly. "With the things that Brian and Justin have been through, Michael would have either went crazy- although I'm not sure his fool ass isn't far from it now- or curled up into a ball and died. For one thing he would have expected monogamy. Brian wouldn't have been ready to give that and there is no guarantee that he is now but Justin doesn't have a problem with it. He did back when he was feeling a little unsure of himself after the bashing and he wasn't quite sure where he stood with Brian. That's where Ethan Gold came into play. He said all the things Justin needed to hear; things Brian chose to show him rather than say. Michael had befriended Justin while making the Rage comics-"

"Wait. Michael and Justin are the creators of the comic Rage. You're serious?"

"Yeah. I'm a bit surprised that a hetero such as yourself would know about it much less read it," Daphne said truthfully.

"The sex notwithstanding, the stories were damn good and the artwork was phenomenal."
"The artwork was all Justin. As far as the stories are concerned, they should be good since all good fiction is based on real life. All you have to do is re-read them to know the full core of Brian and Justin's relationship. Although there were villains and such, even they were based quite a bit on Brian and Justin. For example, Icetina was Rage's nemesis who used a ray gun on him. Brian was going through treatment for testicular cancer at the time. The episode where JT is giving Rage a blow job on the cover, was done just after Brian and Justin had gotten back together. In fact, the very first issue was Justin's personal story about the bashing. He and Brian had just finished dancing and were down in the parking garage. When Justin left Brian, Chris took the opportunity to hit him upside the head with a baseball bat; Brian had seen the whole thing. Very little of the storyline was embellished a bit for entertainment purposes. I always suspected there was more to Chris' attack on Justin than just disgust." She went on to tell him of the events leading up to the prom and that fateful night that had nearly killed her best friend and landed Justin in a coma for three weeks followed by countless hours of rehab. "It wasn't until later that we discovered Brian had been there every night watching over Justin. We all misjudged him in our own way, thinking that he'd just moved onto his next conquest. But that was how both Brian and Justin handled things...they used fucking as pain management along with booze but it was always within their control. And what was most important between them- the intimacy they shared which had nothing to do with sex- was kept away from the prying and judging eyes of those who were supposed to know them best. I only knew as much as I did because even though Michael pretended to want to be close to Justin, outside of Brian I was the one he trusted most. To Justin, Michael had the keys to the holy grail that was Brian Kinney but then that wasn't true either. Justin was only he didn't know it at the time. Anyway, Michael knew that Justin's self-esteem wasn't where it normally was because his 'perfection' was marred by his hand. He was feeling vulnerable about keeping the interests of the most perfect man he'd ever met. Mel and Lindz took Justin to a violin recital at the Gay and Lesbian Center and that's how he and Ethan met. Because I know Justin almost as well as I know Brian, I know that Justin fought the urge as long as he could to do anything with Ethan besides just be his friend. It was Ethan who basically pursued Justin, saying all the right things equipped with flowers and music and other bullshit."

"You don't sound impressed," Troy said with a smirk on his face.

"I hated the bastard and I made no secret of telling Justin that either. I was very vocal especially when he asked Justin to hide their relationship for the sake of his career. In part I could understand because he was in the public eye. But Brian and Justin were always, always true to who they were. Brian would never have asked Justin to deny who he is, career be damned. Michael saw Justin kissing Ethan on the street corner. Ordinarily, it wouldn't have been thought about twice except that it was Michael and he saw and used it as his opportunity to break them up. Michael couldn't wait to tell Brian only the part of the story that served him. He didn't mention anything of how Justin felt when Brian had to cancel their long-awaited trip to Vermont because the company Brian was working for had gotten taken over by a larger company and Brian had to fight to keep his job. He didn't mention Justin's feeling less than worthy of Brian nor his need for reassurance. The important thing to Michael was that Justin had cheated on Brian. Sure they could fuck whomever they wanted but the had a "No kissing" rule which Justin broke. The night of the launch party for Rage, Justin had made his choice. It was Brian, at least it was until Justin saw him in the backroom of Babylon with his dick up pseudo-Rage's ass. Justin thought that it was the one night Brian could have chosen to just be with him. Ethan showed up with his brand of bullshit and because Justin was hurt, he went with Ethan. When Brian and Justin's eyes met just before Justin walked out, you could literally feel the heartbreak between the both of them. Although I couldn't stand the asshole, Ethan served a very important lesson for Justin. He taught Justin what the adage: Actions speak louder than words, really met. Ethan lied and cheated while he was away in Harrisburg for one night. At Ethan's agent's..."
request, Justin was not to be there. Justin borrowed my car and drove there planning on surprising Ethan and saw him making what ultimately turned out to be a fuck date. Justin questioned him about it and everything probably would have been fine except the guy tracked Ethan down and showed up at their door with a dozen red roses."

"Who knew that tonight's ceremony had so many twists and turns to get them there. Looking at the two of them, they are so well-aware of each other. They moved together as easily as liquid and nothing feels forced."

"That's because nothing is. They were meant to be since their first meeting even though both of them fought like a son-of-a-bitch against it at different times. Originally Justin pursued Brian, persistently and pridefully. He knew he was meant to be with Brian Kinney even at seventeen. Then while Justin was amassing his fortune, they were on even footing for awhile until there was another bump in their road- a very significant one- which caused Justin to have doubts about his judgment. Brian fought like hell for Justin even as he kept withdrawing into himself. Brian still doesn't know or understand why that happened."

"But you do," Troy stated.

Daphne nodded her head and her eyes welled with quick tears which she wiped instantly away. "You have no idea how hard it is to know what went wrong and have to sit silent and watch your two best friends struggle through it...one for a solid reason and the other completely in the dark; to think that he did something wrong when it wasn't his fault. As quiet as kept, Brian is the most honest person I've ever met and the most kind-hearted. He doesn't show that to everyone. There are only a privileged few of us- Justin of course, Debbie, Justin's mom, myself and his son, Gus. For the most part the rest of them catch glimpses here and there but if they really knew Brian that way, they would take advantage of him. Contrary to Michael's unfounded and unwarranted allegations, Justin never did. If there was anything business related between them, Justin had it written in a contract which he and Brian signed. Brian would have been happy to give Justin anything he wanted but Justin needed it to be a loan for his own self-worth. Brian understood that. What you saw tonight from Justin was fifteen years of pent-up anger and frustration; for Brian it was fourteen years of anger at Justin being hurt and the fact that the persistent little shit insists on trying to goad Brian. Ethan is an arrogant asshole. Brian is too but his arrogance is completely warranted whereas Ethan is just plain annoying and pretentious."

Troy chuckled. "So Brian finally got a hold of Ethan's lying, cheating ass and Justin finally got a hold of Michael's. Honestly, I thought we were going to have two murders to cover up."

"Trust me, we would have had Drew and Ben not grabbed Brian up. Same for Michael. I had only seen Justin in a fight a few times but although he is careful of his right hand, nothing stops that left hook. I almost can't wait to see how bad it is. Hey I know it's mean to say but damn it, it was well-deserved. I probably would have done it my damn self if Justin didn't. But what got me was how fast
Justin moved to get to Michael. He was always lithe and fast but damn...he was like a freight train. Yikes!"

Troy chortled, "The way Michael was knocked on his ass was funny as hell. I could barely contain my laughter. When he looked up, I was expecting him to begin shouting, ‘Yo, Adrianne.'"

Daphne laughed and elbowed him in the ribs. "Go to sleep, Fool. It's your turn to cook breakfast and since we have extra guests you have your work cut out for you.

They each turned out the bedside lamps, snuggled in with Daphne's head on Troy's shoulder and promptly fell asleep.

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That asshole is going to regret putting his hands on me. **FUCK!** I was invited there by his best friend for God's sake. I didn't just show up. If it wasn't for Michael I wouldn't have even known about it. How dare Brian, treat me, Ethan Fucking Gold, like that. **He will pay. HE WILL FUCKING PAY!!!**

As Ethan picked him and Mischa up off the ground in front of the closed door, he began to formulate a plan. With the snow beginning to fall he knew he would not make it back to Pittsburgh before the roads became impassible before being cleared in the morning. The first thing he realized was that he was not in Allegheny County. Judging by the size of the house, Justin had certainly found a gold mine in Brian Kinney. Sure, Ethan had hopes of one day owning a place like the house he was currently and firmly kicked out of for himself and Justin but his career had not exactly gone as planned. But with Mr. Brian Kinney in hot water, he may just be willing to pay Ethan and then he would work on winning back Justin- his muse since they met, his reason for playing- the one who got away. Also the one who was successful enough to take care of him until he could reignite his music career. Also he couldn't deny that he hadn't been satisfied sexually since Justin walked out all those years ago. He had never been much of a butt-slut until Justin topped him. He would never bottom for Ethan which he sometimes found a little strange since he had to have bottomed for Brian. But that didn't matter. No one had held him down and fucked him right since Justin walked out of his
life seemingly for good. That was the first thing that needed to change immediately. Of course he would play hard to get at first. Justin was nothing if not insatiable and persistent when he wanted something. From the well-fucked look of him, Ethan could tell that he was made love to regularly. He had aged well, still youthful despite the thirteen years he had seen him last.

Getting into his car, Ethan keyed in Washington County General Hospital, into the GPS. Noting that it was about twenty minutes away from Brian and Justin's house, he began his slow progress there. The snow was picking up and frankly he had to be alive if his plan was going to work, not lying in a ditch somewhere due to icy conditions. His ribs were sore as hell but ever so often he would pick the sorest spot on them at that moment and give himself a quick jab, figuring the more pain he was in, the sooner they would take him and the faster he would be able to lodge a complaint with the local police department. If Ethan had cracked ribs or ribs bruised enough to be wrapped, then they would charge Brian Kinney with assault or battery. Ethan smiled wickedly, as he looked into the rear view mirror. He was pretty much alone on the road which was a good thing. What he couldn't figure was why Justin wanted to live close to Yuckville, West Virginia anyway. He shook his head. It was just another example of Justin letting Brian call the shots. He punched himself hard in the stomach where Brian had kicked him. The action caused him to veer sharply on the road from the pain of it. His face was already bruised under his chin from Brian's first blows to it. Motherfucker!

Ethan calmed himself as he began looking for the sharp left turn he would need to find to get into the emergency parking lot. Finding it, he parked in one of the spots reserved for people who had brought themselves to emergency. Inflicting enough blows where it looked like the incident with Brian had just happened as opposed to almost forty-five minutes ago, Ethan struggled to get out of the car. The pain was real even if the cause wasn't. Limping into the entrance he was relieved to see that there was only five people. All but two people looked like they were waiting on someone rather than to be seen. He hobbed over to the admissions desk, waiting slightly impatiently as the attending nurse finished documenting the notes from an open record into the computer. He started to clear his throat loudly but she chose that moment to speak.

"Good evening, Sir. What brings you in tonight," she asked, chewing gum and popping it ever so often.

He did his best to tamp down his annoyance at the woman. The sound of gum chewing and the idea of watching people make bubbles with their grated on his nerves to know end. Weren't people cultured anymore? He mentally shook himself out of his revere and slipped back into character. "I would like to see a doctor."

"Well who wouldn't, Suga. Everyone in here is waiting for one of those to appear, so the question is why do you need one?"

An incredulous look crossed his face as his eyes widen marginally. Did she not see that he was in pain. "I have been assaulted. My ribs hurt unbearably. I am also a famous violinist so I would like to
have my hand checked out to be sure nothing is broken." He finished through gritted teeth.

"Have you been here before, Sir?"

"Of course not," he snapped then immediately brought his tone down at her raised eyebrow. Before she spoke again, she regarded him all the while cracking her gum between her teeth.

"Well I hate to disappoint you Jean Luc Ponte but before you can get treated you have to fill out the paper work.

At her reference to the famous classically trained jazz violinist, Ethan figured he would try his luck. He glanced at her name tag and looked at her intently, smiling widely while doing so. "Since you've heard of Jean Luc, Nurse Tuttle, perhaps you've heard of me as well and maybe could save all the formality for after I see the doctor. I'm in a lot of pain. My name is Ethan Gold."

He didn't know what he expected of her reaction but it certainly wasn't the one she gave.

"Uh-huh. Well, Mr. Gold? is it? I'm sorry we can't even waive protocol for pseudo-celebrities that I've never heard of. If you require assistance with any of the forms, please feel free to come back and ask me."

Ethan slinked off to one of the nearby chairs so that if he really did need help, he wouldn't have to go very far. Finishing the forms relatively quickly he was back at the front desk in a relatively short time.

"All set, Mr. Gold?"

He nodded. He didn't like the way she said his name, as if it left a bad taste in her mouth or something. If her were into women he would say that even in her nurses uniform, she was stunningly beautiful with green eyes and skin like porcelain. He was almost tempted to give voice to those thoughts but the a sharp pain gripped him from his ribs and the thought flew out of his head momentarily. It was excruciating and it literally felt like someone was sawing his lungs in half every time he inhaled.

"Also if it's not too much trouble, Nurse Tuttle, could you contact the local police department. I would like to press formal charges against the man who attacked me."
She nodded. "I'll see if they can get here relatively quickly, Mr. Gold, as the snow usually accumulates faster here than it does in Pittsburgh."

Ethan resumed his seat, replaying all the events in his mind leading up to his current situation. He still couldn't believe the looks of shocks on the other occupants faces. All laughter, which had been raucous when he walked in a was announced, ceased. It was gratifying to be the sole focus of Justin's world even for that small amount of time. It reminded him of the morning after he'd left Brian and he had stood naked serenading him awake. He'd moved a little stiffly because his ass was sore. Justin had literally fucked him to sleep. He could tell his lover hadn't slept that well but he was determined to keep at least one promise to him no matter that he broke several others along the way. He'd wanted Justin. He'd said whatever he had to to have Justin and he really did mean them when he was saying them. There was something about that vulnerable blond that reached down into a part of him that had never been touched before. Brian didn't know how to appreciate him them and he still didn't as far as Ethan was concerned. Once Justin was back with him where he belonged, Ethan would treat him the way he really deserved to be treated. He would teach him to be happy with him again. He would show him how much he'd grown and how much he'd missed his muse. They would make beautiful art and music together again.

"Mr. Gold," Nurse Tuttle called him. "Dr. Carter will see you now. Also Officers Baker and Prince is in there with him to take pictures of your injuries. Follow me."

Standing straight up was a trial just then. He'd felt like the wind had been knocked out of him just from the simple action. The amazing thing was that he couldn't say when the sharp pain was coming from but he knew it wasn't in the spots where Brian had hit and kicked him. He had added a few spots himself to increase the bruising he knew graced his fair skin. Entering the room he greeted the three men. Dr. Carter helped him on the table and began his examination while Officer Prince took pictures of his black and blue torso and Officer Baker listened to his story and asked questions.

"Did you know what was happening at the Kinney residence when you showed up, Mr. Gold?"

"Not at first. I had been told by Mr. Kinney's best friend to show up and bring Mischa."

"Mischa, Mr. Gold?"

"Oh sorry," Ethan swallowed hard and trembled a bit when Dr. Carter palpated a particularly sore spot. "Mischa is the name of my violin. It's is kind of automatic that I refer to it that way. It was the first instrument, the only instrument, my Grandfather had given me."
Officer Baker nodded. His son was a musician so he understood that they could be like family members but he wouldn’t tell him that. "So Mr. Kinney and Mr. Taylor did not invite you to their home themselves but a friend of theirs did?"

"Yes," Ethan said a little more forcefully.

"Well by your own admission the relationship between the three of you is strained at best, why wouldn’t you have called to verify with them first?"

"Both Brian and Justin are amazingly busy men. I didn't think they would pick up the phone. Both run businesses in their own right and have several meetings a week. Plus it was wedding week," Ethan said the last sneeringly which was not lost on Officer Baker.

"It's no secret that I would not have chosen for Justin to be with Brian Kinney. When they were together many years ago, Justin was a broken-hearted young man because of Brian."

"Who would you have preferred him be with if not for Mr. Kinney?"

"What does what I want have to do with anything past pressing charges for being beaten, with bruises covering my body? What I do want is Brian Kinney arrested for inflicting harm on me."

Again the officer nodded seemingly in agreement, but he kept his council of what he thought really happened. "We'll bring Mr. Kinney in for questioning in the morning. But how do you feel now that they are for lack of better term married?" He noted Ethan's stiff body language at the mention of their marriage, the hardening of his eyes and the twist of his lips when before he spoke.

"As long as Justin is happy then I don't have a problem."

"Officer Baker looked at the young man in front of him, able to detect the lie without Ethan ever having to speak one.

"Why aren't you bringing him for questioning tonight?"

"Have you looked outside since you got here? The Kinney residence is a good ways away and I for
one have no intention of going to get him tonight. I think it's safe to say my partner feels the same way.

"So we're done here?"

"Yes, Mr. Gold, we're done. I've asked the Nurse to provide you a room for the night so that you wouldn't have to sleep in the car.

"Thank you for that," Ethan nodded at the three men and went in search of Nurse Tuttle and a bed.

"So what do you fellas think?" Officer Baker addressed the occupants after the door closed behind Ethan.

Dr. Carter said, "I will tell you both this: there are a lot more fractured ribs than if Brian had just attacked him and many of them look self-inflicted."

Officer Prince nodded as well. "I thought so too. There were injuries that if Ethan Gold was laying in a fetal position as he said he was, Brian would have missed those spots entirely.

"Well, we'll bring Kinney in the morning to sort this shit out," Officer Baker said rolling his eyes heavenward. *Is there no rest for the weary?*

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Chapter 27—Revelations by Nichelle Wellesly

Jennifer crossed the room to where John and Peter sat isolated from the rest of the group. Seating herself next to John she asked if he was okay. She had seen the looks that passed between the boys during the altercations and then when she and Emmett had told Debbie what Michael had said all those years ago about Justin.

John said, "Why would Michael say something like that about Justin? And if he is Uncle Brian's best friend, why would he pull some garbage like he did tonight? As mad as I might be, I could never do something like that to Peter. Honestly, I'm glad Justin went off. If he wouldn't have, I would have."

Jennifer shook her head. She had asked herself the same thing during Michael's speech to Justin. Why was it so difficult for Michael, a married man, to accept that his best friend was in love with someone else. "It's true that Michael didn't act honorably but oft times jealousy doesn't allow a person to be reasonable. The young man that Brian had the altercation with was Justin's boyfriend back when you were a kid. The relationship lasted only a few months. I suspect he came here tonight to push his suit to reclaim my son but as you can see nothing will ever come between Brian and Justin again."
"So what happens now?"

"What do you mean?"

Peter who had been most quiet since arriving at the Kinney residence earlier in the week and still had trouble being near anyone except John spoke then. "Will Uncle Brian and Justin be arrested? The beatings they dished out were pretty brutal."

Jennifer nodded. They were very brutal but she could understand why. "I can't answer that. I would hope not since technically Ethan came here to Brian's house and Michael was invited but because there is so much bad blood between the four of them, I really can't say what will happen or if Brian and Michael will be able to mend their life-long friendship."

"What about you and Ms. Debbie? Will you still be friends even though your sons can't stand each other?"

"I'm sure we will but why do ask?"

"I don't know but I feel safer here and don't want to leave. If Uncle Brian gets angry..."

Jennifer chuckled. "That's something you don't have to worry about. If there is one thing you should know about your uncle is that once he gives his word, he'll never go back on it. Besides I think having you two here is good for him. You have a rare chance to heal and rebuild your relationship with him and he with you; a real chance to get to know the man, not the opinion you've been force fed about him. Whether Debbie and I remain friends or not, which I'm sure we will, it doesn't have anything to do with all of our protection of the two of you. Whether you can believe this or not, you've gained a whole new family. The people in this room, even Michael with all his stupidness this evening, have been your uncle's adopted family for a long time. Justin and I came along later and we were embraced just as if we had been here from the beginning. I have considered Brian my son for as long as I can remember even though I'm not sure when it happened. Even so and based on that I consider you two family and I dare anyone to say differently. Got it?"

Her eyes had taken on a hard glint for a second but John and Peter saw it. They nodded realizing the truth of her words and her eyes went soft again. She reached out to take Peter's hand. He winced but relaxed into her touch eventually. Jenn offered him a reassuring smile, remembering when Justin had done the same thing after his bashing some years ago. The only one he could let near him was Brian. She suspected it was going to take some time for Peter to trust others again just as it had her son.
"And that goes for the rest of us as well," Tuck said as he, Emmett, Ted, Cynthia and Colby had come upon their little group. "Jen is not to be played with when it comes to her children. Does this mean I have gained a few more, Darling. You're turning me old."

She flashed a blinding smile at her husband so like Justin's. "You were never young, Sweetheart."

Everyone laughed, even John and Peter. Tucker was clearly younger than Jen but it had always been a running joke amongst the family that they number twelve was a good one for the Taylors. As Brian was twelve years older than Justin, Jennifer was twelve years older than Tucker. Originally Justin had a major problem with the fact that his mom would be labeled a cougar, advising that Jennifer was old enough to know better. Once Jennifer bristled and told her son that she expected the same leniency she showed his and Brian's relationship, the matter was closed. Over the years, Justin had gotten used to the idea with the knowledge that Tucker was not taking advantage of his mother nor was he going anywhere. Since Tucker and Jen's marriage, the relationship which was once strained and uncomfortable, smoothed out into an easy camaraderie between the younger men. And Jen was never happier. She still used 'Taylor' for business purposes but in everything else she was known as Mrs. Tucker Armstrong and it suited her to be so. Her marriage was full of life and fun. Tucker kept her laughing and young and although they shared a WASPy upbringing, they couldn't be further from it. Whenever Jennifer would regret her marriage to Craig, Tucker would tell her not to stating that if it weren't for him the two of them wouldn't have stood a chance. She had to know what a bad man looked like so that when he came along she would give herself a chance to be happy with a good one. He accepted Molly and never tried to 'parent' Justin which made for a relatively peaceful transition into the life they shared. It also helped that he was gorgeous and intelligent.

"So Darlings, how have you guys been settling in?" Emmett asked John and Peter.

Ordinarily, John would have had a problem with a man addressing him as 'Darling' but strangely he found Emmett comforting despite the fact that he was gay. "We're doing okay even though we've only been here a few days. The estate is amazing."

"Yes it is," Em agreed. "Brian has lived here for the past nine years."

"Wait. He doesn't have the loft anymore?"

"He still has it but he only uses it when it's necessary. He hasn't really lived there since the year after Justin left for New York. I really hope you guys will like it here." Emmett smiled even as he felt
Drew put an arm around his waist and nuzzled the side of his face."

"Peter, I understand you're in your junior year at Carnegie," Ted said. Brian had pulled him and Cynthia aside the day after Peter and John had come to stay with he and Justin advising that he wanted Peter in the internship program but he wasn't sure where and that they were to find out during the party.

"Yes," Peter said, taking a deep breath. He wasn't used to attention and it made him shift a little uncomfortably. John saw it and nudged his shoulder making him look up at him. The small wink he gave Peter put him at ease instantly. The others saw but didn't say anything or show any outward sign of how touched they were by it. Peter continued. "Yes, I'm in the Marketing program and minoring in Finance. The semester has been going okay so far."

Ted nodded. Peter would definitely seem to be an ideal candidate but he needed to know a bit more. "Which area of marketing are you looking to go into?"

"It was always my plan to get in somewhere where I could bring John along as a graphic designer so I was mainly looking to begin in the car and truck industry. It's the least I could have done since John gave up college for me."

The attention turned to John then. "Why would you do that?" Jennifer answered instead.

"Ted, do you really have to ask? You know about Brian's family just as the rest of us. Joan and Claire aren't exactly the promoters of self-improvement." Her look was meaningful to the rest of those assembled. They all knew bits and pieces of the Kinney household and all agreed that it was a miracle Brian ended up the most stable and sane of the bunch...and that was saying a lot.

"If I know the first thing Brian is going to want to do, it is to get John enrolled in school," Cynthia said. She looked at John directly. "I've been told the full truth of the matter, even if Ted wasn't as of yet. I want you to know that I do not approve of the situation...at all. However, that said, I'm willing to trust your uncle's opinion in the matter. I've known Brian a long time- longer than you could possibly imagine- so if he's willing to take a chance on you even after everything that's happened between you two, then I will take the same chance. But understand this, my first loyalty is to Brian, now and always. If you fuck him over, you won't have to worry about him. You'll have to worry about me. Are we clear?" Cynthia kept her voice sugary sweet but the look in her eye told John that she meant every word.

"You don't have to worry about me, Cynthia. It is enough that he's getting Peter and I away from my mother and grandmother. As far as the gang goes, my part ended when they made my brother a
target. I cannot and I will not say what would have happened had they not but I am learning to take people as they are, not who they do. I will not say that my views on gayness will change tomorrow because then I'd be lying and of all the things I am, a liar is no longer one of them. I learned my lesson about that years ago because of what almost happened to Uncle Brian due to my lie. This a learning and life-changing experience. Considering that I've grown up all my life having the opinion that all homos are hell-bound and not to be trusted and that my asshole is in jeopardy every time I'm near one reiterated and drilled into me with every other conversation, you cannot expect me not to think of it or even act a certain way at times. I can only try to change daily. What I do know is that I love my brother and will do whatever I have to do to protect him."

Cynthia nodded. It was what she needed to hear from him. She could see John's potential but she would be damned if she stood by and watched Brian get hurt by his family again. There were many nights that she watched Brian drink himself into a stupor when the rest of the staff had gone home. It was usually after he had had a run-in with Joan or Claire. The night of John's betrayal had sent him so far over the edge that she thought he would overdose on coke, which he rarely did and only when he was thinking of ending it all. He'd scared the hell out of her when he asked questions for which she had no answers. It was the first time she had ever seen him so broken; the first time in all the years she'd known him that he'd cried in front of her. There were other hard times for Brian where he got drunk and cried but none had been more despairing than that and she never wanted to see that side of Brian Kinney ever again.

"Then we need to plan your future so that you won't be tempted to get into any more trouble. I understand from Justin that you designed a car detailing program but he said that you have a key chain full of USB drives. What's on them?"

"Why?"

"Because based on what's them, we may be able to find a program that combines all of your interests. We already know that you have an interests in cars, art and computers. The ultimate goal is to spend less time in school and get you on a more career driven path."

John nodded. That was always his plan even before giving up college. "Sounds good but can I ask you a question?"

"Sure as long as it isn't about my age," Cynthia said smiling.

John smiled back. "Why did you chuckle when Justin punched Michael?"
"Because he had the courage to do what I've wanted to do for years." Everyone had gone silent at her words but it was Lindsey who spoke. She and Mel had slipped back into the room when Cynthia was engrossed in conversation with John.

"I think we can all agree with the sentiment tonight. Mel and I had the devil of a time calming Jenny and Gus down. They actually violently argued for the first time in years."

"How are they now?" Colby who had been silent and listening to Cynthia and John's conversation asked. Justin had also pulled him to the side to speak with him about John's knack for programming. "Do you need me to go play referee?" He looked at Lindsey who smiled back at him.

"No I think they're fine for now. But Michael's act tonight caused a trauma I don't think will diminish anytime soon. Jenny was ready to throw a punch when Gus said he deserved the one he got from Justin. What's funny is that as much as she doesn't like being around Michael, she still acknowledges that he's family and she should defend him." She turned to Cynthia. "So I understand why you've wanted to hit him. I have wanted to every since the day at the restaurant. In fairness, Justin warned him."

"What? When?" Emmett asked. "It's hard to imagine Justin warning anyone -especially Michael-about getting pummeled...well at least not with his fists." Everyone laughed hearing the innuendo followed by Emmett's quick clarification. Justin fucked just as much as Brian did and his reputation as a top was well known in the gay set. Peter was even advised that he should try for Justin since Brian rarely tricked anymore. Until that moment, Peter hadn't put two and two together. The reason his Uncle Brian didn't trick anymore was because the notorious top was his new uncle Justin. Emmett nodded slightly when Peter looked at him to confirm the thoughts. He crossed over to sit next to Peter but didn't touch him. Justin had explained to him what happened to Peter and Emmett was the only one of their set beyond Daphne who knew what that situation could cause. "Don't worry, Sweetie. We'll help you navigate the gay world. Hell if Ted and I hadn't known Justin before he became the reigning Prince of Liberty Avenue, we probably would have imagined fucking him too."

"EMMETT!!!" the group yelled followed by laughter.

"What? It's true." He defended himself. "There's no ass hotter or dick more notorious except Brian's, even though Brian can't compete in the ass department. Justin holds that honor all by himself." Just then he remembered Jennifer was sitting there. "Oh sorry."

She waved her hand and laughed. "I've given up any illusion that my baby was innocent long ago. My son's antics are well known and with him being involved with Brian...well let's just say I wouldn't really have expected any less."
Lindsey redirected the conversation back to Emmett's question. "Brian and I were having lunch when I first moved back. He was trying to make sure that being in Pittsburgh and all it entailed was the right decision for me. During our conversation Michael showed up. Of course the conversation immediately turned to Justin and why he was back. Michael did his usual song and verbal dance, 'He lied to you and took from you,' blah, blah, blah. Anyway as Michael was busy assassinating Justin's character once again, Justin stood by silently listening until he chose to speak up."

"That must have taken a lot of restraint on his part," Cynthia said. She hadn't heard this although she'd known that Justin showed up to the restaurant that day. Brian had come back to the office and asked her to make copies of the documents he held personally and give a set to Ted- a task he rarely asked her to take care of even as his personal assistant. She then filed his set of the documents in the safe within Brian's private office. Ted also put his copies in the safe with in the CFO office before returning the originals to Justin and Daniel Quinn.

"It did, Cynthia. It really did. I was appalled at the venom Michael spewed even then especially after all Justin had done for him."

Colby asked. "What do you mean? As far as I know the two of them can't stand to be in the same room together."

"Oh they can't but it didn't mean that Justin wasn't looking out for him as a courtesy to Brian. Justin has allowed Michael to keep all the profits from Rage."

"What?" Melanie asked. "You mean to tell me that the little fucker has been able to afford more than six-hundred dollars for child support all these years?"

Lindsey nodded. "The average gross of the first five editions of Rage total well over ten thousand dollars even right today. The other ten issues from when Justin was based in New York are still best sellers and being printed all the time. After taking twenty thousand off the top which pushed Justin into the millionaire bracket, Justin told Michael to keep whatever came in after that. His art was doing extremely well at that point and he was selling out his shows even prior to that."

Ted added, "Plus JT Designs was doing exceptionally well. His individual investment portfolio matched that of the annual gross of Rage sales both here and abroad. He didn't have time nor inclination to attend the Cons or do the legwork required for promotion but Michael did. Justin figured he should be compensated for it so I arranged that Michael keep all the proceeds. Between the store which is the only retailer to carry Rage as a distributor and an Amazon and Ebay affiliate, Michael has made over forty thousand dollars a year since 2007 just based on Rage alone. Given that Red Cape Comics also carries other rare and collectible comics, I'd say that Michael and Ben have
been financially sound for a long time but none of it would have happened if Michael had to pay what he really owes Justin. If he wanted to he could really sue Michael all the way back from the first issue because all of the stories including the latest ones have involved Brian and Justin's history being used.

"Although he agreed to some of them, I know for a fact that he didn't agree to most of them," Emmett said.

"Then why draw for them? If he didn't agree with the storyline, why take the time to basically endorse the work?" Melanie was genuinely puzzled about that. She was a firm believer in holding true to one's ideals.

"We're here as a result to why he did it," Emmett said. "To Justin, it provided a way to gain equal footing financially with Brian and the sooner the better, even if that meant compromising his ideals for a time. Was he happy about it? Absolutely not. He was even less happy about working with Michael again but he did it for himself and for Ben, who he knew was footing all the bills so that Michael could travel with him. One of the main reasons Justin thought of ending his and Brian's relationship entirely was to avoid Michael and his machinations. Justin was tired. He is tired. There were times Michael would call him especially when he heard Brian was in New York to question and harass Justin. Or to monopolize Justin's time when he would be with Brian, although Michael didn't know that they were together for certain. Or Michael would call Brian and of course you know how that conversation often went. The other reason was because of business. Brian was determined to have Justin even if that meant they continued their long distance relationship. As long as they were finally committed and saw each other regularly instead of once every two years or by chance as they did in Toronto, Brian didn't care; he wanted permanence which was shocking enough. Justin, on the other hand, wanted to stop being Brian's best kept secret. From what Daphne said, while seeing Brian was a comfort being away from him sent Justin into an emotional decline. He became a shell of himself. We all know that the same happened with Brian, too but Justin didn't."

Melanie looked at Lindsey. "You knew all of this? About Michael and Justin?"

Lindsey shook her head. "Not while it was happening. It wasn't until he hired me and I had the first of many business meetings with Ted, that I discovered the situation of the money. As far as what Em said about Justin coming back planning to end things at first, this is the first I'm hearing about it. I remember the night that Justin came back from Rochester and they argued but not this. Hell I didn't even know that their affair was ongoing before or after they visited us in Toronto."

"How did they act in Toronto?" Colby was genuinely curious. "Based on the scenes I've witnessed between Brian and Justin in the short time I've known them, I can't imagine them being any different then they are now."
"Oh, they were," Melanie said. "At least for a time, they were almost shy around each other. Lindz
and I just thought that it was because they hadn't seen each other in nine years at that point. We had
no idea of the other undercurrents of their relationship. But based on what Emmett said, it was
surprise at a disruption in scheduling?" She looked to Emmett for confirmation.

Emmett nodded. "Since 2007, just after Justin's first showing in Toronto." Emmett grew sad
momentarily remembering the events surrounding Justin's request that Brian keep away from him for
a time. "He was extremely busy with work, as was Brian. They met briefly in Venice by accident."Emmett smiled at the memory of Justin's panicked phone call at three o'clock in the morning EST.

"How do you accidentally run into someone in Venice?" Colby laughed. "That's one helluva
accident."

Emmett laughed. "Trust me. That meeting wasn't planned in the slightest. In early fall of 2008, Brian
had gotten a new account for Maserati. He'd accepted, I mean who the fuck wouldn't. The problem
arose when he walked into the showroom to see a familiar ass bent over picking up a paintbrush.
According to later accounts by Brian, no one could ever look at Justin's ass and forget it. Justin had
been over there for over a month sketching out the requested mural which kind of explained the
missed calls and unanswered instant messages between the two of them. Consequently, it also played
on their individual insecurities."

Cynthia nodded. "Working for Brian during that time was hell with a capital H. Nothing was right or
could be done right. I think he fired Ted and I at least six times an hour which we disregarded
because we knew he couldn't reach Justin and it was affecting him more than he would admit. The
Kinney mantra of Work-Drink-Fuck was truer than ever. So when the Maserati account came
through, he jumped at the chance to get out of town and regain some normalcy. He thought Justin
just didn't want to be bothered; that he was having the time of his life with someone else. Ordinarily
that wouldn't have bothered him except that he and Justin hadn't seen each other since the year
before and he knew something was wrong but when asked Justin would just evade the question."

Lindsey nodded. "Well, it's nice to have some explanation to the awkwardness. I mean they
eventually snapped out of it but the two of them were never uncomfortable around each other...well
not since the whole Ethan thing." Lindsey cringed as she remembered their first time seeing each
other after the Rage launch party. Justin had come into the diner as they were all sitting having lunch.
A wealth of words was said in the way Brian watched every move of Justin's while the latter tried
scrupulously to avoid the looks but was unsuccessful until Debbie sent him to take out the garbage.

Ted, Emmett and Mel must have had the same memory because Mel agreed that it was exactly like
that. "The tension between them was thick. So much so that even knowing we had the spare rooms,
Justin offered to stay in a hotel. Brian in his usual fashion called bullshit. We heard them arguing that
night and whatever was said must have cleared the air because the next day they were back to being
Brian and Justin."
"And it's a good thing they did otherwise tonight wouldn't have happened," Cynthia said.

"What? The ceremony? By the way Emmett, it was fabulous!" Mel said, leaning over to give Em a kiss on the cheek earning her a big smile.

"I was talking about the subsequent actions of Muhammad Ali and Mike Tyson upstairs. I sincerely hope they got it out of their systems by now. We can't have the dual CEOs of Kinnetik, Corp and JTK, Inc. fighting in public, no matter that it was more than well-deserved especially not with the other trouble surrounding them," Cynthia said meaningfully.

They all nodded but Melanie, John and Peter had not been informed of the threats against Brian and Justin. The other members of the party began to bring the three up to date but Colby was noticeably absent.

*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Colby made his way to the media room to check on Gus and Jenny. He was coming to care for Gus in a way that he probably shouldn't and he considered Jenny an adorable, out-spoken little imp but she was growing on him too. Colby had never wanted children but if he did, he decided that he would want them like Jenny and Gus. Honest, brave and natural born fighters for what they believed in, they were amazing kids to him. Gus had taken to running with him in the mornings. As a result, they developed an easy friendship. When Gus had asked him what it was like to be gay, Colby told him that he wasn't. Then went on to explain that he was bisexual and all that entailed; that it wasn’t necessarily that he wasn’t limited to liking what was between a person's legs but more attracted to the person themselves. Since sex is a natural progression in relationships he went with the flow in that regard. Gus in turn shared his two dads' advice with him and Colby had advised that it was sound and that if he should have any other questions, he could come to him.

Walking into the room, he smiled a little wistfully. Gus and Jenny had fallen asleep holding hands and with their heads together in the dual recliners. When he turned to go back to the living room, he had not expected to bump into Lindsey who was standing behind him and looking at her children over his shoulder.

"Peaceful looking, aren't they?" She smiled at the view of how Jenny and Gus had fallen asleep. "They used to fall asleep like that all the time when they were little after they coaxed me into letting them finish their movie passed bedtime. I would often find them like that as the credits rolled on the screen."
Colby laughed. "Well it looks like you came just in time then." The screen on the television had just gone dark.

Lindsey nodded. "True but I also wanted to ask you something."

"Okay." Lindsey pulled him further down the hall heading back to the living room but apparently in no hurry to get there.

"Why did you kiss me the other night?"

"I thought we already covered that," Colby said, smiling softly at her and the memory. "But to state it again, I wanted to."

Lindsey nodded again. Then taking him by surprise, she pushed his large body up against the wall and kissed him heatedly. Colby sighed into it as she kept control of it by pressing her long fingers into his scalp and holding him there as she explored his mouth roughly then gently then rough again. When she pulled back, he was slightly dazed and ridiculously horny.

"If you think you want me, Colby, come and get me. I won't be easy and I'm damn sure not cheap."

"I'm not threatened easily, Lindsey."

She shook her head and smiled. "No, I don't imagine that you are. I just want you to know what to expect when dealing with me. It's only fair since I already know what to expect with you."

"And that is?" He liked her and he liked a challenge.

"Detachment. Aloofness. Sex without a conscious. If you were a woman you would be called a slut."

"Is that all you think I'm after, Lindsey? A little roll and tickle between the sheets and then I'm gone?"
"Yes but it will be on my terms, not yours."

Colby nodded in understanding her point but he said, "You're wrong you know."

"Prove it." Lindsey leaned in again placing a final kiss on Colby, then turned on her heel and walked back toward the living room never looking back once.

Colby smiled to himself, pleased that he'd decided weeks ago that he didn't mind being landlocked after all.

When he walked back into the living room, he noticed that Lindsey had rejoined the conversation with Emmett, Ted and Melanie while Tucker and Jennifer spoke with John and Peter. Although Cynthia was also apart of that conversation she threw him a sly, all-knowing smile. He chuckled as seated himself next to his cousin and bumped her shoulder. *Nope. Not didn't mind being landlocked at all.*

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Chapter 28- Love of the Loveless- Michael by Nichelle Wellesly

What have I done?

Sweet Jesus, what have I done?

Become a thief in the night

Become a dog on the run

And have I fallen so far

And is the hour so late*

Michael woke up making a beeline for the toilet. Upchucking the contents of his stomach he tried his damnest to remember the events of last night and what he possibly could have eaten that made him so sick. The rest of him felt as if he'd been a meat locker but he decided it could just be from worshipping the porcelin god which he couldn't seem to stop doing. As stayed there kneeling, his mind was a jumble of images that he couldn't make sense of except a few. *Brian was for all intents and purposes married to Justin*. He rolled his head and stuck his head in toilet to empty more of the
contents of his stomach. He remembered a corner in the living room which looked like the corner outside of Babylon but that didn't make sense. *Brian's living room was always impeccably furnished. No way he would allow Babylon into his inner sanctum.* He laughed at the notion as more pieces of the puzzle began to uncloud within his tired and decidedly overwrought mind. *Pictures everywhere—both photographs and paintings of Brian and Justin.* Well that sort of made sense. Michael briefly recalled when Brian had done something like that for him when he turned thirty and had given him a party. *Fuck my stomach hurts like a bitch. What the fuck did I eat?* Continuing to dry heave, Michael flushed the toilet quickly before he had the urge to throw up again. Making his way over to the sink, he turned on the water and washed his hands. He hand cupped some of the water into his mouth, wincing at the sudden stinging he didn't notice before when he was bowed over the bowl. He continued to rinse and splashed a little water on his face trying to make sure there weren't any remnants of the disgust he'd just witnessed pouring out of himself. He finally decided to check the mirror, to make sure it was all gone...and let out the most blood-curdling scream.

Ben knew the exact moment Michael discovered the raw meat his face looked like. He was hard pressed not to laugh outright, settling for a slight chuckle before rolling his body out of the comfortable bed. By the time he reached the bathroom, Debbie and Carl as well as Daphne and Troy had reached their room. Ordinarily, he might have had a problem with them entering without knocking but he found he couldn't give a hell that they had and chalked it up to his feelings regarding the man in the bathroom. Michael's cries for Ben to come to him altered between anger and bewilderment. Instead he calmly stated to the group, "I think Michael has discovered some of the consequences of his actions."

"Well aren't you going to go answer him, Ben?" Debbie asked accusingly.

"I don't feel like it, Debbie but you're welcome to if you'd like."

"But you're his husband-" she the rest of her thought as she looked up into the angry eyes of Ben. She'd since him angry especially in the midst of Roid Rage when Vic was alive and briefly at the hospital when she had been so panicked about Michael dying from the bombing. She'd seen it the night of the rally following the Babylon when some religious fanatic said that Michael should have died and Ben had lost his temper. But she had never seen him with so much anger that encompassed both hurt and hate. She heard the restraint and tension in his voice when he responded to her.

"I don't exactly need you to tell me of my marital obligations, Debbie. In fact truth be told I have gone over and beyond the vows I took but I'm done, Debbie. Do you hear me? I'm done."

"Ben, I know you're upset but-"

Ben smiled tightly and shook his head. "Upset doesn't begin to cover it, Debbie. You know what...you should really go tend to Michael." Ben stepped aside and stood by where Daphne and
Troy did. "Are you going to check on him, Daph?"

She emphatically shook her head. "I don't trust myself to do it but Troy you should go just to make sure there are no fractures in his face."

He nodded and went to do her bidding, clearly not happy about it but Daphne was right. Michael needed tending and as one of two doctors in the house, one of them had to look.

"Sorry about you being woke up out of your sleep, Daph. I could have tried to prepare him since I felt when he ran for the bathroom but honestly, I don't want to speak to him."

She patted his shoulder. "I know, Ben but you're going to have to sometime. Let it be when you're ready to and don't allow yourself to be bullied before, okay?"

He hugged her close and kissed the top of her head. "Now I understand why you and Justin are friends."

"Really? Because I ask myself why we are all the time," she said, happy that she made him chuckle in return.

They turned their attention back to the bathroom where Debbie was trying softly to reason with Michael to let Troy take a look at him while Michael kept demanding to know what the fuck happened.

"I don't know him, Ma," Michael whined. "What I want are some goddamned answers! Why does my face look like the raw meat hanging in the meat locker from Rocky? Who did this to me?"

"Michael, let Dr. Bradley clean you up and then we'll talk okay. I'm really worried about you, honey."

He was inclined to argue further but Troy had had enough. "Look we can do this the easy way or the hard way, Michael."

"Which is?" he said petulantly.
"Which is I can finish the job to make sure you need surgery on your face. Now hold still so I can see how much damage was done."

"Where's Daphne? I trust her. I don't know you."

"Well you don't have a choice because she sent me in here so that she wouldn't hurt you."

"Why on earth would she want to do that? I've never done anything to her."

Troy shook his head. "What's the last thing you remember, Michael?" It was possible that he had a concussion which in conjunction with the amount of alcohol he took in, could be the cause of his temporary amnesia. He was certainly confused but from what Daphne had told him, that could have been his normal brain pattern.

"All I remember was being surrounded by pictures of Brian and Justin. The other things going through my head don't make much sense. In fact, I'd like to go lay back down now."

"That's not a good idea, Michael. We have to get the swelling down around your eyes and lips especially. Do you hear any ringing in your ears?"

Michael as well as the assemble party grew quiet so that Michael could answer truthfully. "No. I don't think I do."

"That's good. I know by the smell in here that you've already vomited but do you still feel nauseous?"

"Accept for the occasional dry heave, no."

"Any pressure in your head?"

"A kick ass headache."
That's because you got your ass kicked, is what Troy almost said. Instead he asked, "Do you see stars?" he already knew that Michael was talking funny but he couldn't tell yet if it was because of his swollen month. Justin was not playing with Michael. For all intents and purposes Michael looked like Dolph Lundren after Rocky finished with him. He knew there was a reason why he was still mildly obsessed with those movies and boxing in general.

Daphne entered the bathroom carrying several emergency ice packs that didn't require freezing and two moderately hot tea bags. She methodically cracked the ice packs and shook them while looking at Michael. Troy noticed her focus and was hard pressed not to chuckle. Consequently, Michael also noticed her look at she handed the ice packs to Troy. Something instinctively must have warned him to stay quiet because although he looked at her, he didn't say anything. Debbie who was still present, was also silent...and also watched the normally gentle Daphne. Her anger was no surprise or secret to those who had vivid memories of the events of the night. All Michael felt was confused.

"Where's the ibuprophen, Daph?"

She wordlessly handed the bottle from the pocket of her pajama pants. Then turned on her heel to leave the bathroom without speaking one word. When she left, Michael could no longer resist speaking.

"What the fuck's her problem?"

"Michael, baby, I don't think you want to know just yet. Why don't we try to let the swelling go down a bit and then we'll fill in the blanks for you."

"Ma, I'm not a child. I want to know what the hell's going on and why my husband refuses to come into this bathroom. Everything is so fucking strange."

Carl who had been silent said, "Deb, maybe you should tell him. At least he's in the bathroom in case he'll want to throw up again."

"Carl!"

"Deb!"

She instantly silenced. Carl had never spoken to her that way.
"Will someone please just tell me what the hell is going on?" Michael begged them.

Carl answered despite the dirty side-eye he received from Debbie. "YOU got drunk during Brian and Justin's wedding. YOU arranged for Ethan Gold to show up. YOU said mean and hateful things to Justin. YOU got deserved what you got, which is the rearranged face you're nursing right now. Justin was well within his rights since you insulted him at his wedding in his home. I'm done."

"Brian's home," Michael said automatically and the assembled group sighed at the hopeless of the man in front of them.

Daphne spoke for all of them. She'd had more than enough of Michael Novotny-Bruckner. "Listen, you obsessed pain in my ass, and get this through your head... Brian and Justin are together. Justin's name is on the deed which is why the house is called Britin and not Brian's. You are such a pathetic, insignificant prick. I understand why he felt loyal to you but if he still does, he's a goddamn fool. If there is one thing I know about Brian Kinney is that he is nobody's fool. You had the absolute fucking nerve to interfer with their wedding by inviting that greasy, slimy, rat-bastard motherfucker into their home and then spew your own venom at Justin of how he should have died in the bashing! Do you know what you may have done to him? I won't ask if you care because you're too selfish and stupid to care about someone other than yourself-"

"Who do you think you're talking to, Daphne? You don't have a right to speak to me that way," Michael ranted.

"I have every fucking right. You are in MY HOUSE, bought and paid for by ME and you will shut the fuck up and listen! And the only reason you are here and not walking your ass back to Pittsburgh is as a courtesy to Debbie, Ben and yes Carl as well because his wife would have made it his obligation to see your worthless and sorry ass safe. You have done more than overstep this time, Michael and I hope you're prepared for it. I mean really... did you not think, even if you weren't drinking yourself into a damn coma and told on yourself, that we wouldn't have figured out that you invited Ethan?! Are you really that stupid? Or did you think that it was going to be another case of forgive and forget? You were probably just arrogant enough to believe that all your lies and manipulations over the years wouldn't catch up with you; that you would be wiped clean yet again by your mother who still even now can't accept the wrong you've done or by Brian who loved you like a brother and probably still does but would never go against his husband. What about your own husband? No you couldn't be bothered to do right by him because you were too busy chasing a dream- a vision that was never destined to come true. You were never an option for Brian. He needs someone intelligent and brave; someone able to hear the things he has to say and offer wisdom and perhaps even a little guidance. THAT IS NOT YOU!!! It will never be you! It has never been you! Fucking deal with it!" Daphne left the bathroom in a high temper.
"My God, is she going to be alright?" Debbie asked. She had never heard or seen Daphne act like that. She was always such a sweet person. It unnerved her to hear the things Daphne said to her son, a lot of which she in good conscious could not disagree with and that saddened Debbie.

Troy knew where she was going before she actually did hit Michael Novotny. "Don't worry, Ms. Debbie. Daphne is going to be just fine after she hits the heavy bag for awhile."

Ben chuckled. "Daphne's into boxing?"

"More than you or I could ever imagine, Ben. I think if she had stayed we would have had an even bigger problem on our hands than what Justin did tonight. I'd better go check on her." Troy left a few final instructions advising Debbie to make sure he doesn't take the ice packs off for the next five minutes.

_all was silent within the bedroom and bathroom after Troy made his exit._

Michael finally broke his silence. "I'm sitting here trying to figure out how you all could let her say the things she said to me. She doesn't know Brian as well as she thinks she does. He'll forgive me."

Ben just hung his head and laughed. "You are so fucking unbelievable, Michael. You ruin what was supposed to be the happiest night of Brian and Justin's life; you invited Ethan Gold...Christ, how delusional are you? You have been literally been interfering in their relationship since the beginning even before I came on the scene and you expect either one of them to forgive you?"

"I don't give a shit whether Justin does or not. I exposed him. That's all that matters."

"All that matters, huh?" Ben nodded his head. "Well here's something else that should matter although I suspect you won't give a shit. I'm taking you back to Pittsburgh in a couple of hours and..."
then I'm going to attend the reception of Brian and Justin that I was invited to. By the time I return to Pittsburgh tomorrow night, I want you and everything you own out of my house."

"Wait Ben, you can't mean that--"

"I mean every word, Debbie. Do you know what your son was thinking about and why he was hell-bent on getting Brian away from Justin?" Ben's voice cracked as he answered his own question. "He was planning that he would be with Brian after I died off."

"Is that true?" Debbie asked shocked and not a little hurt for Ben. Michael didn't answer. "Oh my God, Michael Charles Novotny, how could you?"

"It doesn't even matter now, does it Michael? Only the prize you thought you were going to get, was never yours in the first place. He always belonged to someone else but you just couldn't be content with the good man you had. Well that's okay, Michael. It really is."

"You can't get rid of me that easily, Ben," Michael said.

"Can't I though? It was how easily you were willing to discard me but again that's okay."

"It's my house too."

"No, no Michael it isn't. My name is the only one on the deed. We were supposed to see a lawyer about changing documents over next week but apparently you've forgotten. Yes we are legally married but we didn't have time to redo everything because you had the Comic-Con's in Florida, Vegas and L.A. that you had to attend for the promotion of Rage. By the way, I hope Justin decides to sue you for his portion of the earnings to the series."

"Ben, why would you say something like that?"

"Because it's true, Debbie. The one thing Michael never told you was that Justin had drawn ten more issues of the comic. After he collected a percentage off the top, he allowed Michael to keep the rest of the profit. It's how we've been able to keep his store open because the money doesn't just come from in-house sales but from Amazon and Ebay which Justin set up under Michael's name as the sole proprietor. He had his attorney draw up papers and Ted redirect the money from Justin to Michael and has been doing that for years once his goal of becoming a millionaire was reached. He actually
looked out for your son- the same man who performed a betrayal worse than anything Shakespeare could have written. I hope he's proud of himself."

The magnitude of what he'd done finally began to register with Michael as Ben finished. "I need to call Brian."

"For what? He isn't going to want to hear anything you have to say," Ben said shaking his head. "It's like a running tape with you."

"Michael, maybe you should give him a few days," Debbie tried to reason.

"No. No one knows him like I do and Daphne is wrong. He will speak to me. He has to."

Ben and Carl threw their hands up and left the bathroom even as Michael accepted his cell phone from Debbie and dialed the number.

It rung and went to voice mail. Michael stopped the call and dialed again. The same results happened again. After a half an hour he gave up, thinking that he would just speak to him tomorrow. Never realizing that the call was deliberately ignored...which it was.

Yet why did I allow this man
To touch my souls and teach me love?
He treated me like any other
He gave me trust and called me brother...*
Brian always enjoyed the sight of Justin naked but the moon was out and shone directly on his husband giving him an almost ethereal glow. He wished he could sneak a picture of Justin but there was no way with the house as quiet and Justin fully awake.

"Why don't you come back to bed, Justin? Your spot is cold and it's making me chilly. Come warm me up" he asked from his position still on the bed.

Justin didn't move and it was then that Brian recalled feeling Justin shift restlessly on top of him before his weight had disappeared. Brian had slept a bit longer until the blasted phone had woken him up which just kept ringing. He reached over and shut it off. He shifted himself making to get off the bed when Justin spoke.

"Don't. Not yet, Brian."

Brian nodded. The only time Justin didn't want to be touched by Brian was after a nightmare. It usually took him awhile to come down from it. "You want to tell me about it?"

At first, Brian thought that Justin wasn't going to speak. He was surprised at what came out when he did. "You have to forgive him, Brian."

There wasn't a question of whom he was referring to. "How can you even ask me to do that? I mean, look at you. You're back to having nightmares again because of him. How can I pretend that nothing happened or that I'm not affected by it?" Brian couldn't sit still. Tossing the covers angrily, he got out of bed and stomped over to their liquor supply. He poured but in his frustration he didn't drink.

"Forgiveness, the act of it, is not for the other person- it's for you. Brian, whether either of us likes it or not at this point, Michael had been part of your life for more than twenty years. He's apart of you. I'm not saying you have to be friends ever again if that's your wish but you have to let this go."

"And what about you? Will you let it go? What about the things he said which have once again started the damn nightmares of that time in our lives we try never to talk about? Can you forgive that?"

"I have to find a way to, Brian because if I don't it will change me. I never want to be the person I was while hanging out with Cody Bell again. I was angrier than I'd ever been at Chris Hobbs, mainly because I feared him even years after the initial incident. He took something very precious
away from me- my courage to be who I am without excuse and apology. In his own way, Michael has taken something very precious away from you. If you don't forgive him, at least within yourself, you'll end up seeing shadows and ulterior motives where there aren't any. Trust is a very fragile thing with you, Brian. You think I don't know what it took or how long it took for me to regain yours back after my foolery? You think I don't know that every now and again the doubt that I will stray creeps into your mind? I will reassure you everyday if I have to but what happens when I have to go away on business again?"

"This is different, Sunshine."

Justin hopped off of the window seat and crossed the room where Brian stood in shadow. He laid a hand gently over Brian's heart, feeling the rhythmic steady beat of it- the lifeforce that always helped him out of his own dark places within himself. Brian had always been strong... a true lion in every sense of the word but Justin knew Michael's betrayal cut deeper than he would ever admit. "Is it? With ordinary people I would probably agree but you and I are not ordinary. We feel, channel and process things a lot differently than most. Never forgiving or forgetting a slight or offense. It's who we are although I daresay, I'm better of than you in this regard. At least I'll voice it now the minute it happens, whereas you bury it and let it fester. Tonight's situation with Michael is the exception for me. I probably would have let everything else slide had he not mentioned the bashing. It made me angry all over again. No, I don't regret hitting him- that actually made me feel good- but I do not like that I got that angry. I was back in my 'Pink Posse' days until you pulled me off of him. I felt the same rage back then. I will not tell you that you have to forgive him tomorrow, next week, next month or even next year but it has to happen so that it doesn't change the man I fell in love with under a street light all those years ago; the man I love to distraction even now with his well-concealed sensitive side-- the only one able to pull me out of dark places within myself."

Brian nodded and buried his fingers in Justin's hair, inhaling the scent of Justin's shampoo and that essence that was uniquely his own. They would rise above it. They always did.

Portions of the Sililoquy of Valjean- Les Miserables*

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DISTURBING THE PEACE

TIME'S UP VOLUME II: SHARE MY LIFE by Nichelle Wellesly

Summary:

TU VOL II

Categories: Alternate Universe, QAF-U.S., Family, Angst, Bdsm, Brian/Justin, Canon, Could be Canon, Drama, Humor, Jealousy, Justin/Ethan, Justin/Other, REAL LIFE ISSUES, Romance, Tophy! Justin, Unsafe Sex, What If Characters: Brian, Cynthia, Daphne, Justin, Original Character(s), Other Canon Characters, Ted
Challenges: None
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Chapter 29- Disturbing the Peace by Nichelle Wellesly

Author's Notes:

Thanks for being patient with the update for Volume II! There are some key people/ issues that are going to surface in Volume II and III so I had to finish Volume I immediately. Some of the following chapters will be shorter than others but are no less important. Nevertheless, I hope it was worth the wait! HAPPY READING! ~ Nichelle

For the seventh time in as many minutes, John's cell phone rang out, waking both he and Peter. He didn't want to answer it, knowing who it was even without looking at the Caller ID. It was the same person it was the first morning after he went missing along with the previous night's target. The first few times, he left a simple voicemail: 'The boss wants to see you,' but the last few days there were calls and text messages... threatening text messages. And not only against him but his mom. It was also apparent they had figured out his connection to Peter based on the other messages. They were looking for them. How much time did they have before they discovered where they were hiding and his connection to Brian Kinney, bringing the trouble to his uncles' door? Sure Brian had enough money to hire guards but there was no guarantee that they would keep breathing.

"John, you have to answer them. They won't stop calling if you don't," Peter counseled.
"They won't stop calling even if I do, Little Brother. What the fuck did I get myself into?"

"Trouble," Peter answered succinctly. "But running from it isn't going to get any of us out of it."

John looked at him as if he'd gone crazy over night. "Do you have a death wish or something? Do you know what they planned to do to you?"

"Yes, John. I have a pretty good idea since they drugged me. But I will not stop living my life. I will not hide anymore. I hid being gay from you and look at what has happened?"

"That's different and you know it."

"Do I?" Peter asked. "From where I'm sitting, this whole mess started because I didn't tell you. You joined a fucking homophobic gang, for Christ sake, hell-bent on torturing and murdering people for what? Not liking pussy? For not liking dick? For going against some fake ass, pre-ordained order of nature according to who? I believe in God as much as the anyone with a true vocation, John but I know who I am; who I've always been. I've known from the time I was five. I knew when I fucked Nathaniel Simkins in the locker room when he begged me to do it."

"Wait. The star football player at school begged you to fuck him? That's..."

"Yeah, he did. And I did. And that's the way of it. Did you or anyone else think any less of him because he liked my dick up his ass? No he was still a fucking hero. How about Drew Boyd? Do you think any less of him because he likes fucking Emmett?"

"No," John said wincing at the unwanted visuals.

"Exactly, you don't because people are just people, John and their sexuality doesn't change who they are at their core. It's just a part of who they are. Who they do shouldn't even factor into it. You're just learning that. Brian and Justin are good and upstanding men who are willing to give you and I a chance to better ourselves. Does the fact that they fuck each other- that they love each other- change who they are? No it does not despite what the bigots like Claire, Joan and your boss say. So the question is if you're going to run from the chance to start a new life, John? Because I'm not."

And with that Peter went out onto the balcony to have a cigarette and give his brother and best friend time to think.

John sat there for what seemed like hours replaying his entire conversation with Peter over in his mind. His brother always had an amazing gift of making John see the big picture and what he stood to gain or in this case lose. People like Ivan Douglas didn't have anything but gang life but John always had goals for himself which he'd planned to achieve after he got Peter settled in his own career. Brian and Justin were offering him a chance to achieve it much sooner than later. When he'd joined the gang he believed all that he was taught by his embittered mother and pseudo-pious grandmother; believed that his Uncle Brian was wrong in the way he chose to live his life. But that was the thing he was learning fast- that it was his life to lead as he saw fit. John had meant what he told Cynthia. He wouldn't do anything to bring harm to his uncle based on the strength that he was willing to help and hide Peter alone. The fact that he was willing to do the same for John was an added bonus and he didn't want to blow it.

Picking up the phone, he made the call he dreaded. When Ivan answered the phone, John said the two most important words of his life: "I'm out," and hung up. He knew right then that the fallout was
not going to be easy or without casualties. And for the first time in many years, he *prayed* that the body count wouldn't involve any of the people he now considered his family.

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Chapter 30- Preserving the Taylor-Kinneys 101 by Nichelle Wellesly

For the first time since he'd started Auntie Em's Fabulous Creations and Event Planning Services, he felt like flinging his phone far away. Preferably into the Allegheny River. However the electronic leash was only annoying at this moment because he had to get up. Well I pay the cost to be the boss, don't I? Rising and making his way to the shower in the en suite he took the opportunity to reflect on yesterday's events.

Although last night ended under questionable circumstances- that was a matter of perspective actually- Brian and Justin's ceremony was the stuff dreams were made of. Who knew Mr. Brian fucking (both the literal and figurative of fucking definitely applied here) Kinney had such romantic notions! When Brian had first come to him about the streetlight idea, he thought his friend had lost his damn mind. Who the hell does that? Brian fucking Kinney that's who! Then to see the pictures he’d taken of Justin and in turn the paintings revealing the purest nature of Brian that any of those attending had only caught minuscule glimpses of over the years was without a doubt enlightening and enchanting. Leave it to Brian and Justin to make their non-marriage ceremony the stuff of legends. The Stud and Twink King- practically royalty on Liberty Avenue and by all accounts Midtown Manhattan as well- were now well and truly joined. With or without a piece of paper, for better or worse Brian and Justin were hitched. And by the sounds of it coming through the walls as Emmett stood in the shower preparing for his day, they were especially glad to be so.
Oh to be in that room... But then again Emmett had seen his fair share of the Brian and Justin Live Action Porn-a-thon many, many times as recently as last week. He shuddered to think of how Justin had gotten both legs behind his head like that or how much Brian had taken advantage of it after hours in his office. All he knew was that he would opt to sit in one of the office chairs the next time he was in Brian's office. As much as he admired that Italian sofa, it was no longer comfortable seating for Emmett Honeycutt.

"Emmett, if you don't come and stop Alicia Meyers from singing of how she loves the nightlife, she and your phone is going out the window, like now."

"Coming, Drewsie. I thought I turned it all the way off."

Emmett turned off the water almost reluctant to leave the bathroom since he'd been hearing the action going on in the next suite. Hearing the gasping moans he knew were Brian's and the alternating pleas and curses he knew were Justin, did not put him in a hurry to get dressed and go downstairs to work. But he had a job to do and that's why Brian and Justin hired him... because they knew Emmett was as dedicated to his business as they were to theirs. And right now, his business included preparing breakfast before they could start the prep for the reception. Fortunately, Darren was available so that he and Archie would take care a lot of the food prep for the afternoon and evening while Emmett did what he did best. Because of the snow the night before Emmett was glad he'd had the forethought to remodel the adjoining portion of Brian and Justin's garage not being used. Since Brian had given him carte blanche, Emmett had the space cleared and aired out and completely remodeled it into an additional lounge area that he was sure Brian and Justin would be making their own after the reception. He had floor to ceiling triple paned windows installed to keep the cold out but to provide a spectacular panoramic view of estate ending at the large private lake. He couldn't wait to see it in the spring and summer since during the winter it looked like the picturesque views of a ski resort. After adding seating and the hidden entertainment center, Emmett had recessed lighting installed which could be adjusted based on activity. Em chuckled to himself. Knowing those two the lights would stay off in favor of the fire place.

Putting the finishing touches on this work clothes, Emmett grabbed his cell and other necessary items so that he wouldn't have to come back to the room until it was time to get dressed for the party. He hurried downstairs and was relieved to find Anita already up and preparing coffee.

"Good morning, Mr. Honeycutt. I thought you could use a fresh-brewed cup seeming how today we will literally be running for our lives."

Emmett smiled before replying. "Now Anita, I thought we agreed no 'Mr. Honeycutt' stuff. Just Emmett. Let my staff call me the whole mister thing. You and I are friends. Deal?"

"Deal...Emmett," Anita said in her deep southern accent. She had been Brian's housekeeper for the past seventeen years.

If anyone had earned the right to call him by his first name, it was Anita considering how many times she had cleaned up after both him and Brian in his early days of his stay in Pittsburgh. He'd partied just as hard as Brian in those days out of loneliness and depression although he hid it well behind his infamous flame. Brian had seen the nights where Emmett was afraid of what he might do to himself if he was left alone and although they didn't speak about it, Emmett owed Brian Kinney more than he could ever repay. So he was going to make it an event that Brian would always remember with fondness and that he would know he was loved- even if he loathed to hear it.

After taking a sip of his coffee he said, "Well Anita, my hetero domestic angel, I suppose we better get started before His Majesty and his Prince come down looking for food. I have it on good authority they might be... ravenous." He gave her a meaningful look and was surprised but delighted
when she burst out laughing.

"Welcome to my world, Emmett. I suppose you have been privileged to the melodic sounds of Gasp
and Groan Central?"

Emmett broke out into a wide grin. He'd just fallen in love with a woman. His daddy would have
been so pleased. No matter that she was old enough to be his own mother. "Yeah, the natives were a
bit restless this morning."

"Try every morning...and afternoon...and in between snacks. I've seen bunnies who mate less!" She
chuckled but sobered quickly, leaving a wistful smile on her face. "But I supposed they've earned it
especially after last night."

Em nodded. "Yeah especially after that. I suppose you know all about the history of Brian and
Justin."

Anita frowned. "Yeah. I remember their break-up over that idiot who came here last night. That...Ian
character. A really tough time for them both and not just because of Mr. Brian's seemingly
thoughtless ways which wasn't always the case. There were times that Mr. Justin just needed a bit of
reassurance- a little more than what Mr. Brian was able to show. They were both stupid. Mr. Brian
was an idiot for not seeing the changes in Mr. Justin for himself instead of listening to Mr. Michael's
opinion and Mr. Justin was dumb as hell for listening to all that damn violin music and the cat
torturer who played it. Both young fools I tell you, Emmett! But I think Mr. Brian did a helluva job
punching that slick one out. Part of me wishes he'd done a lot more."

"Me too, Anita but Brian probably would have really killed the guy. He's been stalking Justin pretty
much since the week he's been back. Now I'm not one for violence but I am one for self-defense and
the defense of those closest to me. Ethan Gold was asking for it." Emmett felt completely
comfortable sharing tidbits of information with Anita. Truthfully, Brian and Justin needed all the
allies they could get right now. Emmett thought of all they still faced plus the aftermath of Michael's
machinations.

"When Mr. Justin went off to New York, Mr. Brian was so sad and pitiful although he hid it well. I'll
never understand why it took them both so long but I guess every couple has to go through
something to achieve happiness for themselves. It just seemed so unnecessary to me. In my day, you
loved each other, you got married - end of story, no deposit no return. But these two and their
pussyfooting around and sacrificing for no other reason than they're both idiots...oh, they really
needed their asses whipped. Sorry Emmett." she said in her lilting Southern drawl, rolled her eyes in
remembrance of their near-ten-year folly following Justin's departure.

Emmett burst out laughing at Anita's bluntness. At five-feet-nothing, he could completely picture her
bullying Justin and Brian who would look like giants compared to her slight frame. "Don't worry,
Anita. I've often had the same thoughts about my hard headed friends. But you have to understand, it
was necessary to Justin and his own self-image. The situation with Michael and his shady behavior
over the years didn't help matters. That mean ol' green-eyed monster has ridden Mr. Michael Charles
Novotny hard over the years and in the end it may have cost him everything he was afraid of losing
in the first place... Brian. The one thing no one can say about Justin Taylor, especially now, is that he
was ever with Brian for any reason other than he loved him. And that fact alone makes me want to
make this the most memorable time of their lives. They've overcome so much to get here."

The doorbell rang before Anita had a chance to respond. As she went to answer it, Emmett checked
the supplies to make sure they had enough eggs to cover both breakfast and the preparation for the
reception. He put a quick call to Darren to pick up more, opting to be safe than sorry.
"Good Morning, Emmett," Myrna said.

"Hey what are you doing here so early? And looking stunning by the way, Darling." He gestured to her red leisure suit. Against her salt-and-pepper hair and flawless makeup, Myrna Singleton looked every inch the high powered attorney on holiday.

"After last night's excitement, I thought that I'd better get here early. Besides, it was lonely in the guest house and Dawn and Henry were..."

"Saying 'Good Moaning'" He and she chuckled. "Trust me when I tell you much of the same was going on or should I say down when I left from upstairs." He was so glad that he and Myrna had hit it off the night before.

"I take it our newlyweds haven't emerged as of yet?" Myrna nodded her thanks to Anita as a cup of coffee was placed in front of her.

"No, not yet. I don't expect to see them- at least not Justin- until he smells bacon."

Both Anita and Myrna laughed. Justin was a bottomless pit when it came to food whereas Brian was still health-conscious.

Jennifer and Tuck were the next to make their way down to the kitchen to see if there was anything they could do to help. Amid coffee, cooking and conversation, all the occupants managed to get breakfast done, admit the other newcomers and discuss how they were going to handle the Michael situation.

"Ben, Debbie and Carl just left my house heading back to Pittsburgh before Troy and I came over," Daphne said. "He's still in denial of what his actions cost him."

Troy added, "I know that Ben said he was trying to call Brian last night after Daphne told him off. Is he always like that?"

"Obsessive? Whiny? Deflective?" Emmett asked. When Troy nodded, Emmett said, "Pretty much unfortunately. We all tried to warn him- even Debbie tried- but he wouldn't listen. I take it Daphne has laid out the entire situation for you. Please know that Brian and Justin wouldn't act as they did without good reason."

Troy smiled at Daphne who blushed in return. "Yeah, Daph explained all and honestly I don't blame Brian nor Justin for the way they responded. It sounded to me that it was long overdue although I can't figure out which was the worse offense."

There were murmurs of agreement from everyone. Daphne and Troy also filled them in on the other parts of the conversation that they weren't privy to, including Ben's plan to come back for the reception while Michael is supposed to be packing his things and finding a new place to live.

"It's a shame that it's coming to this," Lindsey said. "There's no way that Ben could-"

"No," Daphne said firmly. "Out of curiosity, have any of you besides Troy read the last issue of Rage yet?"

Lindsey answered first. "Melanie and I haven't read it but Justin warned us about it when he and Brian were in Toronto for his show last year."

Blake spoke for him and Ted. "Ted and I read it and I have to tell you, I was completely bothered by it. I couldn't figure out how Justin could draw that. Although as always the art was impeccable, it's..."
no secret that the entire story was based on Brian and Justin and subsequently Michael and Ben. Teddy explained it all to me but I was still bothered."

"There was more to the idea than what appeared in that damned comic," Daphne said softly and vehemently. "The concept of the ending is what Michael has ultimately been waiting on."

"You mean for Ben... that's - that's-"

"Exactly, Blake. Last night was supposed to break Brian and Justin up for good and then it was a matter of just waiting for Ben. But the most important thing would have been that Justin was gone for good. Of course his plan backfired and instead of someone cleaning this up for him, he's got to do it himself. Debbie was even forced to see what she wasn't prepared to see and although I don't think she will stop trying, she really can't defend him this time for any of it. If I'm sad about anything, it's that her illusions about Michael have officially been shattered."

Jennifer said, "I feel bad for her as well, Daphne. I don't know how to help her with this without putting myself between my sons- for that's how I think of Brian as well as Justin- and Michael. Justin will forgive Michael although he will never forget or trust him again, if he ever did. But my concern is for my other son. Brian is a different matter altogether. He doesn't forgive nor forget easily if ever with anyone else but how will he handle this betrayal from Michael? It's not like the other times and it's not like their friendship was only a few years; it's been in existence for the better part of their lives. But this is more deep-rooted and it was directed solely toward Justin. As much as Brian and Justin have endured and are facing to be together, Michael gambled his and Brian's friendship thinking that it was stronger than the love Brian and Justin have for each other. How is Brian supposed to get over that? And how is Debbie going to cope with the fact that Brian and Michael will now be at odds? She's not going to be able to stay out of it no matter how wrong Michael was. I know I couldn't when Brian and Justin were at odds and I knew about it."

As predicted, Justin came running down the stairs at the smell of bacon cooking thereby effectively staving off any other conversation in regards to Michael and Ethan.

"Good morning, all," Justin said with his trademark mega-watt smile. Everyone couldn't help but smile back. He was practically glowing. "Breakfast almost ready?"

Emmett laughed as he handed Justin a fresh brewed cup of coffee. "Go sit your bubble-butt down. Breakfast will be finished momentarily. Where's the King?"

"Right here, Emmie Lou and I'm hungry." He grabbed Justin around the waist and planted a loud smacking kiss on his husband's lips. Releasing Justin, he grinned wide at the tell-tale blush gracing his cheeks.

"My God, haven't you two had enough?" Emmett asked causing everyone in the room to laugh. He handed Brian a cup of coffee as well.

"There's no such thing as enough especially with Justin. Isn't that right, Sunshine?"

Justin hid his answering smile behind his coffee cup but his bright eyes and flushed cheeks said it all. Emmett finished putting the finishing touches on breakfast and alongside Anita, handed food to the skeleton crew of servers from Em's catering company to place on the table. Conversation flowed around the table deliberately keeping from the most unsavory events of the previous evening. The pictures of Brian and Justin still surrounded the massive open area. Justin opted to sit next to Brian instead at the other end of the table. Everyone laughed and commented as Brian snatched a strawberry-topped piece of waffle off of Justin's plate.
"I don't know why you just don't get a waffle of your own, Brian. You know you want to and one isn't going to kill you," Lindsey said.

Ted joined in. "Justin's has to keep up his strength. Can't have him passing out from overexertion and malnutrition."

"That's why I'm stealing his food, Ted," Brian said sardonically. "I need the sugar to keep up with him."

"Don't worry, Old man, I'll take it easy on you next time," Justin countered.

"Twat," Brian said with obvious good-humor, pulling one of Justin's blond locks which fell over his shoulder. "You know you're going to pay for that later."

"Promise?" Justin tried to look innocent but the mischievous sparkle in his eyes wasn't missed by Brian or anyone else at the massive table.

Brian looked at the clock on the wall. "It's later."

Justin giggled and pushed his chair back as Brian pulled him up against him roughly. "See ya."

There was plenty of laughter and ribald humor as the newlyweds made a beeline for the stairs. About halfway up, Anita called out for Brian apologetically. Both Brian and Justin turned back reluctantly but by the tone in her voice it sounded important. As they approached her, they noticed two uniformed officers at the door with her,

"Forgive the interruption but I'm Officer Baker and this is Officer Prince. We're with the Washington County police department. Which one of you is Brian Kinney?"

Brian stepped forward but didn't let go of Justin's hand. He felt the slight tremble in his partner's hand and gave it a slight but reassuring squeeze and was gratified when he felt Justin squeeze back. "What can I do for you officers?" Brian asked, voice steady, strong and sure although he felt anything but.

At the mention of police, the assembled guests came running including Myrna and Melanie. It put him at his ease marginally but Officer Baker's next words spiked his anxiety again.

"We need you to come down with us to the station for questioning, Mr. Kinney."

Brian nodded. "I imagine this is about an incident which happened here at my home during my wedding last night. Why can't you just ask your questions here?"

"It's just routine, Mr. Kinney."

"Are you planning to arrest me?"

"As of right now, no."

"But?"

"The young man wants to press charges. He was pretty banged up."

"I barely touched that little fucker. You know what..." Brian huffed and pinched the bridge of his nose wondering when this nightmare would be over. "Fine I'll go down to the station and you can take my statement In the meantime, I'll be right back. Emmett, please get the officers some coffee. I won't be long."
Bursting into the room, Brian kissed Justin full and deep. Although he was outwardly calm, Brian was pissed and he was nervous. He replayed the entire episode in his mind while he kissed Justin. True, he'd lost control which is something he rarely did but he had good reason. That fucker had been stalking Justin for months and then showed up knowing that he would not be welcomed no matter that Michael told him he would. He deliberately baited Brian and he got what he deserved. But that still didn't mean that Brian acted correctly hence the arrival of police officers at his door. Now the asshole wanted to press charges.

"Brian, stop," Justin said between the hard kisses.

Brian didn't. He couldn't stop. Too many things and emotions were roiling through him. He pinned Justin's body against the closed door while entangling his fingers in the blond locks.

"Brian you have to calm down."

He couldn't no matter that he knew Justin was right. Brian had to regain control of himself and quickly. "Justin, I-"

'I know, Brian but not like this."

"We don't have a lot of time."

"I know," Justin said gently and pushed against Brian so that he would look directly at him. Justin gave Brian a slight reassuring smile. "Look at this way. We haven't been to Babylon for awhile. Let's pretend this is the backroom."

Brian returned the smile and leaned in to kiss Justin passionately. If it was one thing they were expert at it was fucking on the run so to speak. Justin kissed Brian as he presented his back to him, placing his palms against the door. Brian left him there long enough to grab the necessary items. They dared not go near the bed otherwise they would be tempted to linger and Brian just wanted the whole nightmare over and done. "I won't be gentle right now Justin but I'll make it up to you I swear.

"Just hurry up, Brian. I'm still fucking horny from watching you steal my waffles." Justin added a small smile for reassurance but then grew serious again. "I don't want gentle; I want to fuck."

And he did. He wouldn't admit it to Brian but he was just as angry and scared, feeling responsible for all of it. In truth he felt like crying but when he had promised to be everything Brian needed being a 'weak little faggot' was not part of the deal. So if a few moments of hard, almost brutal coupling would restore both of their calm, it would be worth the discomfort afterward. As predicted, ten minutes of fast and furious fucking took the edge off their anxiety. After a quick shower and a change of clothes for both, they descended the stairs just as they ascended- hand in hand. The entire room paused mid-conversation to gape at them because in spite of the circumstances, Brian and Justin looked poised and in full control of themselves. Standing together as they were, it was evident that nothing and no one would separate them again and all assembled saw it including the officers.

Emmett and company did an excellent job of giving the history of Brian and Justin, of all their struggles and sacrifices from the beginning so Officers Baker and Prince understood the situation as
it were a little better. Both were loathe to have to continue the investigation but it was necessary as a formal complaint was being lodged as they stood in the Taylor-Kinney residence.

"Ready, gentlemen?" Brian asked.

The officers stepped forward in unison as the other occupants of the room crowded in behind them, each determined in their own way to make their support of the couple known. Brian turned to Justin making sure that he was okay with everything. They hadn't spoken after comforting each other and reaffirming their commitment no matter what was coming for them. Although Brian wasn't being formally charged as yet, it was important for them.

"I'm coming with you, " Justin said quietly.

"Avlossa is coming this afternoon. You have to be here in my stead in case I'm not back. One of the heads of the company should be here, both yours and mine." 

"Brian, are we back to horses and dogs again?" Justin asked shaking his head. There was no way Justin was going to sit idly and obediently like a dog when told while Brian got to be the heroic stallion riding off to fend for himself. They were equals period so if Brian was going to have to deal with the mess Justin had made long ago, then the creator of said mess would be there too.

"Fortunately, Cynthia and Lindsey are here and they are for all intents and purposes, acting heads of our companies in our absence. So, I can either follow you in my car now or you can cause an unnecessary scene later and still not have your way. But make no mistake Mr. Kinney, I will be there."

Officer Baker, who had heard the exchange and nearly chuckled out loud as he watched the storm brewing between the two men, spoke quickly. "Mr. Kinney, it's okay if Mr. Taylor-Kinney follows behind in his car. Truthfully we would need his statement and it will save us time in the end."

Brian noted the smug smile on Justin's face and muttered a single word, "Twat," which caused Justin to smile brightly in response.

"Yours though," he responded.

"Yeah, mine, Sunshine. All mine," Brian confirmed and placed a brief kiss on Justin's hand entwined with his own. Even though he much preferred to keep Justin as far away from this as possible, he knew the officers were right since this concerned Justin just as much as it did him. Again he wondered if the Ethan Gold saga of their lives would ever end. Sighing deeply he said, "Let's get this over with."

As Brian left in the company of the officers, Justin gave last minute instructions to Emmett, Cynthia and Lindsey. All assured him that by the time they got back, things would be well in hand if not completely in readiness. Justin asked that both Myrna and Melanie accompany him to the station much to the surprise of the latter.

"Justin, I'm not re-qualified to practice law in the State yet," Melanie protested not a little bit nervous.

He nodded. "Let me ask you something, Mel. Has any of your basic knowledge left such as the grounds of which a person can defend themselves within their home of an uninvited guest?"

"No it hasn't but as you know that kind of law varies from state to state."

"That's what I thought but whereas Myrna is well-versed in New York law and some of
Pennsylvania law in reference to our business, I would wager that although you may be unsure of yourself right now, you still remember everything you learned about Criminal Law. So I'm asking and yes invoking the family card, to come with me. No doubt you and Brian have had your differences just as you and I have but one thing you cannot disagree with was what happened last night on all counts."

She nodded. Honestly, she was as concerned as anyone else and hearing what Michael had been up to over the years regarding Brian and Justin, didn't make her feel any better. These two had it coming from all fronts and she was sorry that she'd had a hand in it unknowingly or not. But what she and the rest had witnessed last night before the incident was solid and true. Watching her nemesis of many years take the final step in publicly claiming Justin in the most heartfelt way had shed new light on who Brian really was underneath his asshole exterior. Their union was definitely worth preserving. And she would do whatever she could to protect it. "Okay, I'll do it. Myrna, do you have access to everything financial in case we need it? I know Justin has it too but if he's busy being interrogated, it won't be readily available."

"Sure do, Melanie," Myrna said. "And for the record, thank you. I'm a damn good attorney in my own right but I don't like not knowing the lay of the land. It gives me comfort to know that you'll be there."

Justin smiled at the exchange. He secretly worried that the ever territorial Myrna would have taken issue with him asking Melanie along. He turned his attention to his agent. "Henry, I need you and Amy to do what you both do best and back Lindsey up there are going to be a lot of people here that Brian and I know personally and professionally. As you know, this is a reception but it is also the first meeting of Avlossa Creations who will be staying with us instead of in a hotel until the meeting on Tuesday morning. You and Ted know all the specifics of the accounts but more than that, they are to be treated as honored guests. I have met the ladies who own the company briefly when I was in Rochester a few months ago and although very attractive, they are also very goal-oriented. Vanguard will have done their best by them in hospitality, if not in presentation. We're more of a family atmosphere here at Chez Taylor-Kinney so that is what I am requesting for you- all of you in fact- to do. It's not to woo their business, Brian nor I are particularly over concerned. However, we never want to appear stand-offish to any of our clients or potential clients. Amy, Lindz and Cynthia are both well-versed in answering the personal questions about Brian and I as I'm sure they'll have plenty. However, you have been with me basically since the beginning of JT Designs. If any questions should come up about that, I know you'll be able to provide that information. Dawn, I know you're a huge fan of the company. Try not to shop too much," he said causing everyone to laugh. "On a serious note, you're my distributor so between you and Henry if any questions come up about the artwork from anyone during the party- do what you do. I don't want today to become a corporate party no matter how inevitable that may seem. Brian and I have waited too long and struggled too much not to be able to enjoy our family and friends without contracts being the main focus but it's bound to happen."

"Justin we have to go," Melanie pointed out.

He nodded. "One more thing. Lindsey, I don't know if Gus told you but he has a female friend coming. Her parents will be with her." He smiled at her slight gasp confirming that Gus had neglected that piece of information. "Time to go back to training at the WASP nest not the lioness camp, okay?"

She smiled in return at the fact that he'd picked the thought right out of her head at the news. "I'll try to remember my manners although you and Brian have some explaining to do later."
"Sweetheart, don't worry," Jennifer said. "I'm sure we'll all help Lindsey through it. Lord knows I've had my share of surprises regarding my own son."

Justin smiled that mega-watt smile remembering the first time Jenn had discovered that he was gay and Brian was his lover. "And look how well I turned out." He wiggled his eyebrows.

Justin, Myrna and Melanie left Britin, promising to check in as soon as they knew what the situation was.

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Chapter 31- And It Came to Pass by Nichelle Wellesly

No doubt Brian was uncomfortable in the back of a police car but he refused to show it. It had been many years since he'd been in one. First back when he was fifteen for breaking the local football jock's fingers after he dunked Brian's head in a toilet. That had earned him a severe beating from his father in which three of his ribs were cracked. The second time was when Michael was pissed off because his mom had begun dating Carl Horvath. Michael had been speeding and had bad mouthed the cop. So Brian thought of the irony that he was once again in back of a police car because of Michael Novotny. He still couldn't wrap his head around what possessed Michael to invite Ethan Gold to his house on the most important night of Brian's life; couldn't understand what he'd hoped to accomplish by doing so. Did he really think that Justin would betray him a second time with Ethan of all people or that Brian would believe Justin was? The thing that hurt Brian most was that Michael's actions had put Brian in the position in which he had to choose between his childhood friend and the man he wanted to spend the rest of his life with. Cynthia had warned him several times that Michael was going to do something to make that happen and he didn't want to believe her at the time. He had even forgiven Michael for his insensitivity toward Justin regarding killing off JT and Ben's characters violently in the comic book and then releasing it on the day before the anniversary of the prom in which Justin had almost lost his life twelve years prior. After Justin had a meltdown and they had talked about it, Justin had urged Brian to forgive Michael just as he had last night.

"Forgiveness is not for the other person; it's for you. So that you don't change the person I fell in
Justin's words replayed in Brian's mind. Sitting in the back of the squad car, Brian wondered if Justin still believed that. Brian wasn't sure how he was supposed to forgive Michael this last time especially when there was no way he would ever trust him again. Thirty years of friendship- of brotherhood- had been wiped out by thoughtless acts and drunken words uttered spitefully. Jack, who was rarely lucid, had told Brian during their talk after they had made their peace before he died had told him that most of the time sober words flow out of a drunken mouth and he'd apologized for the ones he'd said to Brian over the years. So if Jack was to be believed, Michael had meant every malicious word he'd spoken toward Justin the previous evening. But of course, Brian knew that he did since he'd heard Michael say it once before. How could he stay friends with someone like that? Even knowing all that Justin had been through, to say that Brian should have left him for dead was unspeakably cruel. It was like he was seeing a side of Michael that he had never suspected existed and in that moment, Brian felt guilty for disregarding Justin's concerns dismissing them as to simple jealousy.

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Honesty Hour

Arriving at the police station, Brian decided to deal with the situation at hand as candidly as possible. He had nothing to hide nor did he feel unjustified in his actions. Ethan Gold was told numerous times to stay away from Justin primarily by Justin himself. And yes, Brian had been itching to administer a dose of what he felt was justice for a long, long time. He would do it again in a split second if it meant that Ethan Gold had finally gotten the message that Justin Taylor-Kinney was his and only his.

He was shown into one of the interrogation rooms. Officer Prince waited with him while Baker went to collect the statement given from the hospital bed of Ethan Gold. He didn't have to wait long. Officer Baker sat opposite of Brian, reading the official statement before he handed it off to Officer Prince and spoke. "Although I am inclined to believe your relatives, Mr. Kinney, I would like to hear your side of the story."

"Where would you like me to begin?" Brian asked shrugging his shoulders nonchalantly.

"Why not start at the beginning? When did you first meet Mr. Gold?"

Brian laughed in remembrance. "I officially met him some fourteen years ago. You see Justin and I were having some... difficulties that I wasn't fully aware of. The company I worked at the time was being taken over so my main focus was divided. My best friend- well as of last night, former best friend, Michael- knew that Justin was feeling neglected. He had been bashed because he was gay by a former classmate and whereas we were together, we still had an open-relationship."

"Is it still open?"

He smiled. "As far as I'm concerned it isn't but that's a question you'll have to ask Justin." Brian folded his lips inward, thinking of what Justin's response would be and the surprise that Brian was actually serious when he said he didn't need or want anyone else anymore. "Anyway, Michael had told me that Justin was seeing someone else but then we were always seeing someone else. We had rules- no names, no numbers exchanged, no fucking a trick more than once, no kissing anyone else on the mouth and we had a curfew. In retrospect, it seems pretty stupid but it was our agreement plus Justin was nineteen and I didn't think it fair to limit his opportunities to explore other men. No one
else knew about it so when Michael brought it to me, I disregarded it. I mean Justin wouldn't cheat on me, right? At least that was my thinking. We had committed in our own way even though we weren't locked into anything neither of us couldn't walk away from. So imagine my surprise when I found out firsthand that Justin had broken the rules - two of them to be exact. No kissing and no fucking the guy more than once. Did you know that saliva carries a scent as well as the body? I knew Ethan's although I didn't know whose it was at the time. That came later." Brian paused, lost in his memories for a few moments. "What was funny was that everyone thought it would be me to break them. I was kind of notorious that way but once I gave my word, I stuck to it. I still do. To understand why it happened in the first place, you have to understand who Justin is at his core. He is a romantic at heart always was since the moment I met him. And he wanted me and only me. To him, commitment was monogamy and a host of other societal heterosexual norms and conventions. Well, I did everything I could over the years to disabuse him of the notion but once I did, I wanted romantic, idealistic Justin back. Ethan provided that for him in words what I showed him in actions. He had to learn the difference in his own way and it took me letting him go his own way for a time to do it. Ethan Gold was what I'd termed a necessary evil in our lives. I had to learn not to take Justin for granted and he had to learn the value of actions over words. I never knew what broke them up; Justin wouldn't talk about it but I knew he was bitter about it for a time. I knew he would be back and that was all that mattered to me."

Officer Prince asked, "So when did this new problem surface?"

Brian smiled again. "I'm not sure how much my family told you about the events leading up to yesterday but here it goes in short. Justin was ready to call things off after nearly ten years of being in a long-distance relationship. Very few of our family knew that we were still heavily involved with each other although he was based in New York. At Justin's request, we kept it secret and it worked for a time. The reason Justin moved back to Pennsylvania was originally as a trial and error period. We decided to give what we termed our non-relationship a real try meaning that we would be together without sacrificing all we've worked to build. A few weeks after he'd come back, we were having dinner at Liberty Diner in Pittsburgh. As we were leaving we ran into Ethan and a former associate of Justin's. Ethan took immediate issue with the fact that Justin and I were back together. That's when the harassment started. For some reason, Ethan thought that he and Justin were a much better fit than Justin and I and he began pursuing him, leaving text messages, emails or showing up in places Justin was. Basically stalking him."

They were interrupted by another officer advising that Mr. Kinney's attorneys and husband were there. Because of the small space of the interrogation room, Officer Baker ushered Brian into the precinct's conference room. Both Melanie and Myrna asked to see Ethan Gold's statement which Officer Prince handed to them. Meanwhile, Officer Baker silently observed Brian and Justin's interaction based on what he was constantly learning about the couple.

"Everything is taken care of at home, Brian," Justin said bringing his and Brian's foreheads together.

"I know, Sunshine. I still wish I was there to oversee everything."

Justin smiled. "Of course you do. You're a certified control freak."

Brian laughed. "You're one to talk."

"I'm spoiled and used to getting my way because I'm a blue-eyed blond with a great ass. That's not the same thing." Justin bit Brian's chin before laughing.
Officer Baker smiled in spite of himself. Words he'd heard from the family to describe Justin Taylor-Kinney were: intelligent, determined, adorable even at his age, slightly sardonic and enchanting. He suddenly understood what about the younger man attracted and held a man like Brian Kinney all these years and it had nothing to do with looks. There was a steel spine underneath all that blondness and a rapier wit. Nothing about him screamed victim, quite the opposite in fact. He had overcome much from Mr. Gold's statements about Justin alone.

"This is complete and utter horseshit," Melanie proclaimed causing the whole room to look at her.

"What, Mel?" Justin looked at her with concern.

"Brian, have you read this?" When he shook his head, she proceeded to read a small section from it.

‘The only reason Justin is with Brian is because he's rich and has once again been brainwashed by one Brian Kinney. Throughout their former relationship, Brian cheated on Justin several times. Not only that but he abused him physically, mentally and emotionally. It's clear to me that Justin suffers from Stockholm syndrome which won't allow him to leave Brian Kinney and seek out nor re-establish mine and his loving relationship. I tried to bring it all back to him last night since we met while I was playing that very song; tried to get him to see what a mistake he was making...again. I meant no harm by showing up to the party I was invited to. It's clear that Mr. Kinney is an abusive man and emotionally unstable who should be locked up instead of left loose to prey on unsuspecting people like Justin and myself.'

Then it went on to say that he had sustained several injuries including cracked ribs at Brian's hands and that his ultimate concern was for Justin's safety being left with a violent offender of the law.

"What the actual FUCK?! Does he really believe that shit he stated?" Justin was fuming. "I'm ready to give my statement, NOW!"

"Wow. It sounds like someone's been reading Psychology Today. I'll give him points for originality at least. I've been accused of many things but never fostering Stockholm Syndrome." Brian rolled his eyes heavenward before reaching tightening his hold on his still-ranting partner. "Calm down, Sunshine. It's just words," Brian said soothingly.

"Those are NOT just words, Brian. Those are an outright lie and slanderous accusations. I have half a mind to sue the fucker but he doesn't have anything I want. He never did- nothing of substance at any rate."

"Brian's right, Justin," Myrna said. She listened to it in disbelief. She had witnessed plenty of scenes between Brian and Justin and the last thing she would say was that Brian in anyway violent toward Justin. If the latter had a bruise or five on him, she knew it was from rough sex which Justin alluded to more than once.

"First, I have to ask Mr. Taylor, how did you sustain bruises on your wrists. They look fresh."

He looked at them when he took his seat and smiled at his partner. "They are from this morning actually. Brian and I have made no secret that our sex life can get a little more... physical than most are comfortable with."
"Physical as in violent?" Officer Prince asked.

Justin shook his head. "Not in the sense of causing harm. Brian and I have a penchant for Bdsm which we indulge on occasion. If you look at his wrists you'll see similar evidence of it. He doesn't do anything I don't explicitly ask for or don't like. I have a safe word which he respects as does he. If we tend to get a bit rough, that's our business." Justin narrowed his eyes driving his point home.

"How did you and Ethan Gold meet?"

"I went to a recital at the Pittsburgh Institute of Fine Arts which I attended as an Art student at the time. Because my then boyfriend- now husband, Brian, didn't believe in celebrating birthdays, Melanie and her then-partner, Lindsey took me as a gift. It was never my intention to become anything more to Ethan."

"When did that happen?"

"First let me say that Ethan was the biggest mistake of my life that should never have been. I had been bashed by a classmate the night of my prom and although, with Brian's help and support, I had made huge strides in getting my mobility back, it wasn't one-hundred percent and neither were the other things that made me who I am or was. You have to understand what it was like to be the Boy toy- or in my case the notorious Twink- belonging to Stud of Liberty Avenue. Brian was everything."

"Was?" Brian asked incredulously.

Justin laughed. "You still are, Stud. Anyway, being by his side was what everyone wanted- still is, in fact- and I was. So my position was enviable to say the least. Every trick he'd had from the time he and I became a hot topic had always somehow taken it into their heads that they could replace me. They became especially vicious after the incident. There were snide comments thrown at me, not only by them but by Brian's best friend and my self-esteem suffered tremendously. I wasn't perfect anymore and to me, I needed the reassurance that I was still valuable in the only eyes that ever mattered to me. But I couldn't ask for it- my pride wouldn't allow that. Although Brian showed me he loved me everyday, I needed to hear it and that was something Brian couldn't do at the time. So then I became unsure of him; the constant parade of tricks and the demands of his job didn't help any. I didn't feel like I was enough or could ever be enough for him anymore. So along comes Ethan who was as adept at turning a beautiful phrase as he was at playing his instrument. He told me all the things that I needed to hear from my partner and because I was stupid and feeling desperate for some sort of validation, I believed him. The fucked up thing is that I had all I could have wanted- all I actually wanted- but I was too blinded by my own foolishness and insecurities to see it. The night the affair began, I had asked Brian to stay home with me. Ben, Michael's husband, was in the hospital although I didn't know it at the time and Brian was in a sensitive way because Ben was on critical. Long story short, Brian went to Babylon; I went to Ethan's. At first it was just to find some comfort through a romantic song and strictly as a friend. I didn't have the intention of fucking him. Somewhere during those moments, the loneliness began to crush me and I just needed to feel something... beautiful, desired maybe- I don't know. Just something. And so began my folly. After Brian found out, I had ended the affair. My choice was always Brian but then the love of my life did something stupid and I left the Rage party with Ethan. I stayed with Ethan for about nine months but the morning after I had gone to get my things from Brian's loft, I knew I had made a mistake. I felt it and suppressed it ruthlessly; admitting it was out of the question then. Consequently, I still would have stayed and tried to make the best out of my very wrong situation with Ethan had he not lied and cheated on me."

Officer Baker was confused. "How was what Mr. Kinney did any different than Mr. Gold's
infidelity?"

"The difference was that Brian never promised me anything, not even monogamy. It's not cheating if your partner knows about it. Ethan on the other hand promised that he wouldn't sleep with anyone else or lie and he did both. Brian may have his faults and they are plenty- "

"Hey watch it, Asshole," Brian defended himself causing those assembled to chuckle.

"But one thing he has never been is a liar," Justin finished, squeezing Brian's hand. "I could trust him with everything I have and know that he won't abuse it. As far as me having 'Stockholm Syndrome,' no fucking way. Brian isn't abusive. In fact, he would rather leave me, which he has done or tried to do, than harm me. That's just his way. The first year and a half I was in New York, Brian and I had maybe ten conversations because I wanted to come home and he felt that I needed to be where I was. After awhile he stopped answering my calls and emails; missed my first exhibit which is something he would never have done without good reason but he did because he felt I needed to concentrate on what my purpose there was. Emmett, my mom and my best friend, Daphne, told me that he checked on me frequently but that was years later. There were two other relationships which didn't last because I knew where and to whom I belonged. So if anything, Brian pushed me to become the man I am today. I don't feel debt or gratitude toward him but I do feel love. Always have and it hasn't changed since that first night. Nothing, not Ethan Gold or anyone else can replace that nor stop it- not even Brian himself."

Office Baker said, "As I've told your husband, Mr. Taylor-Kinney, I was inclined to believe your family's account of the previous evening's events. Hearing yours and Mr. Kinney's account gives both Officer Prince and I a more accurate insight into the relationship that you both have. But one question that has been bugging me and it doesn't have anything to do with this investigation per se. Why the hell did it take you two so long to get your shit together?"

Both Brian and Justin laughed but it was Justin who answered. "Pride and stupidity in equal measure on my part. It never mattered to Brian what I wanted to do with my life and career or how much I had or not so long as I was happy and safe. But he knew that it was important to me to be on equal footing with him financially and so he gave me the room I needed to become the man I am now."

"And are you on equal footing now?" he was genuinely curious. It was amazing enough that the relationship seemed healthy and calm despite their noted misadventures and twelve year age difference. They seemed well-suited.

"Not completely, no but I'm close enough that if it ever came down to me having to choose between Brian and my career, I can safely make the choice I've always wanted. It was important to Brian for me to have options and I worked my ass off so that I could. I don't regret any of it, even the harder times because they shaped Brian and I in ways that would have broken other people."

"If you have time later, you both can stop by later and speak to some of our guests as a follow-up if you need to," Brian said. "As you can see, we have nothing to hide and it will be an accurate depiction of the way we choose to live our lives. The choice is yours."

"We may just do that Mr. Kinney but we need to get to the hospital to speak with Mr. Gold again."

"Are we free to go then?" Justin asked.

"Yes but although I know you both have business interests which will keep you relatively close, I do have to advise you not to travel outside of the state until we have this resolved."

"That may be a problem for me since the core of my business is based in New York and I have a few
As they prepared to depart the station both Brian and Justin's cell phones chimed. Melanie knew instantly who was ringing Brian's phone and couldn't help the chuckle which escaped her at the pained expressions on both Brian and Justin's faces. *Yeah they have definitely been around each other too long.*

"You may as well answer it now and get it over with, Brian," Justin said.

"You know every time you tell me that, I regret doing so."

"What happened to having no regrets? Besides it's not like you can turn your cell phone off today so it's either answer the damn phone or suffer the consequences of hearing it play 'I Will Survive' until you do. Your choice," Justin finished sweetly while putting his head down to look at the messages from his own pain in the ass.

**New Message: Ethan.**

*By now Kinney should have been arrested for assault and battery. I'm all alone in this hospital room. Why don't you come and keep me company? I'll be waiting. Love You, Justin. You're my muse always.*

**New Message: Ethan**

*Why haven't you answered me? Don't tell me you're sitting there pining over Brian! Ditch that BITCH! Come on Justin; we were always good together. With your business and my career back on track we could really have an amazing life. Why would you settle for a player who will fuck anyone and anything. Look I'm sorry for the way things went down between us. I just needed to fuck someone and since fucking you was out of the question, you can't fault me for needing to pound an ass since you never let me into yours. Come on, let Brian reap what he's sown and come back to me...the only man who will ever love you the way you want- the way you need to be loved. I'll be waiting.*

"You should show your phone to the officers along with the others. It may save me from having to defend my virtue in prison," Brian said.

"You're not going to prison, Idiot," Justin said before lowering his voice. "Besides I have my own plans for your ass. Any guy named Big Bubba will just have to wait his turn."

Brian laughed. He couldn't help it. "In that case you really should show those and the other messages to them. Take Mel and Myrna with you."

Justin nodded in agreement. "Are you going to call Michael back now?"

Brian sighed deeply. "Yeah, I think I better before we get back to the house. The last thing we want
there today is another scene."

"Just remember what I said Brian."

"You are unbelievable, Justin. I mean for fuck's sake we are standing in the middle of a police station because of him yet you want me to forgive him? How can you ask me to do that?"

"I believe I already explained my reasons, Brian. I don't give a fuck about Michael but I love you. I don't want this eating and chipping away at you. Somehow you forget that I know you just as well as you know me. And the guilt you feel about all of it, get over that shit real quick. None of this was your fault. If anyone is to blame it is me for giving Michael the ammunition to do this through a mistake I made long ago."

"It's not your fault, Justin. I should have listened in the first place."

"We can stand here playing the blame game all we'd like but the fact still remains that you need to speak with him and I need to go talk to the cops." Justin brought his hand up to caress the side of Brian's face. "Call him back or better yet, answer your phone when he calls back. Say what needs to be said and then be finished with it, Brian. Move on. Deal?"

Brian grabbed him around the waist, bring in Justin up on his toes to bury his nose briefly in his partner's neck. "Okay, Justin. You've made your point."

"Good," Justin said as he pulled back to look in the hazel eyes he loved so much. "Let's take care of this and then we get to go home to celebrate with the people we love and who love us. Then we can have a proper wedding night."

"Last night wasn't half bad," Brian teased, enjoying the sudden blush on Justin's cheeks.

"Last night was damned good but I seem to remember a promise you made a little while ago."

"Well then you'd better hurry up so we can get this day over with." Brian pressed his lips to Justin's, allowing them cling at the end of the kiss. There was no question Brian was the Master of Suggestion, evident by the semi-dazed look in his partner's eyes. "I'll be outside."

Justin nodded and moved off from him. Myrna and Mel had patiently waited for him and Brian to have their talk about these two problems. Between the people trying to break them up and the people trying to crumble the Taylor-Kinney Empire, Brian was just about at the end of his patience. It was bad enough that people were trying to destroy them just for being successful, rich and queer but when it was someone who he knew and trusted- who he considered a brother and best friend- it made the situation much, much worse.

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This story archived at http://www.midnightwhispers.ca/viewstory.php?sid=3187
Chapter 32- FIRE OFF- The Arrival of Avlossa by Nichelle Wellesly

John sought out Emmett and Drew who were as expected locked in a tight embrace. Emmett was in the midst of a major "queenout" as he'd heard it called. Apparently, Darren had gotten an offer at the last minute to play Shandra-La which he couldn't pass up since it was for Senator Grayson- an avid supporter of gay rights. Whereas Emmett understood, it still didn't help the sudden increase in workload.

Before John could check himself he asked, "What can I do to help?"

Emmett looked for the voice which had spoken and was surprised that it was John Townsend. He regained his composure instantly. "Jenn, Anita and Archie could use the most help. Can you cook?"

"You bet your flaming ass I can." He regretted the words the minute they left his mouth. He'd have to remember to be more careful in the future.

So he was equally surprised that instead of the berating he was expecting instead he got the biggest laugh from Emmett Honeycutt. "Well my flaming ass is about to thank God that your uber-masculine ass can. How are you with desserts?"

"Let me put it this way: Peter and I wouldn't be alive today if I wasn't able to put together an array of comfort food including German Chocolate cake, Coconut Cream pie and Red Velvet cupcakes. Add
to that pineapple Upside Down and Caramel Pound cake and you'll have our entirely edible menu for my senior year in high school. My mother and grandmother left a lot to be desired in the kitchen and were too self-absorbed to learn to make food worth eating."

"My you're just full of surprises, aren't ya?" Emmett said while Drew smiled.

"You'll learn, Emmett. Straight men are just as good in the kitchen as the gay ones."

"Ooh, and the Kinney arrogance firmly in tact," Emmett smiled wide. "Well Chef Boy are John, get to it. And thanks. You really didn't have to help us out."

John smiled shyly. No one besides Peter had thanked him before. "I know I didn't, Em but it's important to me that I could."

"See, Emmett? I told you you were worrying for no reason. There are too many of us not to be able to support each other," Drew said.

"How do you think things are going down at the station, Drew? I can only hope what we all said to the officers this morning helped. But Justin hasn't called. No one has."

"Tell you what, Em. I'll take a ride down there and find out what's going on. But you have to promise me something."

"Anything," Em said. He was so fucking worried and he felt helpless even though he knew this was important for Brian and Justin, too.

"No more tears. I can't bear the thought of someone else holding you other than me when you're crying. Besides, I'd rather make you cry a different way." Drew smiled the one reserved only for Emmett.

"Aw Drewsie. You say the sweetest things to keep this little gay boy happy." Emmett gave kissed him full on the mouth but stopped before they could take it any further. That would have to wait until later. The last time someone had made him this happy was when his sweet George Schickle was alive and well. And even though his time with Ted was special and they had happy moments, they were just wrong as companions. Same with Cal Culpepper. Drew Boyd was a different matter altogether and Em was glad that they were both ready when Drew came back. "Now go on and call me to let me know what's happening. Our friends have waited entirely too long for this day to happen and I need to know if I have to break the power tools out to bust Brian out of prison. And even though he could make anything look hot and trendy, that gaudy orange is not in his color wheel."

Drew laughed. He couldn't help it. Leave it to Emmett to turn sour grapes into a sour apple martini. But that was what Drew loved most about Emmett Honeycutt. "I'll call you. Be good, Emmett."

"Sugar, I'm always good. I just save the badness for you." He smacked Drew on the butt as he moved off earning him a chuckle in the process.

Turning abruptly, Emmett went back into drill sergeant mode getting seating set up in rooms where it was limited. Justin's agent was a gem. Henry was as much of a micro-manager as Emmett so he'd put him in charge of getting the guest rooms prepared for the people who would be staying in the already country manor. He remembered when he'd told Brian that it was too much house for just Justin and him. Brian had laughed and scoffed that Emmett was being too over-dramatic. Considering the amount of guests plus the ones staying, Emmett was certainly grateful for the extra space just then.
Dawn, Lindsey and Amy were with floral arrangements and making sure that Justin's artwork and pictures that Brian himself had done, showed to their best advantage especially since there were going to be more people in the house. Ben walked in the door just as Emmett was zipping by.

"Hey. What are you doing here?" He hugged him.

Ben breathed a sigh of relief and embraced Emmett back. "I figured you guys could use the help. I wasn't sure I would be welcomed so I just took the chance and came anyway."

"Honey, no one is blaming you for what Michael did. We all tried to stop him, I imagine you did more than any of us. Daphne and Troy told us what happened last night over at her house."

"It was the hardest decision of my life, Em but a must. I can't understand nor get through to him anymore. I left him packing him packing his things. I think he'll be better off at Debbie's." They were silent for a few moments each absorbed in his own thoughts before Ben spoke again. "Well. This isn't about the end of my marriage but the beginning of one we've all waited a long damn time for."

Emmett laughed. "And just think, I've been waiting a lot longer than you. Let's see if we can get everything else set up. Colby is around here somewhere. Between the two of you muscle men, we should be able to get the rest of the heavy lifting done."

"I'm all yours."

Ted, Blake and Peter were shifting other things around in the game room so Emmett found Colby on the way to the media room. He was also grateful that Ben had shown up since Drew was on his way down to the police station to check on Brian and Justin. Ben and Colby would be in charge of rearranging the media room. Brian's idea, of course, was for everyone to eat and go home. Justin being a WASP, advised that it would be better to it right since this was the only thing resembling a reception that they would ever have. Brian reluctantly agreed after much cajoling and coddling by his Twink. It was almost time for the guests to arrive so Emmett took one last round of the activity going on around the house. He was pleased to see that John fit right in with Jenn and Anita, who were equally delighted to have him take over the desserts. Archie was kind of put out having to work with a straight guy but even he had to admit that the young man knew what he was doing in the kitchen.

Assured that everything was under control and moving along nicely, he went to change for the party. The funny thing is that Justin had asked the family to wear colors that reflected the colors found in Brian's eyes. An incredibly romantic idea and befitted Justin's artistically trained eyes. The only problem was that Brian had in turn asked the family to wear shades of blue for the same reason. It was amazing to Emmett how much Justin had changed Brian in that he actually cared enough to think of that small detail due to the photographer they hired to capture the event. What wasn't really termed a wedding was keeping with all the traditional elements and Emmett couldn't have been more pleased. The only thing was the noticeable absence of the more traditional flowers, such as roses, due to Justin's allergies. Brian hadn't wanted anything that could cause an adverse reaction in Justin but with a little research, Emmett was able to substitute those with Gardenia "Golden Magic" plants which he had placed in every room which would bloom nicely over time as long as kept from the harsh winter cold.

Emmett pulled out turquoise turtleneck and chocolate brown slacks, admiring the way the colors played off of each other, much like the honorees themselves. After taking a quick shower, he applied a little product to his hair and put on a little midnight blue liner to bring out the color of his eyes- an
effect Drew both loved and hated in equal measure but understood. He was slipping on his clothes when he heard the doorbell ring. He was still worried about Brian and Justin but he knew that he had to go downstairs and get things underway.

Waving away one of his staff, he took a deep breath before opening the massive oak door. About twenty of the guests had arrived at the same time but the two of the three which held his attention were accompanied by a man who would rival even Brian Kinney himself. He recognized the women immediately.

"Welcome to Britin, Ms. Brent and Ms. Chambers. I am Emmett Honeycutt and will be your host in the interim." He ushered them into the living room and closed the door. Despite the snow the previous night, it was one of the warmer days in November but there was still a bite to the crisp air.

Sharlene answered for them all while shedding their outerwear. "Thank you, Mr. Honeycutt. This is our real estate agent and also our partner in Avlossa, Jason Dumas. I know that Brian and Justin weren't expecting him but we recently acquired a business in Pittsburgh and it was necessary for him to accompany us. I hope that won't be an issue."

Emmett smiled. Her voice was like honey, deep and rich with a faint accent. "No I don't think that will be an issue. And Emmett is just fine. No need for such formalities. Unless that's what you're comfortable with?"

Her companion said, "It's absolutely fine, Emmett. I'm Bethany and wee usually use the shortened version of Sharlene's name. As for Jason, we won't tell you what we usually call him so I guess Jason will have to do."

He laughed at her honesty and knew instantly that Brian and Justin would love them. In a way they reminded him of Melanie and Lindsey where one was more formal than the other.

Jason spoke then. "Don't mind these two, Emmett. Besides I'm sure Brian and Justin won't mind me being here. In fact, I'm almost looking forward to the surprise. I haven't seen Justin since his return to Pittsburgh. I take it he and Brian have made their peace?"

Emmett was a bit taken aback although in retrospect he probably shouldn't have been. Jason looked like he could have been a former trick of Brian's or Justin's or part of one of their numerous threesomes over the years. Classically handsome with a movie star quality, even in casual clothes, he looked as if he could have just stepped off the cover of GQ magazine. The deep tenor of his voice was enough to even make Emmett mentally drool momentarily. Emmett almost forgot that he needed to make a call when looking into the sparkling gray with gold flecks of his eyes. He snapped back to reality and remembered his manners as Jason smirked knowingly. Yes. He and Brian were definitely cut from the same cloth. "Yes. Brian and Justin thankfully have made their peace. In fact this is a reception of sorts since they had a commitment ceremony last night."

"Wait? They actually got married?" Jason asked incredulously. "Brian Kinney actually said I do? Hell must have frozen over or there are headless horsemen running all over Europe by now."

Emmett laughed. "Based on that response, I would say you must know Brian pretty well. Make yourselves comfortable while I find out what's keeping he and Justin."

He moved off still speculating how Brian and Justin had met the handsome and outspoken Jason. He
was sure there was a story there but it would have to wait. He was just about to dial Drew when his cell phone rang.

It wasn't Drew but Deb on his phone. He listened intently as she informed him that Michael had taken his and Ben's other car and was on his way to Britin.

"You have got to be kidding me," was all he could say.

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This story archived at http://www.midnightwhispers.ca/viewstory.php?sid=3187
Chapter 33- The matrix Decoded by Nichelle Wellesly

Mark Townsend felt more than a little trapped in a web of his own making as he once again sat alone at his desk. Too much was riding on being able to crack these codes. Not only had they threatened his immediate family as it was now. They had found out somehow about John and Peter-the children from his marriage to that evil bitch, Claire Kinney. Although he had not been there for most of their lives, through no fault of his own, he still looked out for them. He paid his child support regardless of the fact he wasn't allowed to see them. Claire and Joan made sure to tell the judge officiating over the custody case some years ago that Mark was unfit in every way. He drank too much. He never went to church. He was abusive in spite of the fact that he had pushed Claire to keep him from hitting him. The last draw had been the day she had broken his nose and cracked one of his ribs by repeatedly beating him with a cast iron skillet. Unfortunately for him, the judge believed her and her salt-of-the-earth hypocritical mother disregarding the police report maintaining his innocence and that he acted in self-defense. Now these people were after the one person in the entire Kinney household which despite his lifestyle and upbringing had managed to make a success of himself.

In Mark's mind, Brian Kinney was to be admired. He knew all about Jack's abusive ways and Joan's drinking to block out her culpability of Brian's repeated physical, emotional and mental abuse. But Brian used it as fuel to get out alive. Growing up next door from that house of horrors, it was his one desire to rescue Claire since he couldn't do anything to protect Brian from his father. Joan took to 'disciplining' Claire while quoting Bible verses but the minute Jack went for both Claire and Joan,
they would point him in Brian's direction. He often wondered why Joan would let her child be abused like that; why she enabled Jack's constant maltreatment of her children. It seemed to him that the only reason Joan had the kids in the first place was to use them as human barriers between herself and Jack Kinney. If Brian wasn't available only then did Joan and Claire become the primary targets. All other times it was Brian. But he couldn't say any of this without getting his own tongue cut out.

He had no idea what Brian had done to piss off the Hobbs family and he knew for Craig Taylor it was because of Kinney's relationship with his son which was a little confusing since from what he knew, Taylor disowned his son. By all accounts, Kinney had put the young man through school and gave him a place to stay. He knew all about the fiasco of former Chief Stockwell's campaign as did everyone else in the Pittsburgh Metropolitan area but there was no question, Brian had pissed off some really rich people with equally dangerous friends. Everything in him wanted to warn Brian of the impending danger but when he wasn't in the bank, he was followed. He knew that all of his phones were tapped. The worst was not knowing where his sons were. It had been more than three weeks since John and Peter had been visible anywhere, including Liberty Avenue. He used to take comfort in seeing them around town from time to time although he never approached them. He'd been too afraid of what poison his ex-wife and her vicious mother had been saying about him in his absence and he wasn't prepared to deal with the fallout from the misunderstanding or misconception of why he wasn't around.

A series of five pings in succession from his computer caught his attention. He flipped through each one revealing the astronomical amounts of money from both Brian Kinney and Justin Taylor's business and personal accounts. "Fuck. I did it," he said as he continued to stare at the screen.

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This story archived at http://www.midnightwhispers.ca/viewstory.php?sid=3187
FCUK!!!!!!!

Chapter Summary

There are quite a few parts which make up Chapter 34 (on MW it's listed as Parts) but I had to divide them on AO3 into chapters. It should still be completely easy to follow the story line. I just thought you should know because of the secondary title a little further down. Hope you're enjoying this!!

TIME'S UP VOLUME II: SHARE MY LIFE by Nichelle Wellesly

Summary:

TU VOL II

Categories: Alternate Universe, QAF-U.S., Family, Angst, Bdsfm, Brian/Justin, Canon, Could be Canon, Drama, Humor, Jealousy, Justin/Ethan, Justin/Other, REAL LIFE ISSUES, Romance, Toppy! Justin, Unsafe Sex, What If Characters: Brian, Cynthia, Daphne, Justin, Original Character(s), Other Canon Characters, Ted Challenges: None Series: TIME'S UP SERIES Chapters: 40 Completed: No Word count: 215094 Read: 52889 Published: February 04, 2015 Updated: October 03, 2015

Chapter 34 Part I- FCUK!!!!!! by Nichelle Wellesly

Author's Notes:

There are quite a few scenes in Chapter 34 so I divided them into parts. Most of the action takes place at Britin but then we have other notable things happening at First National Bank and let's not forget Ethan has to be served his restraining order as well. Chapter 34 and all of its parts are definitely plot-driven, angsty and have some humorous moments to balance out the drama (well at least I hope so)! Happy Reading! ~Nichelle

CHAPTER 34 Part I
Drew arrived at the police station. Walking up to Brian, he caught the tail end of a very stressful and obviously hurtful conversation. He could only guess who was on the end of that call based on the unguarded look on Brian's face. Throughout the years, he and Brian had become good friends. He only had one stipulation to allowing Drew back into the inner sanctum of those he considered family- don't hurt Emmett. When Brian threatened to have Drew murdered if he did so, Drew believed wholeheartedly that Brian would. He wasn't intrusive into their private lives but he was always a presence, a shoulder to lean on for tears and advice... in short Brian Kinney was one of the best men Drew knew especially since coming out over ten years ago. So it pained him to see an honorable man like Brian having to endure a betrayal from the one person no one thought had it in him.

"Emmy Lou sent you to check up on us, did he?" Brian asked by way of greeting.

"Yeah, he was pretty distraught just before I left." He typed a quick message to Emmett advising that all of them would be returning soon.

Figuring Brian needed to take his mind of the current situation, he began to give him a play-by-play of what was taking place at the house. Brian laughed out loud at Drew's account of the banter between Em and John. It made him feel good that he had at least been able to give Brian a little sustaining humor to lighten his notably gloomy mood. In turn, Brian filled him in on all that's been going on there at the station. Drew nearly blew a gasket when Brian told him of Ethan's statement and accusations.

Brian sighed deeply. "I hate that little fucker but he doesn't matter."

"You're right, Brian. What does is that you and Blondie in there finally got your acts together. That's what counts," Drew said.

Before Brian could say respond, Justin emerged from the entrance with a smiling Myrna and Melanie following close behind. The relief pouring off of Justin was palpable even to Drew. He could only imagine the trauma the young man had been through in the last twenty-four hours alone. But Justin Taylor hadn't bent or crumbled; he stood tall and fought for what was his- both literally and figuratively. Drew couldn't help but respect him for it.

"Ready to go home, Sunshine?" Brian asked grabbing Justin around the waist as Drew and the others looked on. Drew found himself smiling at the display. A few years ago, Brian would never have been so open about his feelings but it was great to see him happy at last.

"More than, Stud," Justin said burrowing into Brian's chest and hugging him back closely. "Ethan Gold shouldn't be a problem for us anymore."

"What happened?" Drew couldn't take the suspense anymore.

Justin answered without releasing his hold on Brian. "I showed them the numerous text messages and emails over the last couple of months. The most damning were the ones from the night I decided to stay with Brian for good and my text to Brian after Ethan cornered me earlier this week in the Diner when I was waiting for Em to arrive. They gave credence to my need for a restraining order. I have to file one when I get back to Pittsburgh.

"Justin will also need to file with the NYPD precincts closest to his home and business interests in
New York and he will have to go there periodically. This will prevent Ethan from being within five hundred feet of him at any given time," Myrna explained.

"Do you think he'll obey it?"

Melanie answered, "If he knows what's good for him, he will. There's enough to charge him now where he would do jail time. If he adheres to the restraining order guidelines, he won't be charged with stalking. The major anvil hanging over his head right now is the fact that he falsified a police report and trespassing. Criminal Mischief is bad enough but added to the trespassing and possible stalking charge, he could be looking at jail time. Ethan knew that regardless of Michael inviting him, he would not be welcomed to Brian and Justin's home. So technically Brian was within his rights to defend his home and the people in it. Had they made the mistake of arresting Brian, there would have been grounds for a lawsuit."

"I wonder if I can file assault charges on Ethan," Brian said.

"What for?" Melanie asked. "Everyone there saw you literally kick his ass. The only thing saving your scrawny ass right now is the ample behind Justin."

"He made my ears bleed playing that fucking screeching cat torturing music. That should count for something. I had to endure that shit for the longest thirty seconds of my life. Now THAT was abuse," Brian said matter-of-factly.

Everyone laughed. Drew shook his head. Leave it to Brian to make light of what could have been a sad and serious situation. It helped relieve any lingering sadness Justin may have had was gone, evident by the return of his infamous mega-watt smile. Once again, Drew was struck by the pair and how well-suited they were. Each had the ability to bring the other out of their troubles and back into a place of peace. Watching Brian and Justin and their constant need of contact from each other, he realized that he and Emmett did the same thing for each other.

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Daniel heard the five pings while passing by Mark's office. He knew what they indicated and the danger his clients as well as Mark Townsend were now in. While working to combat the potential problem, it didn't seem quite real. Now it was. FUCK!! Pulling out his cell phone and hurrying back to his office, he dialed Aurora Kelly immediately explaining and detailing what the immediate issue was. Tony was already walking through his office door awaiting further instruction. In Daniel Quinn's estimation the single best decision Aurora had done was to keep the security firm formerly under Frank Murphy in place. The fact that Tony's company was also in charge of all of Brian Kinney's establishments and therefore in charge of protecting Justin Taylor's interests as well, made all of the nuances of this very complex situation a little easier to covertly pass along information. Tony's team immediately went to work while Quinn continued to make the necessary phone calls.

"Myrna, we have a problem..."

Arriving back at the house, Justin and Brian opted to use the back entrance and head straight for the master suite. After spending all morning and half the afternoon at the police station another shower was in order. Sadly for both, there wasn't time to linger. The house was teeming with guests including the Avlossa team. Brian changed into his winter white leisure suit. Justin relented to Brian's fashion bullying and opted for a cream color silk shirt with matching slacks but would not relent on his canvas sneakers.
Brian came to stand behind Justin as he was about to put his hair in the man-bun he often wore when running errands or going into business meetings. "Leave it down," he said softly.

"Why?" Justin asked just as softly. "I'll just be fidgeting with it and to top it off, I look like an international playboy."

Brian shook his head and met his partner's eyes in the mirror. "You're beautiful, Justin. Your hair like this reminds me of how you look first thing in the morning; still young and innocent." He fingered one of the thick tresses which fell gently on Justin's shoulder before allowing his hands to trail down the silk-clad muscular biceps and finally intertwining their fingers.

"I like your freshly-fucked hair, too." Justin said laughingly, pulling their joined hands across his midsection. He sighed deeply. "I suppose we'd better get down there. Mel, Myrna and Drew will have told Em that we're back."

Brian nodded. "I could just kick everyone out and we could..." He nuzzled the side of Justin's neck.

"No you can't. Aside from the fact we have family and clients downstairs, Emmett worked really hard on this. Plus I would hate to have to deal with my mother for ruining her only shot at my wedding reception." A little sardonic smile ghosted Justin's lips as he finished.

Brian laughed. "Yeah, you have a point. I would hate to face Mother Taylor's wrath. It's bad enough I have corrupted her only son and made him my bitch."

Justin chuckled. "Who corrupted whom is still debatable. I taught you resistance was futile when it came to this persistent twink."

"If we don't get out of this room, I might be tempted to fill a certain twinkie with cream."

Justin turned in Brian's arms, bringing their lips together. The kiss was searing hot and escalated quickly. Brian's toes curled as Justin's tongue drank from him and stole his breath. He eased his hands under the flowing tail of Justin's shirt, raking his nails down his back and eliciting a lust-filled moan from his eager companion.

"Later," Justin murmured against Brian's lips although neither made a move to end the kiss. The insistent knock on their door interrupted what was turning into a very heated exchange.

"What is it, Honeycutt?" Brian didn't even bother to hide his annoyance.

"First, don't call me 'Honeycutt.' Secondly, I came to look you two over..." Emmett's eyes roamed over Justin first and then Brian, noting the shiny and slightly dazed looks in the blue and hazel eyes regarding him. He continued with a big smile, "And last but certainly not least by the looks of it, I came to stop any extracurricular activities you may have been getting into."

Brian smirked not in the least bit bothered they had been easily read. "Justin, remind me to put a stop-payment on the check Monday."

For his part, Justin laughed and rolled his eyes at the antics of his two favorite men in the world. "Something tells me that's not the only reason you came up here, Em, so spill it."

Emmett took a deep breath. "I thought this might be better to tell you away from prying eyes and nosy ears. Debbie called while you were out."

"Okay. And?" Brian asked. He was already short on patience due to the morning's events.
Emmett swallowed hard. "Apparently Michael took his and Ben's other car and is on the way here."

"Fuck!" Justin shouted and rounded on Brian. "I thought you called him while I was filing the report."

"I did, Justin. I made it perfectly clear that he wasn't to come today or ever. How long did the call come in?" He turned to Emmett.

"About ten minutes after I sent Drew to the police station to check on you guys."

"Where the hell is Ben? Can't he keep his fucking husband in check?" Brian pinched the bridge of his nose in frustration.

A house full of guests and Michael was coming to cause a scene. He personally didn't give a shit but it could be bad for Justin's career. And Gus had a guest and her parents were probably already downstairs. Michael was never the type to go have a seat somewhere without copious amounts of whining and angst. *FUCK!!*

"About that, Brian... Michael is supposed to be moving back into Debbie's. Ben is downstairs and he and Michael are officially finished. You can't be surprised by that."

"What do you mean ‘finished,’ Emmett? They're married both in Toronto and here. How the fuck can Ben just walk away?" Brian asked.

"Brian, do you really understand what Michael's motives were? Sometimes you have a fucked up habit of hearing without really listening." Emmett shook his head regretting having to point that characteristic out at such a time but Brian needed to be told he does it, especially in terms of Michael. They all tended to do it primarily to keep their sanity.

"That isn't the case this time. I told him specifically that whatever fucked up fantasy was living in his mind about me, him and Palm Springs was just that- a fantasy- and that it would never happen."

Justin interceded. "Brian, that last issue of Rage was all about that fantasy. You know that. What did he say when you spoke to him?"

"The same bullshit and that he destroyed his marriage for me; that I didn't have to go through with any of this. I told him not to come here and that we would talk another day when I wasn't so fucking angry with him. I told him I needed time."

"Well by my calculations, Bri, you have about half an hour to pull yourself together to handle this," Emmett said. Brian could see the clear regret written on his face from having to tell he and Justin about Hurricane Michael coming to do another round of damage.

"We'd better head on downstairs, Brian," Justin said while looking at Brian's face and reading all the emotions he was feeling himself. "Em, could you give us a few minutes. We'll be down directly."

"No problem, Sweetie," Em said quietly, giving Brian's shoulder a small reassuring squeeze and then quietly withdrawing from the room.

The soft click of the door closing was the only noticeable sound for several minutes following Emmett's departure. Justin continued to study Brian's eyes- the only part of Brian's body which he could never completely conceal his emotions. Justin could see Brian replaying moments and his life history with Michael as plain as if he were watching the memories unfold. The happiness, the sadness and moments of anguish evident within the eyes Justin most loved in the world. He ached for his partner knowing that he was a major source of the contention between Brian and Michael.
Justin wouldn't trade a minute of it though. He remembered telling Lindsey once that Brian was his 'Once in a lifetime opportunity,' his only shot at love and to be loved the way he needed to be; the only way Brian could love him. For all that they had gone through to be together, Justin would not have traded anything even this. And he knew no matter how hurt Brian was, that he wouldn't either. Brian turned away from him trying his best to get himself back under control. Justin crossed the room determined not to let Brian retreat too far into himself. He knew the signs and he refused to let Brian erect the emotional walls in his presence. He could do that with everyone else but not Justin.

Justin stroked Brian's cheek forcing him to look at him. He licked his lips before speaking. "I know this is not what you had in mind for today but you have to deal with it. Do you want me to be with you when you do?"

Yes! Brian wanted to say but instead spoke, "No. I have to deal with this. This friendship started long before you entered my life, Justin. It has to end the same way."

Justin nodded understanding even though he didn't like it. "Get the answers you need, Brian and try not to say anything you'll regret later."

"I don't believe in regrets. You know that."

Justin decided to let Brian verbally deceive himself this one time for self-preservation purposes. He knew that Brian knew Justin could see what he never showed anyone else. Justin didn't need to say anything this time. He kissed Brian gently. "If it makes any difference, I love you now and always and I just want you happy. If that means I have to tolerate Michael, then that's what it has to be."

Brian hugged him close, burying his nose in Justin's neck and hair. "I know, Sunshine. You're the only one in this family who ever got me completely. No judgment, just acceptance."

"The one thing I know about you, Mr. Kinney, is that you never act without reason. And no matter how you choose to handle this, I know that theory will hold true as well. Let's go greet our guests and enjoy ourselves for at least a little while before we need to deal with any unpleasantness."

"Ever the perfect WASP," Brian teased.

"Except when I have to defend what's mine. Lions don't run from sheep right?"

"No we don't, Justin. We never do."

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Downstairs the party was in full swing. Daphne sought out Emmett to make sure everything was alright. She knew Brian and Justin had been back awhile based on Drew's reappearance but she was still concerned. The whole Ethan/Michael faction made her uneasy to say the least. She was never a staunch supporter of Ethan Gold; a fact she made more than clear to Justin while the two of them were dating. She couldn't imagine how the whole situation was affecting Brian and Justin especially since they had fought and finally won their right to be happy.

"Hey Sweetie," Emmett said as he bent to embrace her 5'2 frame. Do you and Troy have everything you need to transform the Master Suite this evening?"

She hugged him back. Out of all the ‘family,' she loved Emmett the best, except for Brian and Justin. He and Ted saw Brian in the same way she did and viewed his struggles with Justin the same as well. She would always be grateful to them both and Cynthia for helping her two best friends through their rough times.
"Just about," she answered him. "Now if we could just get them to bring their asses downstairs and stay down here, Troy and I can get to work. How are they?"

"They're survivors, Daph. You know as well as I do that nothing will keep them down for long." He pulled her to the side away from the other guests. "But I have to tell you, I don't know what's going to happen when Michael gets here."

"I wish he would just stay away for at least today. To expect more would be like expecting Marilyn Monroe to be reincarnated."

Emmett laughed. "I agree with you but there's no way he would let the matter rest. In Michael's mind, the sooner he can get to Brian, the sooner the Brian and Mikey show can begin again. Brian has always overlooked or covered Michael's shortcomings in the past. I'm just not so sure about this time."

Daphne nodded. She had never seen Brian so conflicted before and it bothered her. He was always so self-assured and contained; dependable and predictable in his responses to everyone's needs. This fight between Michael and Justin hurt him deeply and rocked his foundation. Yes, he did the right thing by putting Justin above Michael but it never should have gotten as far as it had.

"Do you need me to run interference with Justin while Brian deals with Michael?" she asked.

"I don't think it's going to come to that today," Em answered. "If I know Justin and I do, he's going to give Brian the space he needs to address the Michael situation. However, he may need you regarding his feelings about Ethan."

"Why would he feel anything regarding that asshole?" If it were up to her, Ethan Gold would be tarred and feathered by now.

Emmett laughed. She knew he could read the emotions on her face and she lowered her eyes momentarily; her cheeks felt hot and she knew he could see the blushing stain of embarrassment on her cheeks. She and Justin were like twins in that respect- never good at hiding their anger.

"You could be right but if anything else goes wrong today, I'm afraid Justin will do what he always does which is take the guilt upon himself. He's already done that last night and this morning."

Emmett said.

"He has to realize that this isn't his fault but we both know that Justin will think it is." She let out a frustrated sigh. "These two are going to be the fucking death of me. After nearly fifteen years of the Taylor-Kinney angst you would think they would have the decency to let the lot of us rest awhile."

"But then our lives would become boring and meaningless," Em joked. "We would sit around wondering what shit they stepped in instead of helping them out of the muck they've fallen into. If I ever write a book, the King and his Prince have certainly given me enough material."

"You could always take it from the Rage story line. It will save you some time."

They both laughed at that. Daphne and Emmett continued to talk about the trials of having Brian and Justin as friends while activity continued to flow around them. There was no question to each of their minds that the relationship would survive everyone and everything that would be thrown at them. The question was how much more the couple could take before they lost their minds.

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Chris arrived at the bank amongst a flurry of activity. His associate in tow, he signed his name for
Mr. Townsend and took a seat waiting to be called. His primary goal was to check his investment portfolio and liquidating his portion of the construction business in keeping with the quiet divorce settlement he and Allison were planning. There was no doubt that her price was steep but since he was taking steps to look like he’d abandoned her and the kids, he had to make sure her and the kids’ needs were met. He had already decided that he owed Justin Taylor a good turn in spite of the gun incident. In many ways Justin had given Chris the courage to do what he must and move somewhere to a place where he and George could live their lives fully and openly. The arrival of his step-brother earlier in the afternoon provided the impetus to speed the process along. Mark was He turned to his companion for reassurance and support.

"Are you sure there isn't anything else I can do without taking from the family business. I mean, I know that I'm in charge of the day-to-day operations but I'm not interested in having to cook the books or anything to cover my tracks."

Brandon Miles looked at Chris with a mixture of pity, scorn and understanding. It was a strange combinations of emotions he felt for Chris Hobbs. On one hand, he decidedly felt disgusted with him because he was essentially abandoning his children- kids he had with a hetero woman knowing full well that he was a gay man. He let other people decide how he should live his life whereas he bashed a notable denizen on Liberty Avenue nearly fifteen years ago for having the courage not to hide who he was; one half of the duo whose shadow Brandon still lived in at Babylon and the Baths. Everyone who was anyone within gay Pittsburgh knew the story of Justin Taylor and the attacker had gotten off with a slap on the wrist. The pity Brandon felt was because Chris was truly trying to make amends for his misguided actions to Justin and break free of the country club set he was born into. That was the problem with the WASP nest. It was a network of family-owned businesses and inherited fortunes; people were born into it but it was hard as hell to get out of without being ostracized for homosexuality like Justin was. Chris and Allison wisely made the decision for him to remain in the closet until all of the financial aspects of their divorce was finalized. Although divorce was frowned upon because of the prenuptial agreements between families, as long as it was handled quietly and with dignity no backlash to Allison and the kids nor Chris should occur.

Brandon sighed as he prepared to relay the information to Chris again. "The only other option you have other than liquidating your portion of Hobbs Construction Inc. is to literally sign over your shares to Allison in trust for your son/ Based on how your community, particularly your family feels about women owning property outside of their husband, this is the safest and most efficient option for both you and Allison. Once the money is in her account under a trust for the children, your father nor grandfather can pull the money back. Allison gets a tenth deposited directly into her account but once that gone, it's gone. It will be up to her to invest it wisely. As for you and George, you fifty percent will be deposited into your account and the other forty percent goes into the trust. If you let your family cash out your shares, they'll want to know why. Liquidation really is the best option for you Chris."

He nodded his understanding to Brandon as they continued to watch the activity. When he sat up in his chair, back rigid as a poker, Chris instantly felt sick.

"What is it?" Brandon looked at Chris who had turned ashen white as he continued to watch the flux and flow from Mark Townsend's office.

"You see that woman, Brandon?"

"Yeah what about her?"

"That's Aurora Kelly, the owner of the bank."

"Okay so? Don't most owners have offices within the bank?" Brandon was genuinely puzzled by the
look on Chris' face.

"Yeah they do but she is never seen during regular banking hours. Ever."

"And this is important...why?"

"Because she is headed directly to my family's personal banker's office."

"Shit. We need to head that off if you mean to see this completed today."

Chis nodded. "Something tells me, it's now or never."

They moved toward the corner office in a seemingly sedate pace when Chris felt more like running in there. They reached the door in time to find Mark cowering in the corner although he tried his best to maintain his usually straight posture while Aurora towered over him. Tony, a guy both Chris and Brandon recognized as the head of security at Babylon, was disconnecting Mark's computer expertly. Listening in on bits and pieces of the conversation as they continued to observe unnoticed, Chris noted the word accounts and heard the names Kinney, Taylor and Kinnetik. He also heard of a company called JT Designs and something he couldn't quite make out about the former Bloom gallery. He also heard a name he never thought to hear again: Daphne Chanders. 

Doctor Daphne Chanders. The last he remembered hearing she had moved to New York as had Justin Taylor. He knew that Taylor was back but was Daphne as well? If he went to her, could she help him get to see Justin? Would she even be willing to?

He knew if he was ever going to be free of the shit he was in and absolve himself of the guilt regarding his connection to Justin Taylor, now was the time to speak up.

"Mark, I'm really trying to help you here but you have to give me the names of the people coercing you to do this. You've always been a loyal and faithful employee but what you have done is a federal crime," Aurora said.

"I know, Ms. Kelly and believe me, I tried to get out of it. I didn't want to have anything to do with any of this. But the people you are questioning me about are dangerous and they have threatened all that I hold dear. Although I would like to automatically do what's 'right' in this case, there are a lot factors."

"You know that this will cost you your job...maybe even your freedom, Mark?"

"I don't care about me, as long as my family remains safe and my son can grow up. My other sons...well I don't even know where they are right now but I hope they're safe. If I don't give them the information on the computer your security guy us calmly dismantling and taking God knows where, I am a dead man and so are the members of my family beginning with my two oldest sons."

Aurora shook her head. "Then Mark you leave me no choice."

"Wait," Chris said softly but loud enough to be heard within the confines of the office.

Aurora turned around, finding the voice which had spoken so earnestly. A frown creased her high arched brows immediately. "Christopher Marc Hobbs, what are you doing here?"

He cleared his throat. Aurora Kelly was the only woman who had ever scared him although he never understood why or would admit such aloud. He always equated her to some dragon lady who would eat young children or wayward teenagers; maybe even walk around castrating unsuspecting men—she was just a cold bitch. But hearing her talking to Mark Townsend, almost pleading with him to help her save his job and his life, he thought that maybe there was a chance she would listen to him.
"Ms. Kelly, although I signed my name to see Mr. Townsend about a personal matter, I couldn't help but overhear your questions to him."

"Chris this really doesn't concern you. Now-"

He cut her off. "But it does concern me..or at least it will. I know exactly who Mr. Townsend is afraid of and why."

"And?"

He swallowed hard and averted his eyes debating how much he should tell her. Stiffening his spine and looking to Brandon for reassurance which was given in the form of an imperceptible nod, he spoke again. "I think perhaps we should go where that computer is being taken which looks like Mr. Quinn's office. I have to say what I need to quickly as I don't want to be anywhere near here when my father arrives."

"I'm not following," she said. "Why would your father be coming here now? He usually does his business on Monday mornings."

"That's when he doesn't want a look inside of five accounts he's not entitled to view and business is generally slower on a Saturday morning than it is on Mondays." Chris finished looking smugly at her surprised look and the astonished look on Mark Townsend's face. "Time's wasting, Ms. Kelly. I suggest we hurry up."

He moved off in the direction of Daniel Quinn's office knowing that Brandon, Aurora and Mark were already in his wake.

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What was supposed to be a joyous day was shaping up to be another action-packed day of protecting the Taylor-Kinneys. Myrna shook her head, eyes wide in disbelief as she listened to the detailed events of the morning from Quinn. Colby stood next to her watching her body language- the tense set of her shoulders, the crease in her forehead but mostly the angered and worried look of Myrna's eyes told him more than anything else the seriousness of the phone call. The five words she mouthed to him as she continued to listen: Cynthia, Lindsey and Ted quickly spurred him into action. He wasted no time in doing her bidding, weaving through the crowd, making small talk so the main players would not be alerted to what he knew was impending trouble. Brian and Justin didn't need the implied stress. It was bad enough because of the morning and having to deal with the crazed fantasy of Ethan Gold trying to press charges against Brian for the much needed and well deserved ass whipping from the night before. And now another waking nightmare was on the horizon for the couple.

He found Lindsey first.

"We have a problem," he said simply and matter of factly.

She was about to scold him on his manners but thought better of it after scrutinizing the look in his eyes. Colby was a lot like Brian in that he could keep his face devoid of all emotion but his expressive eyes spoke volumes and revealed things he would much rather keep hidden. Lindsey could see that his eyes were a deeper shade of green than they were earlier or anytime Colby was his usually laid back self. She could tell he was anything but calm, cool and collected which were words
she always associated with Colby Butler.

"Let's go to Brian's office. Should I alert the others?" She asked her honeyed voice hushed but no less poised.

Colby had heard Brian refer to Lindsey and Justin as WASP products. As Lindsey stood before him awaiting his answer, he acknowledged that growing up in the privileged country club sector paid off with Lindsey's noncommittal question. She was poised and soft spoken but he could tell she was as nervous as he was with the mention of a problem. He shook his head. "I'll do it, Lindz. You go on to the office. We can't have a mass exodus going there. A room with this many people, someone is bound to notice."

She nodded and headed off toward the back of the house. He tried to smile reassuringly as she made her way down the long corridor leading to the inner sanctum of Brian Kinney. Ted had already received an alert and was on his way, passing a knowing look to Colby in the process. Extracting Cynthia was another matter. She was in full business mode hemmed up by one of Kinnetik's major account owners. He caught her eye several times but every time she made to excuse herself, the older gentleman decided it was time for another topic relating to his business. Finally, Colby had had enough of waiting and went to extricate her from the verbal prison himself.

Sliding up to her side, he cut the gentleman off mid-sentence. "I'm sorry, Mr. Jonas- is it?- but I need to borrow Cynthia for a few moments.

"It's Johns, young man and we were in the middle of a conversation," came the reply from the indignant white-haired man.

"Yes well, sorry but I was actually afraid for your dentures because of the amount you've been bumping your gums. Now if you'll excuse us, we have other matters to attend to." Colby hustled Cynthia away before the man had a chance to respond.

"Damn it, Colby, do you know who that was?" Cynthia asked him while being half carried, half dragged in the direction of Brian's office.

"Don't know, don't care. He would have never let you go. A runaway freight train moves slower than that damn motor mouth."

"That was a twenty million dollar account, Colby. If we lose it-"

He didn't give her a chance to finish. "What will it matter when all of Kinnetik's money is wiped out? The accounts have been accessed."

"Holy shit! All of them?" she looked at him incredulously.

"Five so far. Myrna was on the phone with Quinn a little bit ago so we need to get our asses in the fucking office before anyone realizes why we're missing."

TBC

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IT'S A SMALL WORLD AFTER ALL

TIME'S UP VOLUME II: SHARE MY LIFE by Nichelle Wellesly

Summary:

TU VOL II

Categories: Alternate Universe, QAF-U.S., Family, Angst, Bds, Brian/Justin, Canon, Could be Canon, Drama, Humor, Jealousy, Justin/Ethan, Justin/Other, REAL LIFE ISSUES, Romance, Toppy! Justin, Unsafe Sex, What If Characters: Brian, Cynthia, Daphne, Justin, Original Character(s), Other Canon Characters, Ted
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Chapter 34 Part II- It's a Small World After All by Nichelle Wellesly

Author's Notes:

More D-R-A-M-A!! Enjoy!

CHAPTER 34 Part II

It's a Small World After All

Peter weaved his way through the crowd. He knew the house was huge but he'd never seen so many
people gathered in one place unless one counted the nights he'd spent at Babylon. Although generally shy, the atmosphere and occasion inspired him to socialize. He'd met several of the employees for Kinnetik and was looking forward to beginning the internship program on Monday morning. He wanted to find John and introduce him around since he'd be beginning there as well. He found him at the back of the room staring into the blanket of melting snow which adorned the grounds leading down to the lake. He noted that John's cell phone was in his hand and a fine sheen of sweat graced his brother's forehead.

"What is it?" Peter asked foregoing all preliminaries, his body on full alert after seeing the tell-tale signs of John's sudden nervousness.

"I-It's nothing." John replied calmly although he bit his top lip immediately following the statement.

"Bullshit, John. What's happened?" Peter fixed his older brother with a penetrating gaze. Alarm bells rang in his mind at John's continued silence and his unwillingness to meet his eyes dead on. Before John had a chance to react, Peter snatched the cell phone and began scrolling the open messages.

"Give that back, Peter. Please," John asked almost desperately, not wanting to cause a scene with his younger brother.

_Ivan: The boss said not to make him come get you. He wants to see you NOW! You have an hour._

Looking at the time the message came in and noting the current reading on the clock, Peter looked at John. There was a half hour left before John was supposed to make his appearance before whomever the 'boss' was.

"You're not going, John."

"What other choice do I have, Peter? You don't know these people. They're dangerous. They're fucking sociopaths."

"Then why the fuck did you get involved with them?" Peter couldn't help the venom pouring from him.

They stood in silence for a few minutes, each absorbed in his own thoughts about the situation they were in. Peter didn't plan on leaving John alone in the trouble; he had saved his life. Peter in turn was
"There are a few things you don't understand about this group, Petey. The first thing is once in, always in. The only way I get out is in a coffin. The second thing is that once you become a target, they don't rest until they get you." John looked directly at his brother allowing the implication of his words to sink in.

Peter regarded John, heart beating fast but still remaining outwardly calm. "Then it is time to involve the others, John." John began to speak but Peter held up his hand. "They are as much in danger as we are. It's only fair to let them know what's going on. Maybe Uncle Brian would be willing to relocate Mom and Grandmother as well as sheltering us. It isn't right that you sit on the information and not give them a chance to defend themselves."

"It's kind of late for that."

"What the fuck is that supposed to mean?" Peter was angry and confused by John's words.

"I saw one of the men from the meetings here."

"Holy shit! Did he see you? Did he recognize you?"

"I don't know and that's what's worrying me the most, Peter. If I don't go and word got back to the boss why haven't shown up, it would lead him here to Britin and Uncles Brian and Justin."

"We have to tell them."

"Not today, Peter. After everything that happened last night, they need today to be peaceful. I'm just going to go and get the meeting over with. Maybe I can talk them out of using my family as targets."

Peter looked at him incredulously. "Do you really believe that shit you're talking? You said yourself that they won't give up. Fuck are you trying to get yourself killed?"

"If that's what it takes to protect you and the others but there's more, Peter."
"What the fuck else could there be, John?" He watched as his brother swallowed hard.

"Our father."

"What about that loser?"

"Petey, there's so much you don't know and I don't have time to explain it all right now but Dad didn't just leave us like Mom led us to believe. It's not even her fault really but the problem lies with Grandmother."

"Bullshit. Claire has been more than vocal about his abandonment of his wife and kids."

"It wasn't like that exactly. Remember Petey, I'm older than you so my memory of him being there is a bit different than yours. Either way, I don't have time to give you the full history but he's involved in this too. They're blackmailing him into it."

"John seriously? Have you been hitting Uncle Brian's weed? This shit sounds like the gay version of the Untouchables. Gangs and blackmail and secrets and lies/ What the hell is next? You'll tell me that they've threatened Jesus-jumping Joan and Catholic-crusader Claire as well."

John stood silent and still, willing Peter to see the truth of his words. He watched as realization dawned clear in his clear blue eyes before he spoke again. "They intend to wipe out our entire family an anyone associated with it."

"But...but that's absurd. A bunch of innocent people just to destroy two men?"

"Yes. They're that ruthless. Dad and his new wife just had a baby. I can't let them do this, Peter."

"Look. Let's get a drink and figure this out. There's no way you're going to make the deadline with the icy roads anyway but we do need to figure out how to protect us and those we are beginning to love. I can't fucking lose you, Big Brother."
John nodded much to Peter's relief although he was looking distractedly across the room into the crowd. Peter tried to follow the direction of John's gaze but the crowd had thickened considerably so he couldn't see what John saw. Shrugging his shoulders, he decided that today, only hard liquor would calm his very frayed nerves. He knew that in spite of every promise he had made John during their talk earlier in the day, he had to betray his brother's trust. He prayed that John would either tell the story himself or that John could forgive him because he was tired of being a scared gay man instead of a proud one.

"Look I've already told you my terms, Ms. Kelly," Chris said defiantly. "I will not speak unless Taylor and unfortunately his boyfriend get their asses in here today. I really don't have time to waste with this shit."

"Watch your mouth young man. In case you've forgotten your upbringing, I have not and need I remind you that I've known you since you were in short pants." Aurora blew out a harsh breath and softened her tone. "What you're asking is impossible, Chris. They aren't even inside the city."

"Well then you'd better find a way to get them in here then because if I know my father, he's on his way here to speak to Townsend here."

Brandon sat still listening as long as he could before interjecting. "I'm well aware of the reasons why Brian and Justin may not be able to come in today. I've known them for some time and although they are relatively private about their lives, news travels fast on Liberty Avenue. The problem is that once Chris gives you all of the information and we subsequently handle the business with his personal and business accounts, he needs to skip town...fast."

"Is it really necessary that you leave?" Quinn asked. He was having trouble morally putting Chris Hobbs in the same room with his one-time victim, Justin Taylor. It was bound to get ugly especially if Brian accompanied Justin which was a must not only for Justin's peace of mind but because of the compromised accounts.

"Ordinarily, I could probably work around my father and grandfather but there are others involved with friends in high places and the lowest of the low places as well. I have to protect myself for no other reason than that. Not only that but just like they've done to Townsend, they will threaten my kids and my partner. I can't take the chance. They're even more depraved than I was considered within the gay community and they will stop at nothing to achieve what their goal is. Sadly, they are not above using women and children to do it." Chris began to shift in his seat and wring his hands giving credence to the truth of his words.
"Listen Chris, don't worry about your father seeing you here. This office holds a safe place. I doubt that when he doesn't find Mark in his office, he'll want to pursue the matter with me."

"What makes you so sure?" Brandon asked. All of this business reminded him of all the reasons he left Chicago after his father was killed in a mob war. Money and power bred strange bedfellows and bore even deadlier enemies.

Daniel shook his head and chuckled a bit at Brandon's question. "Unlike Mark and Chris, Mr. Miles, I have nothing to lose except my reputation for being an honest financial planner. There is nothing they could offer me that would ever make me bow to them. I haven't in over thirty years with this bank and I won't now."

Brandon, Chris and even Mark nodded their heads. Mark envied Quinn for being able to stand his ground and not be harassed because of it. Chris was also aware of Mr. Quinn's reputation from friends whose families did business with him. If he was going to be able to stick around, he may have been a new client but there was just no way he could, especially with Joshua in town. He just simply couldn't take the chance.

Aurora broke the brief silence within the confines of the office. "Daniel dear, everyone on their end should at least be in Brian's home office by now. Myrna told you that she was going to round them all up. Chris, I can't promise you anything but hopefully we can get this all taken care of for you today."

He nodded again. "I really hope so, Ms. Kelly. I haven't always done the right thing where Taylor was concerned but... well let's just say I understand him a whole lot better now and it has very little to do with who I'm doing. I just need this resolved quickly."

"Ready?"

"For a blow job, sure. Now if I could just convince you to come back upstairs with me and ditch this shindig, all would be right in the world."  

Justin laughed. "Ever the romantic, lover. I promise if you behave, you'll have that blow job and much, much more later."
"As if there was any doubt." Brian shook his head regretfully. "Let's just get this over with."

Brian's first inclination when he looked at the crowd gathered was to immediately make a bee line for his office. The open floor plan was filled with people he knew and some whom he didn't but were Justin's acquaintances. Although Brian was used to crowds thanks to his many years as the notorious Stud of Liberty Avenue, it did not mean he was always comfortable in them. Being drunk and drugged always helped but he didn't have the luxury of being either within his own home. He felt the touch of his partner's hand on his shoulder and knew Justin was experiencing much of the same apprehension. Since the bashing several years ago, Justin also had trouble in large crowds. Gripping the strong hand, Brian was determined both he and Justin would in one piece emotionally by the end of the long day.

Spotting Emmett and Daphne by the bar, which was in actuality their kitchen island, Brian and Justin each marveled at the solid friendship displayed amongst the tall queen and smart-mouthed hetero. Emmett held his usual Cosmo while Daphne held her white spritzer and was laughing at something on her cell phone. Peeking over their shoulder Brian was as stunned as Justin was at the pictures of various Disney characters in full out BDSM get up.

Justin recovered first. "I feel like my childhood has officially been ruined."

"Aw I don't know, Sunshine. We've been known to do our own variations on these pictures. Especially the spanking. We just replace the Ben-WA balls with the anal wand. I imagine it has the same effect," Brian said much to the chagrin of both Emmett and Daphne.

"I think we have all been privy to your sex lives... too much in fact," Daphne said indignantly, retrieving her phone from Brian who had snatched it out of her hand to take a closer look.

"You know you loved it," he responded. "Who is trying to warp your young mind with these salacious photographs? Don't tell me Dr. Bradley isn't as squeaking clean as he purports to be." Brian used his mock falsetto placing his hand to his chest in a shocked gesture.

"Shut up, asshole," Daphne said laughing and blushing at Brian's antics.

"So when are you going to put that man out of his misery?" Emmett asked. "The way he looks at you is hotter than the hell we are all trying to avoid."

"Brian told her that if she doesn't jump him soon, he's going to do it himself," Justin said smiling at
"You can't. You're married now," Emmett said looking pointedly at Brian who studiously ignored him.

"Since when have words like commitment dictated monogamy, Em?" Justin asked. "Just because we haven't gone outside for right now, doesn't mean the option isn't there."

Daphne and Emmett looked at Brian who schooled his features to remain blank under their scrutiny. He knew he and Justin were heading toward the dreaded 'm' word but they hadn't talked about it again since the morning Brian told him he wanted them to be monogamous. As he thought back to that moment which seemed an eternity ago, he wondered if it was fair to ask such a thing of Justin who was only thirty-three years old. Brian was fucking everything that wasn't nailed down including Justin at that age. Mentally shrugging away the confused feelings, he decided it was a conversation that could wait and pulled Justin back against the front of his body, immediately feeling the temporary tension ease from him. Luckily he was saved from any further discussion of marriage and monogamy by Jennifer.

"Hello, Darlings." She placed a kiss on Justin's cheek first and stood on tiptoe to do the same to Brian.

"Jennifer, may I say you look rather stunning in that color." She was dressed in a cerulean pants suit which complimented her complexion perfectly.

She smiled in response and said, "No need for flattery, Brian. I've already given you my son to have and to hold. I won't take him back."

They all laughed in response. Jennifer Taylor was a revelation to them all over the years. She was still reserved and a product of the WASP nest but she was also a very loving, smart woman with a sometimes wicked sense of humor. She was also outspoken although she picked her time to do so. Although Justin initially had his reservations about her choice of husband, Tucker had given his mother the freedom to be the woman she'd kept hidden when married to Craig Taylor.

"Where is everyone else?" Justin asked his mother. However before she had a chance to answer, they were interrupted by a beaming Gus.

"Dad, Justin, Grand-mom Jen, Aunt Daph and Auntie Em, I'd like you all to meet Carmela Kelly."
He smiled that smile so like his father's and brought her forward before he continued. "This is her mom, Janice and her father Morris. Also they brought along her soon to be stepfather- "

Justin stood in shock before speaking. "Kevin Dixon."

"Hello Taylor," he said barely masking his sneer.

Remembering his manners in reference to Mr. and the former Mrs. Kelly as well as Carmela, he greeted them pointedly trying to ignore the object of his disgust. "Kelly? Are you by chance related to Aurora Kelly?"

Morris smiled gently. "Yes I am. She's my sister- half-sister to be exact but you would never know it. We're as close as any full-blood relatives."

Justin returned the smile as did Brian, "We've met her. She's a very special lady."

"So Taylor, it looks like you still haven't overcome your little problem," Kevin said, a ghost of a smirk on his well-defined features. Although grossly unfair, the years had been kind to the arrogant homophobic prick.

Letting the comment slide for a moment, Justin calmly said, "Gus. Son, why don't you give Carmela a tour of the house. I don't know how full the game room or media room are right now."

He smiled but all who knew Justin noticed that the smile didn't reach his eyes, including Gus. He was tempted to stay in case Justin needed help in another fight. He'd never liked Mr. Dixon and now he was beginning to understand why. No one ever told him the whole situation regarding Justin, only that a student who didn't agree with the way his dad and his partner lived their lives. Whereas his father suffered emotional trauma from that time, Justin had suffered both physically and mentally from the attack and had almost given up painting. That fact alone made Gus angry on Justin's behalf. The fact that he was attacked made him even angrier. He would love to get his hands around the guys neck who had hurt both of the men he considered his dads.

Crossing over to his dad, he gave Brian a brief hug before responding. "Sure, Papa. That sounds like a good idea while you adults talk." Gus embraced Justin as he had Brian but whispered for his ears alone, "If you decide to hit the jerk call me first. I'd like to get in on the action or at least place a bet and win some cash."
Justin chuckled and promised Gus. He leaned over to tell Brian what he said while everyone watched the teenagers move through the crowd. Justin then turned back to Kevin. "Now, exactly which problem were you referring to, Kevin?" He got a small pleasure out of watching the man bristle at being called by his birth name. *Well tough shit, this is my house.* With that thought in mind, Justin continued. "The only little problems I seem to recall from that time so long ago was having a homophobic asshole of a teacher who allowed me to be bullied by another prick of a student resulting in my being bashed over the head at prom after I danced with my absolutely stunning partner who is also the owner of a multi-million dollar corporation. If you take a good look at the artwork on the walls and at this house, I'd say I recovered rather well from knowing you and others like you."

"So you still take it up the ass, huh?" Kevin's crude reply caused the others within hearing distance to gasp, including Carmela's parents. "Ms. Chanders, I would have thought you'd have stopped hanging with fudge-packing losers by now."

Daphne laughed. "You mean you haven't come out of the closet yet? I always thought you walked and talked like you had an unpleasant stick up your ass. Perhaps if you adjust it a bit..." She shrugged and smiled while Emmett snickered at her response. He really liked her.

Brian felt the tense posture of Justin and moved immediately to grasp his left fist which was already balled up. Jennifer following suit held onto his right hand, massaging it gently. She finally understood what Justin had gone through everyday at school. It appalled her that Kevin Dixon, who had called himself an educator, allowed that type of bigotry and hatred-attitudes which he evidently still held.

Justin finally managed to calm his voice to answer without the anger bubbling on the inside of him. "Unless I'm fucking you, it's none of your business." Turning to Brian who was angry but managed to wink at him he said, "Now you understand completely why I call him Dickhead Dixon. The next time it happens, don't scold me anymore. Deal?"

Brian nodded and smiled warmly at Justin before he addressed the dickhead in question. "I believe my husband and I would love for you to get the fuck out. Now. Drive safely." And with that parting thought, Brian made sure to disgust him further by giving Justin a kiss so hot it made the younger man's toes curl and left him undeniably horny by the time Brian allowed him to come up for air.

They along with the rest of their group, including the Kellys left Kevin standing there filled with impotent rage. Justin felt satisfaction but also trepidation because so many of their business associates were witness to this, including the Avlossa group of which Jason was a part. He would have to get that story later; Brian wouldn't let it go otherwise but it had to wait. Too much was happening for any in-depth conversations and this was just one more thing. Besides, Justin had a tongue-lashing of a more personal nature he needed to give Jason for overstepping the bounds of their friendship. That definitely needed to happen away from prying eyes, flapping ears and waggin tongues. As they
passed Gene, one of the security guards hired for such an occasion, Brian instructed him to see Mr. Dixon off their premises and to advise the guards outside as well. One her way passed him, Kevin asked Janice where she thought she was going. She politely disengaged her arm from his grip and told him the wedding was off while handing him back his ring. Morris who had been privy to the last part of the exchanged chuckled, happy that Janice had finally come to her senses. No matter what problems they may have had being married, he still loved her and they were still best friends. He guessed he's just have to settle for that.

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Jason was suitably impressed with the way Justin handled the situation. He was sure Brian would jump in but the more he watched the exchange, the more he realized that Brian was there only as support. He couldn't deny that he was proud of Justin-- indicated by the quick glance they shared before the security guard hustled he and Brian off-- but it was more than that. Jason trusted Brian and Justin to do right by Avlossa and that was saying a whole lot for a man who trusted no one except his twin, Jeremiah and himself. He, Shar and Bethany had heard some conversation in passing about what occurred during their ceremony the night before. Jason in turn gave them the history as he knew it of Brian and Justin's tumultuous relationship from start to finish. He'd also done research on the company, Kinnetik from how it got its initial start to the present day figures. If Jason had his way, Shar and Bethany would sign on the dotted line immediately with the company. He knew that although Justin wasn't involved in the day-to-day operations of the company, Brian would never except mediocrity from his employees. He'd also done research on the numerous properties the duo owned which was managed by Justin's mother. He and Jennifer had managed to have a decent conversation about the area of Liberty Avenue which he, Bethany and Shar had newly acquired. She'd also given him her business card so she could give him a list of contractors if they were going to consider remodeling the interior of Torso- the clothing store they just bought out. It was discovered that while they owned the store, Brian and Justin owned the lot it was built on. He stood in awe of their business acumen and the fact that they were surrounded by people they trusted implicitly. Even their business associates spoke highly of them whether they agreed with how they lived their lives or not.

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Jason was brought out of his revere- and from his surreptitious perusal of their hosts nephew named Peter- by the arrival of an ultra loud redhead and her companion. He cringed when he heard her voice calling for both Brian and Justin. Both greeted her affectionately realizing that she was significantly distressed about something. All he was able to hear was that someone named Michael hadn't arrived yet and for her not to worry. Justin promised Debbie that he wouldn't hit him and that it was Brian's call alone how he chose to handle things with him. He noted the look of pure sadness and confusion on Brian's face as the lady named Debbie reminded him of how close he and Michael had been over the years. 'Woven together as the tightest fabric' she said which caused Jason to think of his twin brother, Jeremiah. They had argued before Jason left Rochester for Pittsburgh and this was the first time they had gone more than twelve hours without speaking. Both of them had been through so much including becoming orphans at a young age due to heroin-addicted parents and the murder-suicide which prompted them to make their own way in the world and stay the fuck out of
orphanages and group homes at all costs. Hearing other bits and pieces about the men trying to destroy Brian and Justin, it reminded Jason of his and his twin's own ties to organized crime and the hell they endured to get out of it. No life had not been easy for Jason but he was grateful that he and his brother had found their own extended family much like Brian and Justin's. Pulling out his cell phone, he was determined to remind Jeremiah of that fact.

"I understand all of your concerns but what other choice did we have? Brian and Justin can't leave and this young man is holding information which could really help us all," Myrna stated matter-of-factly. She really couldn't understand why everyone was either silent or protesting vehemently against her plan to get the information at all costs.

"How much has Justin told you about his life here in Pittsburgh, Myrna?" Lindsey asked.

"I think just about everything, including the bashing. Was there more?"

"The man who is making the demand to speak with Justin face-to-face..."

"Chris Hobbs. What about him?"

Lindsey could barely pull herself together at the mention of his name so Cynthia took over. "He is the same man responsible for the bashing," she said softly.

They all watched as the information sunk in and Myrna flopped into the seat conveniently placed behind her. "I-I'm so sorry. He may have mentioned his name at the beginning of our association but that began over ten years ago. I would have never..."

"We know. But it's not just Justin we're worried about although dealing with him will be hard enough. It's Brian who's more dangerous in this situation. He was there that night and has never forgotten it, not that any of us expected him to."

Myrna thought back a moment. "Is he the reason they both go off the grid around Memorial Day each year?"
Those who knew the story nodded vigorously but it was Ted who spoke. "They both have a tough time functioning during that weekend, particularly Justin. I know that he's still seeing Nicole, which helps him regain his balance after the date passes. Brian doesn't speak about it much- not at all really. It's especially painful because his birthday is in the same week so he usually resorts to his own 'pain management' methods."

Myrna chuckled a bit. When they looked at her questioningly she said, "I was just remembering the first time I heard that term. It was about a month after I'd first met Justin and had requested a last minute meeting. Justin had agreed to it but when he didn't show up and wouldn't answer his cell phone, I trotted over to his studio where I found him indulging in what he termed pain management. He was standing behind the guy and apparently giving it to him good if the loud moans were any indication. He had a half-drunk bottle of Beam in one hand, the guy's hair in the other while carrying on a normal conversation with me...well if you could call that normal. But it was then that I learned about a man named Brian Kinney and how he had left that morning to go back to Pittsburgh; how disconnected Justin felt without the love of his life by his side- those were his words, not mine- and how he was counting the days until he was successful enough to go back home to Brian and this house. At the time I knew Justin was coping in the only way he could at that moment." She smiled sadly at the memory. "I can't watch him break again, not if it's in my power to do something about it."

"You won't have to," came the voice from the doorway. Brian and Justin stood there and although the caught the tailend of the conversation they knew something was big on the horizon, "Someone want to tell us what's going on?"

Each dreaded the task in their own way but Ted spoke up knowing that if it remained hidden which was the original plan, there would be hell to pay later. "Your accounts have been accessed. Quinn and Aurora were able to contain Mark Townsend but there was someone else there when it happened; someone with information you both will need."

"Well Theodore, you have our attention so no need for the fucking suspense. Spit it out."

"Brandon Miles is coming here since you can't leave today and his client needs to get out of town as soon as he talks to you both."

"And who is this client?" Justin asked getting an immediate sick feeling in his stomach. Brian grasped his hand, having but not acknowledging the same feeling of foreboding as his partner.
Ted took a deep breath before announcing, "Chris Hobbs."

TBC-Part III: Uninvited Guests coming soon!

End Notes:

Also Coming Soon!

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STACKED DECK

TIME'S UP VOLUME II: SHARE MY LIFE by Nichelle Wellesly

Summary:

TU VOL II

Categories: Alternate Universe, QAF-U.S., Family, Angst, Bdsm, Brian/Justin, Canon, Could be Canon, Drama, Humor, Jealousy, Justin/Ethan, Justin/Other, REAL LIFE ISSUES, Romance, Toppy! Justin, Unsafe Sex, What If Characters: Brian, Cynthia, Daphne, Justin, Original Character(s), Other Canon Characters, Ted
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Chapter 34 Part III- Stacked Deck by Nichelle Wellesly

Author's Notes:

FINALLY the Conclusion of Chapter 34! I hope it was well worth the wait! Thanks for your patience!

HAPPY READING!!!!

~Nichelle

CHAPTER 34 Part III

STACKED DECK
Peter sat silently watching John down his fifth shot of Beam in as many minutes. He had switched from his beer right around the time their cousin, Gus, was introducing his guests to Uncles Brian and Justin. Contrary to popular opinion, Peter wasn't a reticent and oblivious gay man. He wasn't shy about speaking his mind; only when meeting new people. So it amazed him that John pretended like nothing was wrong or that he hadn't turned whiter than a virgin's sheets during the exchange between the man who will be forever known as 'Dickhead Dixon.'

"So that was him, huh?" Peter said quietly.

"Who?"

Peter shook his head. "John, look outside. Is it nighttime?"

"No of course not. It's only two o'clock,"

"That's right. It's the middle of the afternoon which means there are no owls out and no need for you to answer 'who.' That man, Dixon, is the person who has you shook up, isn't it?"

Peter watched as John sighed deeply before responding with a quiet "Yeah." He was relieved that John finally opted not to hide the truth from him. "Well now you have no choice in the matter. Brian and Justin have to be told and if you don't I will." Peter's resolve came through loud and clear. So clear that John's eyes snapped back to his own.

John looked at Peter. He took in all he thought he knew of his younger brother and tried his best to reconcile it to the man who stood before him. "You aren't scared, are you?"

"Of course I am but I refuse to sit idly by and watch those we care about destroyed. I'm having a hard time understanding why you are willing to."

John licked his lips while signaling the bartender for another. He was never so glad as he was right then for the Kinney tolerance for hard liquor. If Peter was demanding that he speak up he was damned sure going to need some liquid courage.

"It's not that I'm willing, Peter. It's just that the side of the organization I know of is huge. There's no telling how big it really is. There are rich people and people like us within that network of homophobes. Dixon is one of those born into the WASP clique just as Justin and our new Grandmother Jenn. Hell even Gus' mother is from the area of old money. Based on that alone, he's a man to be feared because of his connections and there's no telling how deep those alliances run."
"Well we have our own friendships and family now. I'm not willing to watch while it gets taken away, John. Do you know how much I prayed to have a place where I could just be loved and accepted for who I am and not condemned because of something I can't change about myself."

"I know, Peter, and that's what you found on Liberty Avenue."

Peter shook his head. "No, John. That's what I've found here. Liberty Avenue and its inhabitants are just an extension of what we've found here with Uncle Brian and Justin. It doesn't matter what I am or even what you are. It only matters that they accept you because of your heart. The more I get to know Uncle Brian and those he considers family, the more I see how warped Grandmother's thinking is."

"She's a Bible-speaking hypocrite."

"Yes she is but what's worse is that she actually believes that by judging others, she's doing the Lord's work. I believe in God but I don't believe in a book that basically tells me to hate myself because I'm considered different than societal "norms.""

"I get it Peter and I have for a little while now." John let out a deep sigh. "But now I have to walk a path I don't want to and risk incurring their anger in the process. I know there's too much at stake, not to mention our lives."

"And you are running out of time, John. You've always been brave and capable so why the self-doubt now?"

John shrugged. It was too hard to explain to practical Peter- the nickname he always called his little brother. This situation was far from ideal but it really couldn't be helped in any way. He would just have to say what needs to be said. But it would have to wait because Justin was running up the stairs taking them two at a time... and Brian was hot on his heels.
"Will you please stop tapping your goddamn thigh?" Brandon yelled at his passenger.

"What the fuck else do you expect me to do, Brandon? I'm nervous as fucking jello; I can't stop shaking."

"Well you're the one that asked for the face-to-face meeting so you don't have the right to act like a meth addict looking for his next fix." Brandon sighed. "Why did you ask for the meeting if you knew you were going to be this way?"

"I just thought that it would be Taylor and I."

Brandon laughed. "I could have told you that wasn't going to happen. Brian and Justin are pretty much joined at the hip especially since Justin's been back. As for the rest of the people they consider family, they usually aren't too far away from either of them. There's no way you've been a part of gay PA and never understood the Brian/Justin dynamic."

Chris nodded but said, "I always thought they were just rumors."

"Well that's what you get for thinking. True the Tell-A-Queen hotline gets some things wrong but not about Brian and Justin. They live their public lives openly so there is no room or reason for misconception and fabrications. Your thinking because they're aloof that their legendary exploits were lies and innuendo couldn't be further from the truth. They each belong to no one except each other. It's been the bane of every queers' existence especially those who frequent Liberty Avenue. They're virtually untouchable. They live together. They fuck together and they've fucked others together- at least they did up until a few years ago."

"Jesus, how much further do we have to go?" Chris shifted in his seat of the sportscar.

"About fifteen minutes according to the GPS. It would be sooner if the grandmother in front of us would drive like she has somewhere to go and not sightseeing. I really wish they would expand this highway instead of having this one fucking lane. I can only how Quinn and Ms. Kelly, let alone that damn fool Townsend feel behind us. He must be itching to get all this shit over with."

Chris grunted his response before speaking again. "Why up until a few years ago?"

"Business has kept the two exceptionally busy. There isn't much the duo don't have their hands in."
It's a true partnership both in business and in bed."

"When the 'incident' happened all those years ago, I never thought they would be together all these years later."

Brandon looked over at Chris then. Really looked at him. "From what I've been told, there couldn't have been any doubt. I happened up on the scene many years after they began. Brian and I had a 'fuck-off' and though they were taking a short recess from each other, anyone looking at them when they met up on the street or happened to run into each other at Woody's could tell they were still united. Even after Justin left for New York there wasn't a doubt. That invisible thrall which was visible when they inhabited the same space was even more so when they didn't."

They turned off the exit behind the car which had been in front of them for practically the entire trip. Brandon had never been so happy to have a second lane. Based on the reaction of Quinn as he pulled behind him, Brandon could imagine the feeling was mutual. The light turned green and Brandon zoomed ahead with Quinn following close behind. It wasn't until Brandon turned into the driveway that he understood why Brian and Justin elected to live such a long way from the city. The estate was larger than Brandon could have imagined. The Tudor mansion screamed opulence and luxury but there was also a feeling of home which emitted from it. Judging by Chris' reaction he had the same opinion. Brandon and Chris hurried out of the car when accosted by the valet driver. Brandon advised that they had business but wouldn't be long. Quinn and Aurora followed suit.

The five of them gathered to go over last minute details just as the black SUV which held them up on the highway, pulled into the open gates.

"Justin. Justin!" Brian called as he neared the top of the landing leading to the studio. He pushed open the door regarding the upright but trembling form of the man he loved. His heart broke as he watched Justin stare out of the window trying to will himself back under control.

"I don't know if I can do this, Brian."

He crossed over to him and from behind held his lover as they looked over the landscape. "You have to, Sunshine but I'll be there with you. You're not the same person who was bashed nor the same man who lived in fear of your own shadow for many years. You are the strongest man I know, Justin and you always will be."
Justin shook his head. "I feel the same about you, you know? I know I wouldn't have made it through without you, Brian. You knew when to demand more of me and when to just hold me."

"You would have done just fine. You did the work; I was just there. But now we have one more piece of business to finish with Chris Hobbs and then like we've done before, we'll move on from him. In the grand scheme of our lives, he doesn't hold any power. He has no control. He can't hurt us; can't touch you nor I but he does and is willing to give us the information we need to fight against the people who are trying to destroy all we have built. I won't let anything or anyone hurt you again, Justin. I hope you believe that."

"I know that, Brian but what about the shit you can't control? No matter how much you or I want to we can't control or fix everything." Justin sighed deeply. "But I know you are right. He requested to see me and Myrna had to honor it based on all that has happened today. I get it but I can't help being scared again. Fuck I don't even know why he would be willing to help us after what I did to him the last time I saw him."

Brian looked at Justin with a singular focus. "Is this that thing you alluded to last night? And do I even want to know?"

Justin licked his lips and swallowed hard. "I pulled a gun on Chris back when I was hanging out with Cody." At Brian's shocked and then angered look, Justin rushed to continue. "It wasn't loaded but sometimes I wish to God that it was. I just wanted him to feel what it was like for me following the bashing and even now sometimes. The fear to be who I am; the anger and resentment I feel when my hand stops working but most of all I wanted him to feel remorse."

Brian nodded. Even though he was still pissed off and wanted nothing more than to give Justin shit about it or turn him over his knee and not in a good way, he could understand based on what Justin had told him the previous night. Chris Hobbs had taken much more than Justin's physical capabilities that night... he'd taken Justin's peace of mind. He cleared his throat. "Do you think he learned the lesson you were trying to convey, Justin? More importantly, did you?"

"I did which is why I left Cody there after I sent Chris inside." He closed his eyes briefly in remembrance.

"Well then we definitely have to go down there. You weren't ever a coward- not even the first night you went home with me." Brian was rewarded with a watery chuckle.

"Well that was an offer I couldn't refuse."
Brian grew serious. "So is this, Sunshine." He pushed Justin's hair back away from his face, relishing the way the silken strands slid through his fingers. "If it helps, you look like an angel."

"A very naughty angel," Justin said smirking in that barely-there way which always made Brian want to take him. He had the same feeling when Justin returned from Hollywood all those years ago. Justin was always mischievous innocence mixed with the right amount of tempting deviltry. He smiled wide at the imagery dancing in his mind.

"Fine we'll be fallen angels but without that whole fire and brimstone thing. The smell of sulfur would be a bitch to get out of this fabric."

Justin laughed before pulling Brian in for a long kiss.

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Michael sat outside the house known as Britin. He knew fucked up royally and that he owed Brian a huge apology. He couldn't for the life of him figure out what possessed him to say those things about Justin; why he couldn't just be content with his own life. Ben was a good man and he had ruined that. He'd apologized for that and Ben had responded with a look at first. Then he'd told Michael he needed some time. Michael agreed to give him that. The situation with Justin was another matter.

Okay so he may have been wrong there too but he couldn't see it. Justin had weaseled and manipulated his way into Brian's world for fifteen years. Every time Michael breathed a sigh of relief that it was over between he and Brian, they had gotten back together especially after the 'Ethan' episode. He had purposely left out the information that would have saved their relationship when dropping hints to Brian but that fucking kid just couldn't stay away and leave Brian alone.

No, Michael, you shouldn't even be thinking like that. Not if you want to get Brian back on your side.

He sat there mentally arguing with himself about doing what was right instead of just doing what was convenient which was to blame Justin for provoking him to act rashly by inviting Ethan. It was a lesson which he had never dealt with before. Sure there had been many instances where he was faced with the choice but someone had always absolved him of it, either his mother or Brian. But now he found himself needing to apologize to the one person who had always defended him, even against the twink. Fuck! If Justin had just stayed away and left Brian alone, none of this would have happened. He and I would still be happy. That kid always ruins everything.
He looked at his battered and bruised face in the mirror, tears shimmering in his eyes. It was all black and blue from the punches Justin leveled on him. *I look like I've been in a prize fight with Rocky Balboa.* As he sat there he thought about pressing charges. But that wouldn't have endeared him to Brian. That kid had stopped him from being able to attend the party Brian was giving where they could hang out and catch up like old times. One thing was clear in Michael's mind. He wasn't just going to hand Brian over to Justin without a fight. He'd earned the right to be by Brian's side as his friend and only confident. He could fuck Justin all he wanted but Michael earned the right to take care of Brian for better or worse...not Justin. And as soon as Brian saw that, Justin would be relegated to the 'Trick that Wouldn't Leave' status once again where Michael could regain Brian's affection and attention as he'd always had it.

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Peter cornered Brian and Justin before they made it back down the second flight of stairs heading to the office.

"I need to speak with both of you," he said in a tone which puzzled both of his uncles. Peter was as agitated as they had seen him the night John with Brian and Justin's help explained fully what had been done to him at Babylon and the full intent behind it.

"Can it wait, Peter? We're about to go into an important meeting."

Peter nodded. "I heard a little of what's going on in passing. This is just as important." He took a deep breath and exhaled as slow as he was able with his pounding heart. They couldn't deny him this. It was crucial. "Please."

Brian looked to Justin who was already concerned about walking into the meeting. Communicating without words as they often did, Brian nodded. "Okay Peter. Is this something for yourself alone or does John have a stake in this 'very important' conversation, too?"

"It concerns *all of us*. I'll go get John and meet you in your office."

The inflection in Peter's words was not lost on Justin who spoke. "Get him quickly. I've put this off as long as I could. We'll wait for you by the office door before going in."

"Okay Uncle Justin." Peter sped down the stairs leaving the two older men to descend the stairs at a
more sedate pace.

"What do you think is wrong, Brian?"

"I don't know, Justin but I won't lie and say I have an easy feeling about it. Growing up with Claire and Joan, the boys wouldn't be prone to hysterics. He didn't corner us for something trivial. I guess we'll have to wait and see."

"I don't like that they will be in the same room with Hobbs, Brian. I know they're grown men but you see how Gus reacted to the mere mention of his name. I don't know how John and Peter will. Speaking of which, where is Gus-Gus?"

"Hopefully still giving Carmella and her family the grand tour and got stuck on some activity. The last thing we need is a fist-flying Gus added to the mix. Not that I blame him. It will be hard to control my own fury at the fucker who hurt you."

Justin stood on tip toe, placing a quick and gentle kiss on Brian's lips. Partially for courage; the other part for caring so much. As emotionally unstable as Justin felt inside, he was sure Brian felt even more so. This would be the first time Brian had seen Chris since that farce of a trial fifteen years ago. Justin shook his head. The unpredictable variables sure outweighed the constant, more stable ones in this fucked up equation. Peter and a nervous looking John arrived. Brian nodded at the three men standing with him, taking hold of Justin's hand before opening the door.

It was as expected. The air within the large space was laden with hostility with Jennifer, who had been warned ahead of time of the impending arrival, led the pack in intimidating looks. She looked ready to claw Chris Hobbs' eyeballs from their sockets if he so much as breathed out of rhythm. Tucker stood by her side, lending a menace no one ever would have believed possible of the normally laid back man. Daphne, Emmett, Ted and Drew stood behind Brian's desk. Myrna, Melanie, Quinn and Aurora Kelly stood in the middle of the room separating the two groups. Colby had asked Ben to come in case he needed help breaking up the almost sure pandemonium that may occur. Cynthia and Lindsey stood on either side of the massive mahogany desk, both no less pissed or ready to throw a punch if necessary. While Hobbs, Brandon and a man Brian never thought to see again in his lifetime flanked them.

"What the fuck are you doing here, Mark?"

"Believe me, Brian, I would rather be anywhere else but here."
"Dad?" John said.

Mark smiled in relief. "Hello John and Peter. It's been a long time."

"No shit and whose fault is that?" Peter surprised everyone by his response. He was usually the sweet-natured of the two so the venom which laced his voice was a shock to all assembled who knew him.

Mark bowed his head and murmured, "I suppose I deserve that."

"And a lot fucking more," Peter answered vehemently.

"Petey please," John begged. "You don't understand."

Before Peter had a chance to answer, Brian stopped him. "Can we save the angry kid edition of 'Leave It to Beaver' for a little later. In case no one has noticed, Justin and I have a houseful of guests we really need to get back to so can it for now, okay?" He looked directly at Peter willing him to get his silent message. Brian knew a lot more about why Mark left than Peter would. He wasn't sure how much John remembered but he suspected a great deal he shielded Peter from knowing.

Brian led the way to the comfortable leather chair behind his desk. As he took his seat, he pulled Justin down to rest on his lap, slipping his hand surreptitiously under the back of Justin's shirt. He felt some of the tension drain as he stroked Justin's spine in a soothing motion, the skin-on-skin contact another way for them to communicate without words.

"Hobbs," he barked out relishing the small feeling of victory as Chris immediately snapped to attention at Brian's voice. "I will warn you of this once so pay a-fucking-tention. Justin has reluctantly agreed to this because you said you had information which would benefit both of us. If you make any move toward him which was not initiated by Justin, I'll fucking kill you where you stand. Other than that, you may speak freely and trust that no one in this room is interested in betraying your confidence. Mark part of that statement goes for you as well. John and Peter will also spill what they know but make no mistake. We expect full disclosure, as much as you are able to give." Brian looked at Justin whose imperceptible nod assured Brian he had done the right thing for Justin's benefit. "Brandon, I'm not sure why you're here."

"I'm Chris' financial adviser, Brian," Brandon said.
Brandon smiled. "No, Kinney. Personal although his money is tied up in the family business- a matter we have to correct as soon as this meeting is finished."

Brian smiled back as did Justin. They both knew where Brandon was going with it. "Well in that case who would like to begin?"

Mark didn't hesitate to get his part in the whole situation out of the way. He told Brian everything about the threats against his family including John and Peter. He informed them of the late night meetings held within his office after-hours and the as much of the plan as he knew about it. "Their main plan is to ruin you financially. The encryption was hard as hell to crack but all five codes unlocked this morning. In addition to that, I also accessed every other account with the same last seven digits although only the five belonging to you and Mr. Taylor were of import."

"Did you call alert anyone about it, Mark?" Brian was beyond concerned that Quinn hadn't caught Mark in time.

He really couldn't blame Mark for not warning him sooner. Truthfully, given the choices Mark Townsend had been given and had he cared enough to save Joan and Claire, he would have done the same thing. However, if it was any one of the people he considered family, now including John and Peter, he would have done it in a heartbeat. Justin squeezed his hand briefly knowing exactly what he was thinking and understanding all the same.

"No. Daniel and Aurora came into my office as I sat there debating what I should do," Mark answered.

"Out of curiosity, which would you have done?" Brian really wanted know especially by his own rationale.

Mark answered without hesitation. "Before they opened the door and confiscated my computer, I was going to sell you out." Mark dropped his eyes. "I'm sorry, Brian. No one knows better than me why you have busted your ass over the years the way you have. Living next door to you for nearly twelve years gave me a pretty good indication. But I had too many people depending on me to keep breathing and expenses to be paid-"

Brian held up his hand to silence the man who was once his brother-in-law. "I know, Mark and I
respect you for your candor. Where is your family now?"

"I called my wife and told her and the kids to visit Mom today at the nursing home since I wouldn’t be able to."

Brian nodded. "Drew, I need you to do me a big favor." He took a deep breath before he smiled wide. "I need you to go out there and bring back three people. Gareth and Celene Kilpatrick. Anthony Matthews should also be out there. With any luck you'll find all three of them together."

"Brian you didn't tell me they were coming," Justin said.

"Of course I didn't. It wouldn't have been a surprise if I did." Turning to the rest of the assembled company he said, "Justin recently completed a commission for the Kilpatricks and their twins but I've know Gareth for years. Justin and I just completed one of their campaigns as well."

"You're going to send them there?" Cynthia asked.

Brian laughed. "And scandalize the poor prudes? No. Celene, Gareth and Anthony own a number of properties. Seascape, the adults only resorts, is only one of many they own. I'll ask them where they think is best. In the meantime, Jus, I think it's time you get on with your business. Don't you?" He raised an eyebrow.

He knew Justin was happy to stall for time or ignore Hobbs altogether. Brian wasn't about to leave him that option. He resumed the soothing strokes along Justin's spine as a reminder that he was right there and wouldn't let anything happen. Brian felt immediately when Justin the Dominant, took over and mentally smiled at the immediate change. The soft, frightened look was gone from the angelic blue eyes Brian had fell in love with. In their place was a cold stare, hard as flint and devoid of any vulnerability which Brian loved equally. Apparently Chris noticed it as well because he immediately shifted in his chair as Justin regarded him.

"Well?" Justin said, his voice strong and sure.

"We- Well what?" Chris stammered before clearing his throat. "Look, Taylor, I didn't come here to fight with you."

"First, I prefer the name ‘Kinney.’ You may use it or just call me Justin as you used to since it is my
name. Between you and that waste of DNA known as Craig Taylor, I see very little value in the name past what I've made of it with my career. But I refuse to allow it to be spoken in my own house without my partner's name attached to it and definitely not in the sneering tone you often use. That said, Chris, I think it's time you tell me what the fuck is going on from your end."

"I'm sorry, Justin."

"You've already apologized, Chris. It has nothing to do with the here and now."

Chris licked his lips. "Just let me say thisokay?" At Justin's nod, he continued. "Everyone thought me hitting you with the fucking bat was about you and Kinney here and your 'perverted' lifestyle."

Justin felt Brian tense up underneath him. Daphne also tensed but she couldn't hold her peace. "If it wasn't about that, you asshole, what the fuck was it?"

"Nice to see you're still around, Daphne."

"Can't say the same, Chris. But regardless what the hell do you mean it wasn't about that. There was no other reason unless..."

"I was jealous alright," Chris exploded. "I was fucking jealous. Kinney came up in there acting as if he owned the place- the fucking world. Then... then I watched you two dance and it was as if there was no one else in the world except the two of you. The way you looked at him. The way he held you as if you were something more precious than gold. I wanted you. I hadn't been sexually satisfied since you made me cum in that fucking equipment room and I wanted you. I made your life a living hell because I couldn't have you. You belonged to Kinney. You still do based on the ring you're sporting. And yes, I hated you because you had the courage to do what I couldn't at the time... to be who you were without fear."

"So you decided to put fear into me?" Justin had to ask; he had to know.

"It wasn't supposed to be like that, Justin. Not at first and then Dixon kept pressuring and threatening me."

The shocked gasp around the room from six of the occupants seemed to stop time but it was John who spoke. "He was here."
Brian looked at his nephew who seemed as white as a ghost. "He was, John. Is this part of that thing Peter was trying to tell Justin and me?"

"Yes. But I think you better let Hobbs finish before I add what I know."

Brian and Justin nodded at Chris who was hesitant indicated by the deep breath he took. "I wasn't supposed to get caught. He was there, you know, lurking in the shadows. You weren't supposed to be there at all, Kinney. I exited the hotel right after you both; saw you singing and dancing. You were happy and I was miserable. Yes, I wanted to hurt you but his intention was that I-"

"That you kill me," Justin finished for him.

"If Kinney hadn't called you, I would have." The room had gone silent, each person in it lost in the memories of the days which followed; of the days still relived moment by moment. For Justin it was a million times worst because of the recurring side effects for being born gay and having people envy and hate him for it.

"So why come forward with all of this now, Chris?" Jennifer asked. She was the third person most hurt by his actions. Brian relived it, Justin lived and breathed it and she grieved over it through the years. She lost a vital part of her son that fateful night.

He looked directly at Justin. "I married Allison even knowing what I knew about myself. We have kids together but I've met someone else and have finally decided to stop living for everyone else except myself. His name is George and if I feel a tenth of what you and Kinney here obviously feel for each other than it's much more than I deserve. The problem is that my stepbrother has also arrived into town to finish a job which left you two alive instead of dead."

Realization dawned in Brian's eyes. "Babylon."

Chris closed his eyes and nodded. "He was responsible which is why they never found him. Now they are going after you two with everything they have."

"Why? We haven't done anything to hurt anyone else."
"Haven't you though?" Chris asked shaking his head. "The fact that collectively you both have amassed a fortune which would literally put their old money and their ideals out to pasture is enough to cause them to have a coronary. The fact that two gay men have it and they do not, is an abomination to them. Add to that Stockwell's revenge and Craig's bitterness..."

"Wait! What? My own fucking father is involved in this shit?"

Daphne huffed. "Of course he is, Justin. The one thing you've never been is dense or blind when it came to him. Remember that day at the bank? Well now we know the reason he was there."

Chris continued. "From what I could gather, they have been planning this even before you came back into town. Originally, they were only going to settle for one of you. The man Craig and Stockwell each hold responsible for the destruction of their families. The fact that you're back is an added bonus because you're also well off. You two fags individually are richer than two of the straight men. If they could get into your accounts, they could have taken it from you and you wouldn't know until it was too late. That was the goal of accessing your accounts. Forcing Mark to help them would have assured that they wouldn't have been caught since it would have looked like any other wire transfer."

"Then what?" Justin asked quietly.

John spoke. "Then they were planning to make you suffer the same fate they meant for Peter, Uncle Justin. Drug, torture and kill you both only Brian would have been the last to die so he would feel the most pain watching you go before him. It's the nature of the gang when tormenting lovers together."

"We know that Craig, Stockwell and Dixon is involved in this. We also know that Hobbs, Jr. and the stepson is involved. How many more fucking people is it?" Brian asked.

"There's no way of knowing, Uncle Brian," John answered. "They all answer to the Boss but the street runners don't know who he is unless they are specifically called."

"And he's been calling you, hasn't he. John? Don't lie. It's written all over you."

John dropped his eyes, ashamed to be involved in the whole mess as much as he was. "Yeah he has but I haven't nor do I have any intention of answering. You've given Peter and I a chance to do something different; to be different and I'm not blowing it."
Brian nodded. If anyone in that office understood, it was Brian. The need to be different and want different had driven him all of his life.

"Colby, how close are you to re-encrypting the files?" Cynthia asked. She had been silent during the entire exchange, in shock by most of it but pissed off by all of it. That Justin's father could be involved in this madness made her see red. Her own childhood was no bed of roses but this level of betrayal was beyond anything her father could have thought to do to her.

"It will take me a few days now that the codes have been completely forced open." He leveled a look at Mark Townsend. In theory he could understand the man's problem. What he couldn't condone was his silence.

"No it won't, Colby. I have a program which encrypts and decodes on demand."

"Well why didn't you say so, Johnnie boy?"

"Hello. No one told or asked me, Beanstalk."

John and Colby's quip eased some of the tension which held the room captive. They shifted over to the corner, to begin the work on Colby's laptop. It was time to start planning counter maneuvers but first they had to get Mark and his family settled and quickly. As if on cue, Drew came into the room with Brian's invited guests. Both he and Justin rose upon their entry.

"Well Brian, it looks like the party is in here," Gareth Kilpatrick said as he moved toward him.

"No. But then if I recall you can make a party just by being in the room, Trouble."

Gareth smiled wide at the moniker he was known for during his and Brian's college years. "Yeah well, I married even more trouble so I guess it really is true."

"Don't forget you have to sleep with said trouble, Gareth. Hello, Brian," Celene Kilparick smiled pleasantly. The petite light-skinned woman exuded class and elegance.
"Hey, Cel. How are the twins?"

"A pain where I sit, Sugar." She walked over to him and curled herself around his waist. "It's good to see you."

"Anthony!"

A tall dark-skinned man moved forward. "Oh what, Bri. I'm not chopped liver right now?"

"Shut up fool. Where's Shelia?"

"Oh assignment with Sarah which she most should not be on." He huffed.

"He's just mad because Sarah is working undercover in Sharps tonight and asked Shelia along to watch the action and her back," Celene said.

"But we all know by the end of the night, she'll be taking her turn doing the pole stroll, too. My wife could never resist stripping."

"Ugh! Anthony could you please remember that your wife is *my* sister. The last thing I need is images of what she does without her clothes." Gareth shivered causing everyone in the room to laugh.

"Well you idiots and Celene, this is my husband, Justin."

"Nice to meet you all," Justin said smiling. He was enjoying all of them even though he wished it were under better circumstances.

Celene was the one to break her silence first. "So you're Justin. When Brian described you, I didn't believe him but now I understand why he calls you, Sunshine. Wait until Jules finds out that she missed your wedding."

"You're the Celene? Your last name was Richards? It really is a small world." At Brian's puzzled
look, Justin explained. "Remember the work I did on CCK Architectural? Well meet the CEO. Celene Kilpatrick nee Richards owns the company. While she was out on maternity leave she left Julienne McKay in charge. I'd also worked with Jules on a number of art programs she was writing and she asked my input. The program I use now is one of hers as is the program you have in your computer which writes its own updates."

They took a little more time to catch up and also fill the newcomers in on the situation before Brian told them why he needed them in his office. "I need a huge favor from you all. Mark is my former brother-in-law and his family needs to be hidden. Any other time, I would suggest Seascape which would have been perfect except he has small children. Is there any room at Wonderland right now?"

"Shelia would have been able to tell you. Anthony and I mainly handle Seascape. Which location are you wanting?"

"The one on Turks and Caicos if you can manage it. Since it's winter here, there isn't a threat of hurricanes plus it's out of reach of the Pitts so it's the last place they'll think to look. Also since it's a family resort, the older members of his family won't be tempted to go au naturale or be surprised if they saw it. Also do you think they could make use of the jet. There's no way Mark nor his family will be able to get home to grab the passports and all. I want it to look like they've just disappeared. There's a lot riding on this."

"If what you've told me so far is just beginning as you suspect, then it's best you get this part done now. I'll call send Bruno with Mark now to collect his family."

Brian looked to Mark then. "Leave your cell phone and take nothing except the clothes on your backs."

"But Brian..." Mark began to protest.

"Don't worry, Mark. By the time you reach the resort, everything will be taken care of. I owe you at least that much." Brian then turned and spoke to Peter who still stood by the door. Brian could understand his anger. Claire had never told him the truth of why his father never came around. Although he could fault her for not doing so, Brian also knew it was Joan's influence. "Peter, it wasn't his fault. You know how your grandmother can be especially in reference to ordering things to her liking and that includes ordering Claire around. Mark wasn't given a choice; he did try to fight for you guys. There is a lot you don't know because you were too young to absorb the whole situation."

He could tell he was getting through to Peter when he noticed the young man marginally relaxing as
he spoke. "You'll tell me, Uncle Brian?"

"I'll tell you all that I know and what I don't John will. He was there much more than I was."

Peter nodded and walked over to his father. He extended his hand waiting for the older man to take it but was surprised when Mark pulled him into a hug. He was even more surprised when instinctively he returned the gesture. "Have a safe journey," he said as he felt Mark nod against the side of his head. Both seemed reluctant to let go but did.

Gareth said, "Everything is in place, Brian. The jet is being readied so once they reach the airport, They'll be in the air about five hours."

"Good. Ted will wire you the money for their stay and the use of the jet."

Celene held up her hand and Gareth smiled at his wife. She was a dwarf compared to his six-foot-five frame but she had the ability to command the full attention of the room. "Brian, the jet is mine so I choose to waive the fee based on the importance of its use. As far as the resort fees, I suggest we settle up on the back end."

Brian smiled, "That works for me, Mrs. Kilpatrick. Someday you will have to tell me how you tamed the wild beast my friend used to be. Perhaps I can use that method on my own wild boy here."

Justin smacked his arm but couldn't stop the blush which crept up his cheek. "I suppose it was the same method I used to tame my own stallion, Stud. Now I have to finish up this business with Chris."

Brian nodded, knowing what Justin wanted him to do. "Hobbs, I understand that you were already leaving this afternoon."

"Yeah my flight is booked and George is already waiting for me at my destination."

"Good. Aurora, how much is it to buy Hobbs shares in his family business?" He didn't trust Hobbs or Brandon to answer at that moment. Brandon of course knew what he was up to and why but Chris didn't and it was best that way.
"His share is relatively small but it's still worth about one-hundred thousand dollars," she answered.

"That's doable. Lindsey and Cynthia, we need both of you to write the checks from your personal accounts. Make them payable to TK Properties. From there, Jennifer, you and Ted will manage the investment. Ted will let you know the right time to off-load it and who to sell it to. If there is a meeting called, let us know and we'll send one of our associates to deal with it."

"Sounds like a plan," she confirmed. "But what are you planning to do?"

"It's better that you don't know right away, Mom," Justin answered before Brian had a chance to. "In the meantime, the money for Allison and the kids will be put into trust immediately. Ted will see that it's done. As for you Chris, I'll give you a cushion but don't think in a million years that you get to come back for another payout. You don't. In fact this is the last fucking time I ever want to see you. Since you are going to disappear off the face of the earth with your lover, there shouldn't ever be a reason to. In the meantime, I wish you well with George. Make the years you've wasted lying count for something."

"Justin, you really don't have to..." Chris began.

"Yes I do," Justin said as a silent understanding passed between the two men. As far as Justin was concerned, there was a lot he had to atone for and this was just one of many things. "Lindsey, can you give Chris the cash so he can leave."

Lindsey nodded, still angry but at base she understood what Justin was doing. She left the room, making her way up to the hidden safe inside the cooling unit of the studio. She paused for a moment wondering why Justin would feel the need to be that generous especially with the amount that was being placed in the trust for Allison and the kids. But that was Brian's influence over Justin she supposed. Cover all bases and plan for every eventuality as far as fate would allow. Doing this assured that Justin could move on from the Hobbs episodes- well as much as he was able with the constant reminders regarding his hand allowed. He was paying to regain a portion of the peace he'd lost so long ago. It was a fucking shame that he felt he had to. She returned to the office and handed Hobbs four envelopes, each with five thousand dollars in a rubberband. She let the displeasure she felt at the transaction shine through and felt gratified when Chris lowered his eyes, cowering from the hatred displayed prominently in hers.

"Thank you," he said softly, as much of a WASP as she and Justin was and as much of a victim as well.

She acknowledged it with a slight tilt of her head even as she heard the office door open and a loud
yell from the doorway. She turned to see the one person they all hoped wouldn't find out about the meeting. Gus was furious and before anyone knew what was going on, Gus Petersen-Kinney landed a punch that knocked Christopher Marc Hobbs out cold. The room erupted in mild chaos as Gus was grabbed from behind by Drew and Emmett, Carmella and her parents stood in shock at the pandemonium ensuing and Brandon, along with Aurora and Quinn were trying to revive Gus' victim.

"What the fuck is he doing here? Mom? Dad? Papa? Someone answer me?" Gus screamed.

None of the occupants had ever seen him so angry. If all hadn't been in a state of shock, they would have seen the identical look Brian always wore when in the same state. Brian recovered first.

"Son, there is a lot you don't know about this. But the man that was here earlier had a lot to do with why Hobbs is here now."

Gus took a deep breath to calm himself, trying to process his father's words through the anger which still coursed through him at seeing the man who had almost killed Justin. "Mr. Dixon?"

"Yeah, Son. Unfortunately the man you just knocked out- fucking great right hook by the way- is also the man who confirmed some other problems concerning your cousins, John and Peter. We had to hear him out, Son." He deliberately left out the threats being hurled at he and Justin. Gus was already stressed enough with seeing the man who had almost killed Justin. "How did you happen up in here anyway?"

"I came to tell you, that Uncle Michael was trying to gain entry into the house. You have to go talk to him, Dad." Gus looked into the eyes so like his own and saw the instant sadness within.

"I know, Gus. We'll deal with your punishment for acting rashly against Hobbs later though."

Lindsey stepped up. "I personally think he should be applauded although I have to agree with your father as the other adult. We don't go around punching people, Gus."

"I know but this was a special case, Mom."

"No matter how warranted, Gus, what were you taught?" Brian asked.
"We don't condone violence; but we do condone self-defense," he said in a near-sarcastic tone of voice.

"So you see, Son, you violated one of the cardinal laws of the Kinney men but we'll deal with it later. In the meantime you still have guests. I won't make you apologize to Hobbs because I've also told you never to lie and I know it would not be genuine."

Gus smiled at all three of his parents before saying, "Well, Papa, it was your turn to be punished by Dad last night for violating the Kinney Men Code of Conduct. I suppose I'll have to take my punishment as well as you did."

Lindsey and Brian chuckled at the look of chagrin on Justin's face. "Perhaps not that well and definitely NOT the same degree of punishment. We'll think of something far more suited to your age, Gus-Gus."

"Nice save," Brian mumbled for Justin's ears alone.

"Asshole," Justin said back with his bright smile in tact.

The others had finally managed to revive Chris and although Gus wasn't sorry he approached Hobbs anyway. He couldn't deny the satisfaction as he saw the fear in other man's eyes, evidenced outwardly by the sudden recoil of Hobbs' body.

"I won't apologize for knocking you out because my fathers taught me never to lie. However, I will say thank you for whatever information you provided to help my family," Gus said, his voice strong and sure.

Hobbs surprised all, even himself by extending his hand. "You're welcome. You're Kinney's kid alright."

"There was never any doubt," Gus answered. "And now I think it's time for you to leave."

Chris nodded. "It is." He looked passed Gus to face his two fathers. "I hope it all works out for you two," he said.
"Thank you, Chris," Justin said reluctantly feeling sorry for him in a slight way because of what he was about to do. He would never be able to see his children grow up as long as the vicious men in his family lived. "I wish you well."

They all watched as Chris collected the envelopes and he and Brandon turned to leave the office. Daphne would make sure they walked out the front door and made it safely to Brandon's car in case Gus had another urge to punch the shit out of him again. Drew accompanied her for the exact same reason while chuckling to himself and marveling at how much Gus was like both of his fathers.

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Meanwhile in the office, Gus spent his time genuinely apologizing to Carmella, Janice and Morris and explaining why he felt compelled to act out of the character they had all known him for. After listening to the entire story of Brian, Justin and their history with the man who'd just left, Morris agreed and completely supported Gus' actions. It also gave a bit more insight to the man who was going to be his daughter's stepfather. Morris had never been more grateful than at that moment that Janice immediately called off the engagement. It also helped that his sister, Aurora, was there to fill them in on carefully-worded events prior to their entry. Morris was able to fully piece together what wasn't said in lieu of what was. He knew Janice was as well. Brian and Justin breathed a small sigh of relief when Morris and Janice offered whatever assistance they could give for now or in the future, happy to know that whatever came of Carmella and Gus, they still would be friends. Everyone cleared out of the office with the exception of Colby and John who were hard at work getting the accounts protected again.

Brian was the last to leave a little reluctant, knowing what was waiting for him on the outside of the inner sanctum. Justin stood silently, reading every thought clear on his lover's face. He led them to the far end of the corridor which was secluded away from the prying eyes of the friends and family. He waited for Brian to speak and let Brian find comfort in running his fingers through Justin's locks. For some reason, Justin almost laughed at Brian's obsession with his hair but he realized that whenever Brian was deep in thought and Justin was around, it was one of the things that soothed him. So Justin turned his back to his husband and placed himself within Brian's arms while leaning his head back to give free reign. He almost cringed at the initial forceful grip Brian placed on his head but the touch became gentle, as if Brian was remembering who he was with just then. At the continual stroking, Justin couldn't help the deep purr which eventually escaped.

"Like that, don't you?" Brian asked in a sexy rasp matching his own.

"Yes I do and you know it but now isn't the time."

"I know, Sunshine."
Justin went back to quietly letting Brian absorb the peace around them; to finding as much peace with himself as Brian could take at that moment. The benefit to their dynamic had always been their ability to communicate without words but Justin knew in this case Brian needed to speak his fears. He just didn't know where to start so Justin did.

"What do you want?"

"What do you mean? I have you." Justin stood still but the stiffness of his body told Brian everything he needed to know. "Oh alright, I'll say it. I want the friend I used to know, Justin."

"Good that's a start but I'm the wrong person you should be telling that to."

Brian smiled. "Gently pushing me off Mount Kinney, are you?"

"Someone has to and who better than another Kinney." Justin raised his eyebrow daring Brian to refute his use of the infamous Kinney Cliff method. "Besides the Brian Kinney I know was never a coward and he isn't one now."

"What makes you so sure?"

Justin turned in his arms and kissed him ferociously. Brian followed where Justin led without question or hesitation; it was as natural as breathing to do so. Justin deepened the kiss again, slowly releasing the pent up anger he'd felt through the last several hours into the kiss along with the worry. The more aggressive he became, the more it triggered Brian's innate need for dominance. Eventually Brian released his own frustrations and took back the control, holding Justin where he wanted him—not giving an inch in his resolve to subdue. When he released Justin from the kiss, both were breathing hard but the communication was clearer to them than ever.

"See?"

"Yeah, I do, Justin."

"No one, not even me, can make you do what you don't want to do. Give yourself permission to be happy, Brian. Fucking decide what you want and own it, pass or fail."
"Right now I want you."

Justin rolled his eyes. "You already have me and have for a very long time. Right now, you have a friendship to either salvage or dissolve."

Brian cocked his head to the side really curious of the answer to his next question. "What do you want regarding it?"

"Uh-huh, Mr. Kinney. That friendship has nothing to do with me unless the issues of it affect me directly as in last night. Other than that, it was established long before I came waltzing my perky ass into your life. Therefore this is between you and Michael. Just know that I'm not going anywhere and regardless of what you choose, I'm yours." He'd kept his voice level but the fierceness in his next statement gave Brian pause for a moment. "But I will always defend what's mine and that is you most of all."

Brian nodded, Justin's message clear. "Well then, I'd better go take care of this before he causes another scene." He kissed Justin quickly and left the corridor.

Justin turned his back and looked out over the landscaping at the back of the house. He knew that no matter the outcome, he meant every word. He wasn't going anywhere. He thought back over all that was said in the office, of Chris' confession, even of how close he'd come to losing Brian and himself over the years. He had no doubts, even now, that they could survive anything...and that included the phenomenon of Hurricane Michael Charles Novotny.

Brian made his way to the front of the house. He thought about changing clothes but decided against it. The last thing he needed to hear was the high-pitched squawking of one Emmett Honeycutt, Party Planner Extraordinaire. No doubt he would be joined in lamentations by all those he considered family and laughed at by the man who had come to mean the world to him. As he made his way to Michael's car, he thought about Justin and his patient understanding when it came to Brian's silent need for time before delivering the heart-stopping, toe-curling, dick-jumping kiss and gentle push which spurred Brian to action. He thanked a deity he still wasn't sure he believed in wholeheartedly that Justin had chosen to fight for what they developed through the years. Sometimes Brian wasn't sure they could make it and he knew Justin had his own doubts but they were determined to see life and its many challenges through together.
He looked through the window of the SUV Michael drove, watching the man he'd known as his best friend, sleep. His face looked like he'd been locked in the ring with Oscar de la Hoya. He smiled briefly when Lindsey had coerced him into watching a prize fight with the former champion and remembered comparing Mel to him the night of Gus' birth. Bringing his thoughts back to the present, he knew that he at least owed it to himself to hear Mikey out. There was no question of what he had to do but how he did it would depend solely on Michael.

He knocked on the window before entering the car, making sure that Michael was fully awake and cognizant upon entering.

"Brian!" The smile which greeted Brian was the same as always, bright and full of innocent wonder.

"Hello Mikey."

He watched as Michael released a huge sigh in relief. "That's good. I'm back to being ‘Mikey.'"

"You've always been that to me," Brian said honestly. "What are you doing here?"

"I- I came to apologize for my behavior last night."

"That's a start but I'm not the one you should be apologizing to."

Michael blanked his face at the reference to Justin but not before Brian saw the emotions of anger and annoyance which flashed across his damaged face. "Fine. I apologize to him too but I'm not here to talk about him, Brian."

"Then why are you here, Mikey?"

"I want to know if we could still be friends. You know the way we used to be before all this ‘Justin' stuff started happening." He gestured his hand in a small circle before placing it back on the steering wheel.

Brian sucked his lips into his mouth before answering. "We can't do that Michael because I'm not the same person I was back then; neither are you."
"What? What are you talking about, Brian? I'm still the same." Michael whined.

Brian thought about all the years of their friendship. Michael was always possessive of Brian, always doing things to get Brian's attention trying to stake a claim that ultimately belonged to Justin from the first moment they met. The problem wasn't so much that Brian had changed. It was that Michael was right...he hadn't. He had a great guy in Ben Bruckner but he still wanted all of Brian's attention. He would constantly think and dream up ways to garner it even if that meant breaking Brian and Justin up or setting Justin up with misinformation; even withholding information from Brian if it achieved what Michael wanted in the end which was for Brian to want and need him. And Brian couldn't live that way anymore. He damned sure wasn't going to ask Justin to endure it anymore even if his husband was willing to do it for Brian's sake. They already had enough shit to deal with without adding Michael's manipulations to it all.

"You're right, Mikey. You are the same but I am not. I love Justin- always have and will continue to do so. The shit you have pulled over the years could have really cost me him."

Michael began to cry. "Why Brian? Why the fuck is it always about him? I'm your best friend. I was there for you when you had no one. How could you just toss me aside like I meant nothing to you?"

Brian closed his eyes gathering his patience. "Why is it always about you, Michael? It's as if you're happy as long as I'm miserable which is exactly what I am without Justin." Brian shook his head. "You know what, Mikey. I can't do this anymore. I will not be put in the middle of you and Justin."

Michael's tears cleared up instantly. "Great. Then that means he's history, right Brian?"

"What? What the fuck?" Brian exploded. "No, he isn't, Michael. YOU ARE! Justin is my husband, my lover and my best friend. My confidant, my business partner, the other father to my son...in short my everything. I can't do this anymore, Michael and I won't. You've caused me to have to choose between you; between my past and my future; between who I was and who I am; between what you want and what I need. So no, Michael, we can't be friends anymore. The Brian and Mikey show has had its last rerun." Brian moved to exit the car but turned to see the stunned expression on his former best friend's face. He leaned over and placed a gentle kiss on his cheek. "It doesn't mean that I don't love you, Michael. I always have and always will. But I love myself more."

Brian left the car, walking slowly back to the house. His heart breaking with every step, he listened as the SUV started and made its way down the extended driveway. Only then did he allow the tears to fall.
When he arrived back inside he was greeted with the sight that almost floored him and made him feel better for the interim. Emmett had managed to turn the first floor of Britin in to baby Babylon. He couldn't help but laugh since it was a classic Honeycutt thing to do. His motto of "When in doubt, have a party," was definitely accurate for the sight of people dancing, socializing and having an all-around good time. Brian felt Justin's presence even before the strong arms circled his trim waist.

"Hey Stud, wanna dance?"

Brian smiled at the memory of a time gone by long ago where he'd asked Justin that question. Turning to behold the countenance he loved so much, he leaned in for a heated kiss, relishing the feel of the plush lips beneath his. When he coaxed a sigh of surrender from Justin and led him to the dance floor, he said, "I thought you would never ask."

Eyes closed, foreheads pressed together, fingers carding through each others' hair, Brian and Justin Taylor-Kinney was finally free to celebrate their union...and woe to anyone who tried to tear it apart.

End Notes:

Also "Secrets, Lies and Alibis" has two chapters up already! I will be updating both again very soon!! Thanks again for all your support and encouragement thus far! It really means a lot.

Happy Reading!

~Nichelle

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DANGEROUS ALLIES

TIME'S UP VOLUME II: SHARE MY LIFE by Nichelle Wellesly

Summary:

TU VOL II

Categories: Alternate Universe, QAF-U.S., Family, Angst, Bdsm, Brian/Justin, Canon, Could be Canon, Drama, Humor, Jealousy, Justin/Ethan, Justin/Other, REAL LIFE ISSUES, Romance, Toppy! Justin, Unsafe Sex, What If Characters: Brian, Cynthia, Daphne, Justin, Original Character(s), Other Canon Characters, Ted
Challenges: None
Series: TIME'S UP SERIES
Chapters: 40 Completed: No
Word count: 215094 Read: 52889
Published: February 04, 2015 Updated: October 03, 2015

Chapter 35- DANGEROUS ALLIES by Nichelle Wellesly

Author's Notes:

Sorry it took so long to update Darlings! Originally, I was debating on continuing this installment because honestly, Chapter 34 part III ended in a very good place. I asked a few folks and some thought it would be good to start a new Volume while others thought with so many unresolved issues in this one, it would be better to just continue in here. In addition, August has been a bit crazy, especially the last week where I was down in NYC with my son and his 4 BFFs. Needless to say I didn't get much writing done then. Now that school will be back in session on Wednesday, I'm hoping that I can get back on schedule. Thank you for waiting for this chapter. I sincerely hope it was worth it! Happy Reading!

~Nichelle

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

DANGEROUS ALLIES
There were days in which agent Sarah Morrissey hated her job. The long, grueling hours as one of the FBI's top undercover operatives did not leave room for a social life much less time to be herself. But there were days like today where the intrigue and danger more than made up for it. Days where although undercover she was able to be who she was in real life while catching the bad guys. So when her boss handed her this assignment which would not only help a case she was working on in Florida to help a friend but to crack another case linked to two of the richest gay men in the world, she jumped at the chance.

The case in Florida involved a nasty piece of work by the name of Fred Pierce who was one of the partners in a Microsoft-esque company. A prominent figure within the political and corporate sectors, he seemed like the answer to everyone’s prayers. Handsome, married with 2.5 children and obscenely wealthy, Fred gave to the community- erecting 24-hour daycare centers and helping the poor citizens of Miami in ways that made him seem like a hero. In reality, Fred was a sexual predator who preyed on the women who worked for him within the halls of his multi-million dollar business.

Unfortunately for him, two of the women he'd forced into having an affair with him against their wills was Sarah's sister, Lisette and one of her best friends, Julienne McKay. His constant blackmail and rape of Lisette was at the behest of Fred's depraved and jealous sister, Tamara St. Giles, who had a vendetta against the unsuspecting woman. When she found out she was pregnant, Lisette took her own life knowing that having the abortion would never be enough to stop Fred Pierce from doing that to her again. Sarah still cried herself to sleep some nights in guilt and pain for not being able to save the one person she should have been able to. No Lisette didn't confide in her at the time- only in the suicide note- but it still didn't assuage the feeling that she should have known something was wrong with the sibling she had taken care of since their parents had died. Her only consolation was that she had managed to save Julienne from a much worse fate involving drug and human trafficking; revenge and ultimately the prize of redemption for a woman who'd gone through horrors untold in order to help Sarah seek her own brand of justice. It was that favor along with her skill both as a Field Operative in her job and as a Domme in life outside the badge which brought her to Pittsburgh working in the classiest gentleman’s' club for the sleaziest bastard she'll eventually have the pleasure of carting off to Federal prison...again.

"You look like the cat who got a mouth full of cream, Mistress Phoenix," her companion said.
Sarah couldn't help but smile at Shelia's use of her dominatrix name. Anthony and Gareth told Shelia of it on a wild night where they all visited a club catering to her particular taste. "Aren't you supposed to be getting ready for the stage show. By the way, your husband will kill me for letting you do this. Your brother already wants to kill me for allowing you to come along in the first place so do me a big favor, Shelia, and leave the dangerous stuff to me."

"You know good and hell well I can take care of myself, Phoenix," Shelia responded hotly. Sarah couldn't deny her claim. Mrs. Shelia Matthews was one smart, tough and courageous cookie. No doubt she would've made one hell of an agent but as one of the partners in a New York advertising agency, she was just as tenacious. If Sarah's partner, Evangeline, couldn't be by her side in an assignment like this one, she was more than happy to have Shelia regardless of Gareth and Anthony's continued protests. "Besides, my mocha complexion in this den of sin seems to be a commodity."

Sarah laughed at her statement. It was true. Shelia was being requested for lap dances ever since they walked in the door of Struts- a gentleman's club owned by Gary Sapperstein. Her friend, Nicole Baird, had given her additional information about the man and his nephew. As a psychologist, there was a limited amount of what Nicole could actually say to protect her client's identity but Sarah had been able to fill in the blanks pretty well and it explained why the idiot was running a hetero sex club instead of a gay one. Upon digging into the man's background, she'd found his connection to not only Justin Taylor but also his lover, Brian Kinney which provided Sarah even more reason to put the bastard and the others she was there for away for a very long time. This business was getting uglier by the second and although she loved her job, she was tired of being undercover. Her boss had promised her a much needed respite after this case was over.

As she and Sheila stood behind the wooden wall by a nearby table, the other men she was looking for began to arrive, including her client for the evening. She spoke into the small pin holding her cleavage together. "It's almost show time, boys. Are you able to here the greetings going on at the table?"

"All set, Boss Lady," Frankie replied, the smile in his voice evident. An agent for five years, he refused to go on any assignments that didn't include Sarah. She was dangerous, deadly, fast, efficient and sometimes reckless but he respected her more than most of the men on the force. She had also saved their lives more than once.

"Any word on Evangeline yet?"

"None," Frankie answered sharply. Where Sarah was always straight with her team, Evangeline- her partner- was secretive and didn't inspire a trusting relationship among him and the others. The only one who could have a civil conversation with the woman was Sarah because she was the boss and
her authority would never be questioned on a mission. Frankie had his suspicions about Evangeline's sudden business which took the place of being on this assignment but he kept those to himself. Instead they had to protect Shelia, a civilian who really should have been an agent. The boys didn't mind though. After the work they all did with Shelia's help on the Fred Pierce case, they were more than happy to extend the same type of protection and respect offered to Sarah, to Shelia. "Do you know why she took off so suddenly, Sarah?"

"No the chief didn't say but it must have been important."

"I doubt it," Sheila mumbled and Frankie laughed when he heard. She also didn't trust Evangeline but what could she say that would be taken seriously? She wasn't officially part of this team.

"Ha! Chocolate Thunder isn't a fan of Evangeline either. Sarah, have you talked to Henry about changing her team yet?"

"You know no one else will work with her because of her attitude, Frankie. She's a good agent but a little tough to take at times. We as women have had to be in this business, you know that."

"Okay, Sarah but I think she's fucking jealous of you."

Sarah knew it was true. Evangeline had been the one to train her but when it came to the promotion, Sarah's education had made it possible to even though she was the junior between the two women. Sarah could empathize with Evangeline but the bottom line was that Sarah had made the most of every opportunity given her and although Evangeline and her butted heads sometimes, they made a helluva team and the cases got resolved. It was time to change back to the matter at hand.

"Tyson, are you there?"

"Yeah, Sarah. I got a clear view of the meeting and have secretly been taking the pics. It seems that one of they're still waiting for someone and Sapperstein's nephew has been to the table twice already."

"Just be careful, Ty. The kid isn't as clueless as he seems. In the month I've been working this assignment, Sean has gotten four people fired plus the bouncer who rebuffed his advances is still recovering from his injuries due to Gary's own bully boys. They also found copious amounts of a date rape drug in his system- the same one used on Justin Taylor some years ago- so don't drink anything he brings to you."
She saw Ty nod slightly. He was definitely an attractive man with his muscular five-foot-eleven muscular frame and his ageless face. Tyson looked more like a college student instead of an FBI agent which worked well in his favor for the past nine years. "Don't worry, Sugar. I've arranged for my Pittsburgh lover who just happens to be the bartender to serve me personally all night. I told Todd I would be especially grateful if he did that for me. We've put out that we're old high school buddies, which isn't exactly a lie since we went to college together, so Gary allows it and has told Sean to back off. But it hasn't stopped the kid from trying to attract my attention and get into my pants."

"Hey you, Pretty Boy haven't I told you to limit the dick talk?" Frankie cut in laughing. "I don't care what you do with it as long as I don't have to witness where you're sticking it or in whom."

Shelia, Sarah and Ty laughed but Ty responded. "Don't worry, Hot Dog. If ever I have the urge to point my dick in your direction, I'll admit myself into a psychiatric hospital first. You're attractive but I'm not into bears, babe." Then, "Fuck me, I can't believe...no it can't fucking be!"

"What, Ty?"

"I know the last member of their group, the guy who they've all been waiting for."

They all looked- Frankie through the surveillance camera behind the bar he tapped into, Sheila and Sarah behind the wall which kept them hidden and Ty directly at the tall figure sauntering through the door and up to the table.

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Unexpected Encounters

Jennifer sat outside the house on Maple Street waiting a sufficient amount of time after her ex-husband left his home. After all she'd learned during the meeting in Brian and Justin's home office, she knew she what she needed to do. Although she resented Madison Taylor, Jennifer knew that beneath that dark hair and behind those seemingly innocent dark brown eyes was a shrewd woman. She had to be in order to have trapped Craig Taylor into marriage again after Jennifer had taken everything which wasn't nailed down in court. Madison and Craig had been involved in an affair for
the last six years of their marriage and conveniently came up pregnant which had been the last straw for Jennifer- the catalyst for her to leave him even after his treatment of Justin. Within four months after his divorce was final, Madison rushed Craig to the altar, had her father who was Craig's attorney at the time force Craig to sign a post-nuptial agreement and admitted there wasn't a child citing how desperate she was to be with him. Jennifer couldn't begrudge Madison her tactics- in fact she applauded them and wished she'd been smarter at the beginning of their marriage- she only hoped that the younger woman was just as smart now.

"Are we ready, Ladies?" She asked her companions.

Melanie looked at Jennifer and nodded along with Myrna and Lindsey. Myrna and Melanie were there as attorneys; Lindz as a peer since Madison and Lindsey graduated high school together. It also helped that Lindsey represented Justin's business interests. "How do you want to play this, Jennifer?" Melanie asked.

"I think the best way to deal with Madison is to give her all of the facts we have at first. If she proves difficult, then both you and Myrna can lay out why she should legally dissuade Craig from doing this thing to Brian and Justin."

"In the meantime, I have Justin's authorization to offer her a settlement if she wants to relocate while he deals with Craig."

Jennifer nodded. "Let's make that the last option, Lindsey. I'm still holding out hope that she'll see reason and look at this from all sides; that her penchant for self-preservation will kick in as soon as she hears the facts."

"And if none of this works?" Myrna asked. She had stayed mostly silent running through all the scenarios in her head of how this could go.

"Then I'll warn her that if she continues to sit idly by while her husband tries his best to destroy my sons- and yes I mean Brian, too- that I will make her suffer in ways only a senior member of the vaunted WASP nest can. The reason she had Craig sign that post-nuptial agreement in the first place was so she could maintain her status as one of us and that her children would have the protection of the Taylor name beyond Craig's death. That includes all money, property, club memberships and no divorce."

"Shit that was smart," Myrna said. Through Justin's account, she was aware of all the previous proceedings between Jennifer and her ex-husband. She knew it was the way Craig got away with disowning Justin and not paying for his education, leaving it to the young man to find his own way.
Madison Taylor's actions made clear that he would not be able to treat her and her children the same way he treated his former family.

"Yes she is," Jennifer agreed. "Now I can only hope that intelligence extends far beyond the fact that I'm his ex-wife and Justin a disenfranchised son."

She turned to ring the doorbell, taking a deep breath as she did so. It was only 8:30 in the evening but she was banking on the fact the kids should be asleep by now. They were still relatively young. When Madison opened the door, her face registered surprise which quickly turned accusatory.

"What are you doing here, Jennifer?"

"Well I'm certainly not going to talk about it on your doorstep, Madison. There are things we need to discuss so may we come in?" Jennifer's tone was just as haughty as the woman before her. There was nothing which would stop her purpose and she didn't have the patience to play the power game with Madison just then.

Madison backed out of the doorway allowing entry to the four women. In spite of her unease, her upbringing mandated she offer refreshment as the women settled into the living room area. All declined for which she was secretly grateful since she wasn't inclined to have them stay long. "Craig will be back shortly so I guess we better get down to the reason for your visit."

"That's fine by me, Madison but I should tell you that Craig won't be home until late. He should be walking into Struts by now."

"You lie! There is no way he would be walking into that filthy club."

"No dear, I don't lie at all." Jennifer shook her head. How could she have been married to Craig Taylor all these years and think he would never find a way to cheat on her, too? "That's neither here nor there but if you remember, I did try to warn you about him. In any event, this is about him but also about what he is up to which could bring harm to your house."

"What are you talking about, Jennifer? He is paying for the rest of Molly's education."

"This isn't about that. I'm talking about what he's up to in reference to Justin and his lover. How much has Craig told you over the years, Madison?"
"Only that Brian Kinney is a pervert who turned Justin gay and against his family. When Craig gave Justin an ultimatum to forget about being gay, Kinney brainwashed him into going with him."

The four women shook their heads but it was Lindsey who spoke then. "And you believed him, Madison?"

Madison exclaimed. "Oh my God, Lindsey. I wasn't sure that was you and didn't wish to make a wrong identification."

"I'm sorry. In my focus, I forgot to make the introductions, Madison. Of course you know Lindsey. My two attorneys are also with me, Melanie Marcus who is Kinnetik's attorney and Myrna Singleton who is not only Justin's attorney but his agent as well."

"It's good to meet you all and to see you again, Lindsey but why are attorneys here in my house, Jennifer?"

"We're getting to that but you still haven't answered Lindsey's question. It's important that you answer any and all questions and listen to what we have to say, Madison. I really need you to concentrate and keep all of what we're about to tell you confidential. Can you do that?"

"It depends on what it is but to answer your question, Lindsey, yes I believed him. I saw no reason not to."

"Sit down, Madison, and we'll tell you the whole story not just the part which makes Craig Taylor look like the upstanding man you would like to believe he is. Each of us has lived this tale in various degrees so you have no need to doubt the validity of the tale but after hearing all the facts if you have any questions, you may ask them and expect straight answers," Lindsey assured her.

When Madison sat down, Jennifer said, "Well I guess I should begin then. I won't tell you about the problems in our marriage before Justin came out since those are the facts you already know and have been warned about. Justin and Brian Kinney met the night Lindsey and Melanie's son with Brian was born. Justin was just beginning his senior year at St. James and had known he was gay from the time he was fifteen. It wasn't until he and I reestablished our own relationship that he told me about an experience he'd had with another boy when he was fifteen at summer camp which confirmed it for him. Anyway, Brian and Justin had what was supposed to be a one-night stand that night but over the years it's turned into something much more than you or I have ever had with Craig Taylor. At first, Brian tried his best to get away from Justin. He had a one fuck only policy that didn't work
for my tenacious teenager." She smiled at the memory of hearing Brian and Justin tell it at their commitment ceremony. Melanie and Lindsey were also smiling. "So Justin wore him down until Brian couldn't help himself. On the evening I told Craig which was after I attended the Gay and Lesbian art show which was Justin's first of many, his first step was to call Brian. I don't know what he heard during that phone call—we never discussed it—but I know it was in a sense traumatizing for him. Justin was very angry with me for telling his father and they had an argument about it. Justin told us that he loved Brian and that all he wanted was to be with him and that he was going to whether Craig liked it or not."

Madison was beginning to get a clearer picture of what really happened during that time. "So when did the ultimatum come into play?"

"It turns out that Craig was stalking Brian to a degree. The week before the ultimatum was issued, Craig had sought Brian out and rammed his car into Brian's jeep twice while he was stopped at a traffic light. When Justin and I asked him what happened to the car, he said some idiot ran the light and hit him. Justin was on his way out and Craig had decided without talking to any of us that Justin was going away to military school. You see, the day before, the football player who later almost killed my son with a baseball bat assaulted Justin in the locker room after gym class as he was changing back into the school uniform. Justin fought back but when asked what happened because Chris Hobbs was their star football player at the time, it was decided that it was all Justin's fault for not being modest about himself. Justin, in an act of independence and rebellion had gotten a nipple ring and the boys decided to make derogatory comments to Justin because of it. Anyway, Craig and Justin had words in which Craig told him it was time he became a man. Justin promptly told him that it didn't matter what Craig did; that more butt-fucking goes on in boarding school than the backroom at Babylon and that he would still be Craig's queer son."

"Melanie and I were at Brian's house when Justin showed up. He told us that he thought it was Craig's vehicle who hit Brian. He had a concussion and some minor injuries but it wasn't the last time Craig had assaulted Brian," Lindsey said.

"Forgive me but it's hard for me to picture this side of Craig," Madison protested.

"It probably would be, dear, but it happened. The following week, Craig punched and kicked Brian outside of the club they all frequent— which Brian now owns—and it happened in front of Justin who in turn attacked his father to pull him off his lover. Craig told Justin that he was to give up his lifestyle or never come home again. From the recounts I've heard from Justin and others like Lindz and Mel, Justin told Craig never again."

"Is that when he went to live with Debbie Novotny? I heard about Justin living there while Craig and I..."
Jennifer nodded. "You can say it. While you and Craig were planning the demise of my marriage to him. To answer your question, Justin went to live with Debbie some time later but prior to that, he was living with Brian. In all honesty, Justin probably would have moved back in with us had Craig not issued a second threat which would have Justin denying who he is, what he thought or what he felt- those were Brian's words, not mine but no less accurate or true. It was no wonder why Justin chose Brian. Craig disowned him that day. He didn't even bother to see him later when Justin was bashed at the prom sometime later."

"I remember hearing about that as well which is why I had that clause put into the agreement," Madison said.

"I know and I think that was a very smart thing you did especially since we don't know until our children's teen years if they'll be gay or not."

"I was here the night Justin came to ask his father to help him pay for school. Brian and Justin had broken up then, I think."

Lindsey picked up the tale then. "They did but prior to that Brian was paying for Justin's education out of his own money. It was a written agreement between Brian and Justin that upon graduation, Justin would begin making payments on the loan."

"And he still chose to honor the agreement after they broke up? He's either stupid or-"

"Extremely generous," Lindsey said. "Brian has always made it a point to tell Justin that he wanted him to be the best homosexual he could be and that included getting his education. At least it did until the Stockwell election when Justin was kicked out of school and Brian had lost his job for a time."

"I thought the Stockwell campaign was dismantled by a group called Concerned Citizens for the Truth."

"Brian and Justin were the ‘Citizens,’ Madison," Jennifer confirmed.

The younger woman couldn't stop the gasp which left her. It was the first time she'd ever seen Craig really angry. He had ranted and raved for quite a few hours about gay people interfering with politics and how it wasn't right that they should be allowed to in a God-fearing nation. She'd had no idea he'd been talking about his own son. "Did Craig know?"
"Yeah, he did since he was a major contributor to Stockwell's campaign. He also contributed to Chris Hobbs getting off with community service after the bashing. He was called to testify on Chris' behalf about his character while Justin laid in the coma fighting for his life. I sat there- Mel, Lindsey and I sat there- literally in shock listening to him basically say his son deserved the fate which befell him." Jennifer fought back tears as she remembered all of Craig's comments ending with 'I don't have a son. My son died the day he declared he was a butt fucker.' She had never felt as murderous as she did that day. "To let you know, Stockwell is out and he, Craig and the Hobbs family are once again attacking Justin and Brian."

"Jennifer, I wish I can help you but I can't. I don't want to get involved." All assembled could tell that she was deeply disturbed by what she'd heard thus far.

Myrna spoke up then. "Frankly, you are already involved whether you want to be or not because under the law you are his wife. It will be said that there is no way all of this was going on without your knowledge especially considering how long you two have been together; that you were even instrumental in luring Craig Taylor from his first family. There are only a couple of options available to you, Madison. You have a real opportunity to get Craig out of this by pleading with him to abandon this plot against the Taylor-Kinney estate and all their holdings thus saving you and your children from certain litigation and humiliation. The other option is to basically collect all information the information you can find and pass it along to us or the authorities. If you do the second option you will be called into court to testify on behalf of the prosecution. Make no mistake, Madison, with or without your cooperation, Craig will face all types of federal conspiracy and hate crime charges unless he abandons this senseless plan for revenge."

Melanie nodded. "Each of the charges against him so far has a maximum sentence of fifteen years. Also we suspect he and his cohorts are responsible for the Babylon bombing back in 2005. Since there isn't a statute of limitations on murder, Craig could be charged with planning the demise of those who died in the bombing. The prosecutor will not ask for the sentences to be run concurrent, instead every single count against Craig that he's found guilty of will be treated as a separate crime. Your children will most certainly be fatherless and based on the contract you had Craig sign, you will not have a way out of it either. No divorce but then that won't much matter either because you will be facing your own charges including Obstruction of Justice, Aiding and Abetting a Known Criminal and Witnessing but Not Reporting a Hate Crime." Melanie watched as all her carefully spoken words took root and formed a picture in Madison's mind. They didn't have the luxury of sugarcoating any of the consequences Madison Taylor faced if she didn't find a way to stop this.

"Is there a third option? I really can't let Craig know that I know what he is up to but I can't be witness to all of this either. I can't risk my children in order to become some throwback country song of standing by my man. I love Craig but I love myself and my children more. Does that make me a bad person...a bad wife?"

Jennifer smiled. It was as she suspected; Madison Montgomery Taylor was all about self-
preservation. "Lindsey, as my son's personal assistant I'm sure there is some other alternative which would help Madison protect herself and her children."

Lindsey's smile turned slightly feral as she heard the underlying smugness in Jennifer's voice. It was time for a little bit of revenge of their own. "Justin and Brian advised me to give you ten grand if you skip town tonight. Also, they require you to do one more thing. Since there is a joint account with the bulk of your funds in it, you are to withdraw every red cent and close the account immediately. Based on the amount in that account and the money I'm giving you in cash, that should be enough to give you a nice new start somewhere far away from Pittsburgh, perhaps in Georgia at your deceased grandmother's estate. Once the money is gone though, you do not get to come back seeking more so invest it wisely and live comfortably but not extravagantly enough to draw unwanted and unneeded attention to yourself. Since you cannot divorce your husband, you will tell him only that you wanted a vacation away from Pittsburgh for awhile. Since the kids are home schooled, they will continue to be for the remainder of the school year by my employer. Providing them room and board will be your choice and or responsibility but he will pay their salary until such time as you can get them registered for a school down there and you will take on their expenses from that point on."

"You mean I can never come back to Pittsburgh?"

"Since we do not know how long this all will take, I would say not soon. That is why it is so important that you establish your future where you live while this unpleasantness is taken care of. When it is all resolved, perhaps then but then again you may be happy enough with your life by then so returning would seem more of a hardship than not." Lindsey patted her knee in a soothing gesture.

"Fine, I'll do it but it will have to wait until morning since the banks are closed at this hour."

"Not exactly," Jennifer assured her while pulling out her cell phone. She held it up to her ear and winked at Madison in an assuring gesture. "Hello Aurora, it's Jennifer. Yes, it seems that Madison has decided to accept Justin's offer. I'll call Brian and tell him to arrange for travel within the next hour and a half. In the meantime, could you start proceedings on closing out the joint account and Madison's personal account as well? Fabulous, we'll see you there in about forty-five minutes. It should take about that long to pack what Madison wants to take with her although she will have to leave the bulk of everything behind to make it look like she'll be returning as soon as Pittsburgh thaws out. Yes I'll tell her and thank you. Talk soon." Jennifer hung up the phone before speaking to Madison again. "Okay, everything is being closed out as we speak. All that's left for you to do is to pack up yourself and the children. The joint account and your personal account gives you about three-quarters of a million dollars for a new start plus the ten thousand from my son will help you out even further. If you play your cards right, you may not have to work."

"It's nice to know that considering I've never really had a job since summer camp back when I was a junior in high school and my brief stint working in the financial aid office during college. My dad made me quit both saying it was unseemly for a woman of my stature and upbringing to work."
"Well pardon me but your father was a damn fool," Melanie spat out. She was well acquainted with Saul Montgomery who just happened to be the uncle of Ben and Michael's adopted son Hunter. His bigoted ass wouldn't take in the kid because he was beneath him and his family yet he was willing to pull out all the stops to justify why Rita Montgomery should be able to reclaim her wayward son. She shook her head. It was no wonder why Madison was so fucking screwed up and ended up with an asshole like Craig fucking Taylor. Like attracts like it seems.

"I'm beginning to see your point Melanie but thank you for apologizing anyway. I actually liked having a job so who knows...maybe there will be something I can do or maybe I'll start my own business since I certainly have enough for the start-up costs now."

"I think I have a better idea. My guess is since you were raised to be a good housewife, you know how to cook? And since you were raised to basically be a country club socialite, I'd wager you could throw elegant parties?" Melanie asked.

"Sure can, Melanie. I was raised to do both but why?"

Lindsey picked up on the idea then and said, "A friend of ours is looking to expand his catering business. He receives invitations constantly, some of which he had to turn down because of the scheduling. I'll run it by Emmett and have him contact you when you get settled in the new place. In the meantime, it's about time we get you and the kids out of here before your husband returns."

For the first time that evening Madison genuinely smiled. She wasn't exactly happy that she would be leaving Craig and their home but it sure beat going to jail which would leave her children motherless and her without hope. If she had to pick out a way to design her life, she never would have been able to envision the one now waiting for her to claim and it was all due to the last person she ever expected an offer from...the former Mrs. Jennifer Taylor.

Joshua Markham made himself comfortable at the table with men almost twice his age. His father, Samuel Junior, had requested his presence after almost ten-years of not seeing each other. He preferred to get right down to business but was forced to wait as a mocha skinned beauty took the stage. Dancing around to *Candy Shop* by 50 Cent, the woman made some of the most sensuous dance moves he'd ever seen vertically outside of a bedroom and silk sheets. Her perky and ample tits
bounced slightly with each movement while her body glistened in the spotlight from the combination of oil and sweat. She was definitely a morsel any man present would want to lick like a lollipop until getting to the cream-filled center- or at the very least filling her up with the cream. He couldn't help but understand the older mens' fixation with the vision on stage. Just as she flipped her lithe body to hang upside down to twirl on the pole using only her ankles, Joshua thought that with luck he would be the first in line to fuck her senseless before the night was through. He usually wasn't into black pussy but for her he would make a definite exception.

He stopped the waiter passing him just then. "How much for the bitch on stage?"

"My uncle said she isn't for sale. She's only filling in for one of our regular girls who called in sick at the last minute," Sean informed the strange man.

"The way I see it, if she's willing to expose what she's got to a room full of men, she's fair game to be fucked. You tell your uncle that I want her or else..."

Sean swallowed hard but said bravely, "I'll deliver your message but I should warn you, he doesn't take kindly to idle threats."

Joshua was about to respond when his father intervened. "Kindly stop thinking with your dick and let's get down to business. Sean here said the woman is NOT available; leave it at that."

"But-"

"No buts, Joshua. This is not the fucking Baskin Robbin. She's not a flavor you can pick. Get the fuck over it. Now gentlemen, what have we learned today?" Samuel had had enough of the conversation regarding the enticing woman on stage. He would have liked a piece of her pie, too but he wasn't about to harass and or rape her to get it. Hopefully Joshua took the hint would would decide to leave well enough alone. They didn't need the added attention assaulting the woman would likely cause.

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Sarah breathed a sigh of relief from her place behind the wall where she remained hidden. She kept one eye on the stage where Shelia was performing but heard every single word uttered at the table containing all of her quarry except Gary Saperstein. His nephew, Sean, had told the man Ty had identified as Joshua Markham that she was not available. Sarah was relieved when at that moment
both Gareth and Anthony had arrived at the club. They, especially Anthony, was decidedly not happy at all the attention Shelia was getting but they didn't make a scene for which Sarah was grateful.

Frankie was still running all of the information on Joshua Markham through the system and would take awhile so Sarah decided it was best to tune into the conversation for the time being. She also noted her client at the table watching the mocha beauty perform there. *Just one more reason to punish him.* She smiled to herself at that thought.

"So what have we learned today?" Samuel Hobbs asked.

"I was at the Taylor-Kinney residence earlier today although I didn't know that beforehand. I was there with my ex-fiancee, her ex-husband and her daughter to meet with the parents of a friend of hers from school. Imagine my surprise when not only did I run into Justin Taylor, my former student, but I discovered that the boy's father is none other than Brian fucking Kinney."

"What? How is that even possible since he doesn't like pussy?" Craig Taylor asked.

"That's the mystery but his mother is Lindsey Petersen so perhaps it's not much of one after all."

"Wasn't she disowned by her family for some indiscretion done back in college?" Samuel asked.

"She's a fucking dyke," Joshua said vehemently. "That's not just any indiscretion. It's an amoral way of life."

"So what do we do now that we've found out that fucking faggot has a damn kid? I take it his son is straight so maybe we can recruit him?" Stockwell added but Kevin shook his head.

"No we can't. The boy clearly loves his parents along with Taylor who he treats with just as much respect. Besides, using the kid to get to his father is just plain fucking stupid especially since he's an intelligent lad."

"There has to be some way to end them." Craig could feel the desperation welling inside him. For some reason he felt that as long as Brian and Justin was able to still have the world at their fingertips, he would never be safe to enjoy his own life with Madison and the kids. It didn't help that he'd just learned that TK Properties had just bought the land which his store sat on. When he went
digging into who owned it, he was appalled to learn that both Brian and Justin owned the land and surrounding buildings outright. He was virtually a sitting duck without the finances to move his store to another location. Basically, he was fucked.

"Have any of you heard from the Boss recently?" Stockwell asked.

Kevin answered. "I heard from her this afternoon directly. She was not happy with the new turn of events but she definitely said bombing Babylon or any of their businesses were completely out of the question. From her sources, they have narrowed it down to a short list of who is responsible."

"Wait-what? A short list? What the fuck does that mean?" Joshua said, the nervousness evident in his voice.

"She said that her sources didn't tell her who was on the list but that they were closing in on the culprits."

"You don't think..."

"We don't know what to think but it's best that we don't do anything to overtly harm Taylor and Kinney's business holdings either here or in New York. With all the dirt we've been trying to do to their finances to no avail, I think it's best we lay low in that direction for awhile." Kevin said.

"What about their houses? Where is this place you were today, Dixon?" Stockwell asked.

"The house is named Britin and it is on the Pennsylvania and West Virginia border but it wouldn't do you any fucking good. The house is guarded better than the fucking White House."

"Wasn't there a loft? I remember it... I believe it was on the corners of Fuller and Tremont. Does he still own that property?"

"I don't know but either way, blow up anything which belongs to them and you're the first suspect, Jim. People have long memories and the fact that you're back in town has not escaped anyone's notice, especially not the Taylor-Kinneys."
"Why do you keep referring to them that way, Kevin?"

"Because although they are not legally married even though they are able to thanks to the fucking law, they did have a commitment ceremony and per what I've heard are in the process of officially changing their last name to Taylor-Kinney."

"Fuck! The two riches fags possibly in North America are literally joining their names as well as their assets? There's gotta be some way to stop this abomination," Craig said.

"Not that I can see," Samuel said. "But it can work to our advantage providing I can get a hold of that useless Mark Townsend. I've been calling him all fucking day and haven't been able to reach him at all."

"Strange you should mention that, Sam, because he wasn't at his office when I went by just prior to the bank closing earlier. In fact his office was completely cleaned out. I didn't ask any questions so I wouldn't raise suspicions but I don't believe in coincidences. Unfortunately, we can't check on or confirm anything until tomorrow or Monday morning."

"I think we have a lot to reevaluate tonight and based on what we find out on Monday morning, we'll know how to proceed. I've also been running into subtle roadblocks at the police station. It seems my successor is as straight-laced as they come regardless of the fact I knew his father. Larry Smith isn't willing to play ball and doesn't give a horse's ass about loyalty to his father's old acquaintances."

"Can he be eliminated?" Samuel asked.

"Not a chance," Stockwell answered. "As Kevin pointed out, I would be the prime suspect in any illegal action taken against him. Deeksins made sure to appoint an implacable, rigid, strictly by-the-book cop in my place. In turn, he has actually gained the trust and loyalty of all the citizens of Pittsburgh including the goddamn gay community and so has the entire fucking police department. Those who sided with me behind those vaunted walls are either retired or deeply in hiding. They dare not cover anything in reference to my return to this fucking city. I wouldn't be surprised if they didn't know I was here right now."

Each of the members of the table looked around the room to see who may have been spying on them and Sarah couldn't help but chuckle at the paranoid group of assholes. It serves them right that the last person they would think to look for in terms of spying on them was a woman.
Just as she was about to resume listening in on the conversation, she heard the most dreaded voice behind her.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing, Phoenix? Shouldn't you be preparing to go on stage?" Sean asked her.

"No you fucking little twerp. I'm actually scoping out my client and getting a feel for what he will need tonight. Why don't you run along and find a nice boy to play with or better yet find a nice playpen to sit and chill in. This game isn't for you." She turned her back dismissing the unwanted intrusion. Thank goodness she wasn't the only one listening in and Frankie was recording the conversation as well.

"You know, you should watch yourself. I could have you fired for insults like that."

"I doubt your uncle will have the balls to fire his top money maker for this dive. In fact, I would love to chain you to the St. Andrews cross and whip your smart-mouthed ass, little boy but it would be a waste of my valuable time and talent. I think the only way you could get your little insignificant prick up is if you render some unsuspecting soul helpless so that you could feel powerful, isn't that right, brat?" she said enjoying the color draining from the asshole's face. She vowed that one day very soon she would bust both Gary and Sean for illegal drug use as well as other crimes. She really couldn't wait for that day.

"You really are a bitch, Phoenix," the young man spewed.

"And don't you fucking forget it, Sean. You would do well to always remember just how much I can burn your little ass. They don't call me Phoenix for nothing. Now go play; it's time for me to take my client to the playroom. Unless you want to join?" she laughed aloud as he scurried away from her in the opposite direction. "Yeah, that's what I thought."

She fluffed her dark hair with its red and gold highlights, adjusted her ample tits bound in leather, grabbed her riding crop and moved toward the table with the heated discussion taking place. Let the games begin!

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His eyes widened as she approached the table. She always looked delectable but there was something different about her tonight. Something forbidding; something standoffish- her welcoming
smile didn't reach her green eyes. For the first time in a long while, he actually felt fear in reference to a woman but this is what he often paid her to do, isn't it? To make him fear her, to make him forget everything, to punish him for everything that he couldn't forget. She was his mistress and he her slave for the next hour. He both relished and dreaded the thought.

"Good evening, gentlemen," Phoenix said cordially while the men looked at her with lust in their eyes. She read each one, recognizing instantly the submissive in all of them except the newcomer. He was a challenge but she would make him bow before her too. She was that good.

"Good evening, Mistress," they chorused.

"I would love to stay and chat but it's time for my boy to go, isn't that right, Slave?"

Her target dropped his eyes before he answered. "Yes, Mistress Phoenix."

She waited a few moments before responding, her sense of awareness heightening at his fear covertly on display in front of the table but she knew it was there. Smirking slightly she said, "I'm glad we understand each other. Now tell your playmates good night and let's go." She moved off not giving him a chance to do anything but follow instructions. She was gratified to hear the hastily given farewells before she felt his presence at her elbow on the way to the club's playroom.

Entering the space, she advised him to strip while she went to the cabinet and prepare for the long hour ahead. He would leave there both sore and thoroughly fucked. She smiled wide to herself at that thought. Based on all she'd learned listening to her client with his disgusting, intolerant friends she decided that she would not be merciful no matter how much he begged. There was a fine line between pleasurable pain and abuse- she would walk that tightrope tonight.

She heard a repetitive sound behind her and instantly knew what he was doing. The sardonic smile widened again as she recognized the change in his breathing. She grabbed the long whip and flicked her wrist outward. The whistling sound as it sailed through the air was the only warning he would receive before WHACK! The blow landed hard enough to sting but not enough to break his skin...yet.

"Who told you to touch your puny little dick, Slave? I told you to get undressed; that was all."

"I'm sorry, Mistress but I've had a painful erection all night."
"Perhaps I should take care of that little problem first, huh? Would you like that?"

"Yes, Mistress please."

"You forget yourself, slave. I am in charge in here. It's about my wants and needs, NOT yours. You have too much power outside of these walls which is why you come to me so that you do not have to think; you don't have to be in control. This means you do not get to tell me what the fuck you need since I know it already. It's up to me to either reward you or deny you. At this moment, I am feeling benevolent so don't think of this as a punishment per se but as a re-enforced lesson in manners." Placing the leather bound cock ring on his erect penis, she fastened it as tight as she could without causing permanent damage and gave it a firm squeeze. "You may thank me now."

He kissed her leather-clad, high-heeled boot, thanking her while she pet his head gently. To date she had not been so harsh with him but hearing him and his cohorts talk about Justin Taylor and Brian Kinney the way they had angered her. Even more so, the mention of Gus Petersen-Kinney and possibly involving and using him pissed her off even more and shaped her night with him more than ever. With that thought in mind, she directed him to stand up and position himself on the bondage bed in the center of the blue-hued room. She threw a wink at the double glassed mirror, knowing Tyson was on the other side of the mirror recording the entire exchange. She fastened the clamps at his feet first, moving up to secure his waist. When she finally bound his hands she noticed his wedding band glistening in the light.

"You've never worn that in here before," she said simply.

"I'm sorry, Mistress. I forgot to take it off."

"Perhaps you subconsciously felt guilty about betraying your wedding vows?"

"No Mistress since I don't fuck you, it doesn't count."

She laughed. "Now this I have to hear. Exactly how doesn't it count that you are lying butt-assed naked in the presence of a woman NOT your wife?"

"My wife...she could never do things like this to me. I could never- would never ask it of her. I respect her too much."
"So you're saying you don't respect me?" she moved the flogger up and down his back, relishing the slight tremble of his body as she did so.

"Not at all Mistress Phoenix. I respect you both in different ways, that's all. She is the mother of my children, the caretaker of my home and a good woman but she isn't adventurous in bed. You are a woman who can fulfill all of my other needs."

"Oh you mean like the need to have your ass played with or a dildo inside of it to stimulate your prostate? Sounds kind of hypocritical to me." She stepped into the strap-on harness, selecting the dick she wanted to use on him. It would stretch him well but more importantly, he would feel it while sitting, standing and lying down the next day. There would be no mentally escaping the fact that he was fucked hard and fast and loved a dick up his ass.

She felt his body go rigid and saw his head snap up. "Why do you say that, Mistress?"

"Well let me think. When you book appointments with me, you don't bother to hide your name, Mr. Taylor. Seeming how though I know several of the men that were at your table tonight by reputation and one with close ties to your son, Justin, it's reasonable to assume that while you support their need- and your own need- to destroy him for being gay, here you are being lubed up to take a nine inch cock up your ass. The only difference is that you prefer a woman to be doing the wielding of it, isn't that right?" Sarah put her words to action, preparing Craig to receive and applying the correct amount of pressure for the head of the rubber cock to slip through the first ring of muscle.

"You won't tell anyone will you, Mistress?" Craig asked as he moaned his pleasure at being stretched and filled.

"Your secret's safe with me, Craig. Now shut the fuck up and enjoy this," she said as she proceeded to whip him, scratch him and fuck him by turns, loving the red welts she was leaving on his back. 'Ricky' would have a lot of explaining to do to his happy home-making 'Lucy' when he reached home.

She fucked him hard for nearly a half hour, driving into him ruthlessly and alternately applying the flogger to him as well as squeezing the cock ring for added pressure. He was begging for more which she gave and the release which she continued to deny him- a fact that eventually had him crying tears of frustration. She flipped him over onto his back, looking into his glistening blue eyes as she continued to fuck him. She enjoyed edging him to the brink of orgasm only to watch him discover that he couldn't come until she released him. Yes some would say she was a sadistic fuck but Sarah didn't give a shit. This man was a hypocrite and if there was anything Sarah Morrissey hated more than criminals, it was sanctimonious assholes like the one she was fucking who denounced something publicly while indulging in that very thing behind closed doors. What was even worse about him being a hypocrite to his heart was the way he treated and continues to treat his
first born son. She slapped him with all her might and got satisfaction out of the stunned look on his face. It took all of her willpower not to do a whole lot more but it was enough for now.

She knew it was time wrap the session up so she brought him to the brink again. As she did so, she released his member from the cock ring. No sooner than she did that, she heard the change in his breathing and knew it was time to finish him off. Redoubling her efforts, Sarah rammed Craig's ass mercilessly, gripping his shoulders and pulling them into his knees for leverage. Later, Ty would tell her that she fucked Craig like one helluva gay man and she would chuckle at the memory of it but for now, she just wanted to teach him a few lessons. She took his dick in her hand and aimed it upward between their bodies as if it were a fire hose. Sarah pumped harder, concentrating on making the man beneath her blow his load. She had his knees locked on her shoulders with one of her perfectly toned arms pinning them into place. Finally as Craig began to shoot she took the hand which was holding his knees in place and wrapped it around his neck, pushing his head down so that his open mouth would taste his own cum. He tried to spit it out but Sarah was quicker and stronger than he could've thought as she pined him in the position and held his nose closed so he had no choice but to swallow. She didn't let him up until she was satisfied.

She laughed as he sputtered trying to get his own taste out of his mouth.

"Are you fucking crazy? I could have you fired for this, Mistress!"

"On what grounds, pray tell?" Sarah affected her most bored tone.

"Abuse that's what," Craig yelled.

Sarah shrugged. "There was no abuse here, Craig. The only really questionable act was making you drink your own cum. Damn who knew you were so flexible for an older man. You were almost able to perform auto-fellatio or in simpler terms for you- to suck your own dick. Might I suggest a few yoga classes for you to make that possible. Your wife may enjoy the sight of that. I know I would have."

"Fuck you!"

"Not exactly, Craig. But we'll remember who played pussy and got fucked tomorrow now won't we?" she laughed while watching him get dressed and kept laughing loud and long as he stormed out.
Shaking out her hair and making her way toward the private bathroom, she winked at the mirror again knowing Ty was both horrified and deeply amused by Mistress Phoenix and her antics tonight. Sarah happily stepped into the shower to wash the stench of Craig Taylor off her skin once and for all. She doubted he would be back.

End Notes:

For those waiting on the update to SLA, it's coming!! I'll be working on it tomorrow so expect it by the end of the week. Love Y'all!

9/1/2015...I'm feeling really fortunate right now because I've received some pm(s) asking me the name of my published work which features some of the new characters. YAY! They are M/F works and are available on Amazon and BN.com. The first one is called "Quiet Fire" which is Celene and Gareth's story. The second is called "Silent Fire" which is Julienne's tale. Shelia's story (Wanton Fire) will hopefully be ready soon to go to final editing and Sarah's story (Covert Fire) is currently being written. If you have enjoyed my work so far, please feel free to check them out. As you all know, I absolutely LOVE feedback pass or fail so please leave a review and let me know what you think! I pride myself on writing "action" heroines and not your average damsels in distress so it will be interesting to hear the opinions of you all.

Again, I am forever grateful for the love and support I am finding here! Happy Reading!

~Nichelle

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Chapter 36- IN THE LAND OF THE MISSING by Nichelle Wellesly

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

IN THE LAND OF THE MISSING

Where do we go from here?
There comes a time when love just can fade away

And it came across for you and I

And I don't know how or where to go from here

I really don't know just what to do

So Baby can you tell me*

Michael had been driving for well over five hours with no confirmed destination in mind as the popular song from the 80's station blared through the speakers in the SUV. His mom kept calling him but he didn't feel like speaking to her or anyone else just then. No one but the one person he knew he would not hear from. He'd just lost his best friend; the only man to mean more to him than his own life- the man who loved another and for all intents and purposes married him. The road blurred before him from the tears constantly falling from his eyes. He couldn't stop them- not that he wanted to. He needed the cleansing just then for his broken heart.

Admittedly, he should never had gotten involved with Ben. Brian had warned him. ‘Kiss it, stroke it but don't fall in love with it.’ Of course that's not what Brian meant in reference to the warning but it was a warning Michael should have heeded just the same. Now Ben was as heartbroken as he was and all because of one man... Justin Taylor-Kinney. If only Brian had listened to him that fateful night fifteen years ago, he and Ben would never have met and gotten married but more importantly, Michael wouldn't have lost his best friend.

He sniffed and rolled his eyes at the thought, Hmmpf some best friend.

Where do we go from here

My love
Do we just walk away or do we keep on trying

After the feeling's gone

My Love*

After Brian told him that he had forced his hand and that the Brian and Mikey show was officially over, Brian Aiden- or should he say Asshole- Kinney had gotten out of the car and never looked back even as Michael sat there crying and watching the love of his life walk away. He thought he should have gone after Brian- made him see how much he needed him and that he was making a terrible mistake. Surely they'd both said things they didn't mean, right? They had plenty of arguments and one- no make that two- major fights but they always found their way back to each other. The panic had set in then. What if we really can't be friends anymore? What will I do without having to take care of Brian? He's been my world, my rock, my courage and protector, my best friend practically our entire lives. But he left me...for him. He thought that maybe it was his turn to fight for their friendship that was in his reality so much more. Michael had watched him until he went back in the house to the party which was more like a wedding reception with hundreds of guests before he slowly but forcibly, drove back through the gates of the palace known simply as Britin.

Now there was a time when I thought I knew you well

That's when we were young and satisfied

Now I don't know what or how to go about it

Shall we take the chance and patch it up

Or just leave it for a million years

We've been trying to work it out all summertime long

I can't figure out, where did we go wrong*
Michael thought back over their entire relationship for more than thirty years. The fact that he didn't know Brian anymore- and apparently hadn't for a long time- was more shocking than anything else. Brian had never willingly chosen self-preservation over his friendship with Michael before. It was always Brian defending him against others, including his mother sometimes. Even when Michael had fucked up royally, Brian always took the blame and covered for him making all of his wrongs right. When Michael did the stupidest things, like the time Brian had warned him not to fuck Big Allen at the Baths and he got a severe case of gonorrhea for doing it anyway, it was Brian who had taken him to the hospital and covered up the problem with his mom for missing curfew. The sad part was that even though Michael knew he'd fucked up, he had expected to be forgiven and Justin out on his bubble plump ass for assaulting him. Funny how that happened and he couldn't even blame Justin this time. It was solely Brian's decision- Michael could tell. They'd known each other so many years that there wasn't any doubt in Michael's mind.

As he continued to drive, he saw the sign for where he needed to be; for whom he needed desperately to talk to. As quiet as it was kept, David and Michael had rebuilt their friendship over the years especially during one of Ben's hospital stays. One of David's patients was in the same hospital and needed a rod placed in his spine after a motorcycle accident and they brought David in as the consulting physician. When he had asked what Michael was doing there, he was honest with David advising that his husband whom he'd married in Toronto was very ill. From that day up until a month ago, they spoke regularly. When Ben got curious and asked him about it, he was honest and explained that although they were all wrong for each other, they were still great friends. With that thought in mind, Michael exited the expressway on his way to the house he used to call home.

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I talk to myself

Craig arrived home physically and emotionally spent. His time with Mistress Phoenix was both the best and the worse time of his life. Watching her tits bounce as she fucked him was as arousing as it had ever been and he'd never cum so hard in his life. But their 'talk' afterward disturbed him. He knew he didn't have legal recourse against her because of the disclaimer the club owner always kept on file. Yet there had to be some way to make her pay for what she'd done to him. It wasn't the humiliation she'd made him endure or the fear she inspired- those were her special gifts, a talent inbred which couldn't be taught- but it was her superiority and calling him out for his secret vices which rankled. How dare she, a slut, call him a hypocrite? How dare she think she shouldn't show respect to her better- to a man who could buy and sell her well-toned ass at the drop of a dime? The problem was he knew Gary Saperstein wouldn't fire the whore. She was one of the club's biggest moneymakers in the last three months since she'd been there. The last Domme they had was mediocre compared to Phoenix and Saperstein knew that but that didn't give her the right to judge him both as a man and as a paying customer.

He winced on his way to the guest room shower. The pain in his ass was pleasurable but he still felt raw. Driving home had been excruciating but in a 'can't wait to do it again' way. Phoenix had promised him that he wouldn't be able to forget that he got fucked and she was right. He stepped into
water as hot as he could stand it, his back on fire not only from the water but the welts he knew was on his back. He didn't know how he was going to explain the marks to Madison. The last time they weren't that bad and he got away with telling her that he'd backed into a nail in the storage room at the store. She'd bought the excuse without question. He liked that about her. She was so naive and innocent in the ways of men. It was always a refreshing change from Jennifer, even after all these years. Somehow Jennifer had always known whether he was with Madison or not. When he asked her how she did, she never said only that didn't want to see him in her bed for the rest of that night.

Craig shut off the water and dried himself off in front of the mirror. His neck was still sore from the way Phoenix had grabbed him by it to make him taste himself. He couldn't say that it was unpleasant but just the idea of drinking and swallowing cum, even if it was his own, was appalling and made him ashamed that he perhaps liked the taste. He wasn't gay for Christ's sake; it should have made him gag and vomit. The confusing problem was that it didn't and that was just unacceptable to him. Reaching for the toothbrush he kept there away from the eyes of his wife, he began to brush his teeth vigorously, deliberately gagging himself with it trying to force the DNA-contents of his stomach up. The idea of his 'babies' still being there didn't sit well with him. As he tended to his oral ablutions, he continued to think on the problem of Mistress Phoenix. She knew too much about the meeting which also gave her too much power. Exposing that to the men at the table was out of the question. If they knew that she knew, it could mean disastrous results for him including his death if Joshua Markham had anything to say about it. He couldn't let that happen. The ruthless bastard wouldn't only take him out but Madison and the children. He couldn't let the Hobbs bastard son, take out his last shot for a straight one of his own. Think. Think. Think, Craig. There has got to be some way to get the bitch taken care of without it leading back to you. As much as he would hate to lose her, she had to fucking go.

Picking up his cell phone and rushing into his home office, he looked for the only person who could do this without messing up. He even considered using him for Justin and his fucked-up molester but there was no way he wouldn't have been a prime suspect. Dialing the number quickly, he listened for potential footsteps coming down the stairs of the house. Madison had to know that he was home by now and she would certainly come down to make sure he'd eaten and that he didn't need anything before she went back to bed. She was such a good wife.

"Well this is unexpected," the voice on the other end of the phone said. "What can I do for you, Mr. Taylor?"

"Cut the bullshit, Bruno. I need a job done clean, crisp and quickly."

"Sounds juicy."

"Oh she is. Her name is Mistress Phoenix and you have my permission to enjoy her before you kill her."
"A woman? You want me to kill a fucking woman? What the fuck did she do, break your dick as she rode you?"

Craig flushed at the memory of his time with Phoenix. The last thing she did was ‘break his dick.’ He felt a pleasure-pained twinge in his ass as he remembered her reaming his ass for all she was worth. "No she didn't. She just knows too much of my business and I want to eliminate a possible threat. She could really fuck things up for me."

"How soon do you need her disposed of? It's going to cost you big but then you know that, don't ya?"

"Yeah and you know I'm good for it, too. Anyway, I'd like this done tonight. She's scheduled to leave Struts in about an hour."

"Well lucky for both of us, I'm in Pittsburgh at the moment otherwise you would have been up shit's creek. One thing though."

"What's that?"

"Wire me the money now. If it's as crucial as it sounds, I'm not taking any chances."

"You don't trust me?"

Bruno laughed loud and gruff as if he hadn't done it in awhile. "I don't even trust Jesus when it comes to my money and I know he's more reliable than you."

Craig grumbled about there being no honor left in the world even as he walked over and powered up the laptop. He typed in his code and all the pertinent information to the joint account. When it read ‘Error,’ he tried again, even pulling out the checkbook to make sure he wasn't transposing the numbers as he typed. He received the message three more times in quick succession before the bank's system threatened to lock him out for twenty-four hours. He typed in his checking account number and looked at the balance. He didn't have enough to cover Bruno Josham's entire fee. "Goddammit!"
"Problem?" the smug voice asked over the phone.

"There seems to be a problem with my account. I can't try the number again tonight otherwise the system will lock me out. Can we work something out?"

"You know how this works, Craig; I don't do payment plans. Now if you want to call me when you have your shit together on your end, I'll be happy to take this job on especially if there's succulent, clean and free pussy in it for me. Otherwise this conversation never happened."

"Fine. I'll call you in the morning then. Will you be able to meet to get the cash in person?"

"Sure. You just call me with a place and time."

"Okay," Craig said and hung up the phone right before speeding out of the office.

Taking the steps two at a time, he went in search of Madison. Something was wrong with the account and since that was the one she drew from the most, he thought there was something she'd neglected to tell him. When he reached their bedroom, he was a bit puzzled to find the bed empty but figured one of the kids may have had a nightmare or some other such nonsense. Heading to the kids' bedroom, he listened at the door for a few minutes. He really didn't want to wake her with this problem but it was too important not to. That account had almost three million dollars in which would cover the seventy-five thousand dollar fee. Craig only had about ten thousand in his personal account and the bills just went out from his business account so there was no way he'd be able to draw off of that without one or two checks bouncing. He knocked softly on the door before entering. What the fuck?! The empty bed and crib alarmed him to the point where he was tempted to call the police thinking his family had been kidnapped. No, there has to be a reasonable explanation for this. Where the fuck are they?

He exited the bedroom heading back to their bedroom. The suitcase was gone. Okay, they must have gone over to her parents' house for the night. But that didn't make much sense since both cars are now parked in the garage. Where the fuck are my wife and fucking kids?!! Craig took a deep breath to calm the hysteria bubbling inside him. Craig picked up the phone on Madison's night table dialing her father's cell phone.

The groggy voice answered the phone on the third ring. "Somebody better be dead and stinking for my phone to be ringing this late at night."
"Hey Saul. It's Craig. Sorry to call you so late."

"What's wrong? Is Madison-"

Craig closed his eyes. "Well you just answered my question. She isn't here and I thought she was scheduled to spend time at your home tonight and forgot to tell me."

"What the fuck do you mean my daughter isn't there?"

"Just what I said, Saul. She and the kids aren't here, her car is parked in the driveway and one of the suitcases are gone. I thought she was over there." He shrugged as if it made perfect sense.

"Have you called her phone?"

"I was about to when I decided to call you instead."

"Well call her phone and call me tomorrow. I'm sure it's all a big misunderstanding. Other than that I'm going back to bed. Margaret and I have a flight to Italy in about four hours."

"Will do. Enjoy Tuscany," Craig said and hung up the phone. *Asshole.*

Craig looked around the room again noting nothing was unusual outside of the suitcase missing and a few clothes gone. As he moved to his side of the bed, he noticed the note lying there. He breathed a sigh of relief. *See, Craig? There really is a reasonable explanation to all of this.* He took one more trip to the restroom before settling into bed to read the note.

*Craig,*

*By now you have discovered that the kids and I are gone. We will be away for awhile. I know you have been inside that filthy club, Struts, so don't even bother to deny that. Based on that, I think we need a little time apart. Don't worry, I'm not divorcing you- we do have a contract after all. But the fact that you were there hurt me deeply. I feel like everyone knows you've been hanging out there looking at other naked women and I... I don't like the thought of them whispering behind my back. Although I won't tell you where we are, just know that we are safe. Also I took the*
money in the joint account and closed the account to avoid bank fees until we're ready to come back again. I'm sure you and your giving nature don't mind because you would want all of us cared for.

Before I close this letter, just know that I love you, Craig. I will be back- we will be back but I just can't be around you right now.

Your loving wife,

Madison

He picked up the phone by the bed again, this time dialing Madison's number and was pissed, worried and disappointed when he heard it buzz and ring on top of her vanity. What the fuck was he supposed to do without his wife for however long she would be gone? More importantly, she emptied and closed out the fucking joint account and there was nothing he could do about it since they were married. How the fuck was he supposed to take care of Mistress Phoenix now? He hadn't felt so impotent since the moment Justin had announced he was gay. Fucking women!

*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

The Hit and the Target

Bruno Josham walked into Struts looking for the woman he was supposed to dispose of had Craig Taylor been able to wire the money. Mistress Phoenix was instantly recognizable and he had to admit the auburn-haired woman with her red and gold highlights was a fucking beauty. The cafe au lait color of her skin glistened as she moved through the room. Even in the leather jumpsuit and thigh-high 5-inch heeled boots, she moved with grace and style, completely in control of herself and therefore the men tempted to reach for her but wouldn't dare. The riding crop in her hand looked like it was made specially for her and he could tell from his seat, she knew exactly how to use it. Her green eyes scanned the room landing on him briefly, acknowledging his regard with a slight nod of her head while giving instructions to the passing waiter.

"Fancy meeting you here, Bruno. What exactly are you doing here anyway?" Gareth Kilpatrick asked.

"What? You didn't miss me?"
"Of course I missed you. Did you get the Townsend family settled?"

"Yeah, I got them settled in and had enough time to get back here. Now would you care to explain what you and Anthony are doing in this flesh palace and does Celene know?"

"Of course she does but she also knows that nothing and no one can compare to her for me."

"Not even the Mistress over there?"

Gareth laughed. "Especially NOT Mistress Phoenix." He mock shuddered. "To answer your question though, Anthony and I are doing protection detail of sorts."

"Of who? You guys are big time millionaires and out of the game for I don't know how long now."

Gareth nodded. "But that doesn't mean there isn't precious cargo right here within the club."

Bruno's eyes followed his finger pointing to the stage. "Holy fucking shit! Is that Shelia?"

"Yep. That's my wayward sister and Anthony's wife. I think she's reliving her college glory days."

"How the fuck are you sitting here letting her do this?"

"By not watching her do this," he cringed. "Shelia is filling in for Evangeline who had an impromptu trip somewhere. Sarah needed to watch the floor for her client and some meeting they had regarding Brian and Justin."

"I wonder if those guys will ever catch a damn break, Gareth. I really feel sorry for them," he said. Bruno was six-seven with a heart of gold despite his less than savory background. A former enforcer for the drug lordess, Queenie otherwise known as Tamara St. Giles, he received a second chance due to assisting with the Fred Pierce case. As a result, he gained a whole new set of friends and his own security business.
"Me too. They don't deserve the bullshit coming at them. I'm not gay by a fucking long shot- I love Celene's pussy too much- but I have to admit everything about them would have made me envious, too. And then when you hear the story of how they finally ended up together, it makes mine and Celene's eight year courtship, even at a distance, seem like a fucking fairytale. Those dudes went through some real shit, surviving a bashing and just barely surviving a fucking bomb."

"Speaking of which, did Phoenix tell you how we're going to deal with you know who?" he lowered his voice because part of the duo was on his way from the bar and headed straight for them.

"You mean the GHB-slinging twinkie and his dealer? She hasn't said yet but I think she has something really special in store for the two of them before she carts their asses to federal prison. The old boy is about to make the FBI's most wanted list. He's been in talks with some lords overseas if you know what I mean."

They quieted then because the waiter had arrived at the table with a platter of drinks.

"We didn't order these," Bruno said, his deep bass voice rising a bit over the loud music.

"I know, Sir. They're courtesy of Mistress Phoenix in appreciation of your regard a bit ago," Sean confirmed.

Gareth and Bruno sipped their drinks while Anthony accepted his but his eyes were glued to the stage while his wife performed. "This is top shelf stuff," Gareth confirmed.

"She said since you've been sitting there all night and have been the most respectful of this rowdy lot, that she wanted to show her appreciation on behalf of the girls."

"Please thank her for us," Bruno said, effectively dismissing the twink.

As both men watched him move off, Gareth said, "So what really brings you in, Bruno? And don't tell me it's specifically for the entertainment or I'll hurl and then throw my drink on you."

Both men laughed. The idea that Bruno would even want a piece of Sarah in her ‘Phoenix' disguise or to watch Shelia was distasteful to them both. "Although I would be more apt to gouge my eyes out with the nearest sharpened object, I actually received a very interesting phone call on my way back here."
"How interesting?"

"So interesting that we'd better wait for Sarah and hope the phone taps in Craig Taylor's humble abode, including his cell, have been planted already."

"I wonder what the hell happened? I saw him go back with her earlier. She made a real pussy boy out of him in front of his friends earlier but I think he liked that since he was like a kid in a candy store when he left them. But an hour later he came out and I could swear you could see steam coming out of his ears."

"I don't know the whole story but it was enough for him to place a call to 'Queenie's enforcer' to rub her out tonight. Something happened with his account and he couldn't wire the money to me. Yeah, something happened."

"I wonder if Justin's mother convinced his wife to cooperate."

Bruno shook his head. "By the sound of his voice, I think it's more likely that she convinced his wife to skip town with the kids and the money."

"Fuck! Based on what Mark Townsend told us before he left, she would have enough to leave and stay gone for a very long time."

"That's what I thought."

Sarah sauntered up to the table just then under the guise of making her rounds. "I need you three to make sure Shelia gets out of here safely."

"Was there ever any doubt? That's why we're here. Anthony and I knew there would be trouble."

"Yeah well this isn't just any kind of trouble but the king of it. One of the men at the Taylor table tonight advised that he wanted her."
"All men want my sister at some point except me," Gareth said.

Sarah shook her head. "This is different, Gareth. He actually threatened Saperstein to his nephew if he didn't have unfettered access to her."

"Dammit. Didn't I warn both you and her about this shit?" Gareth said, steel underlying his voice.

"The others were fine with not having her but this guy is a loose cannon, literally. He's the one we suspected of blowing up Babylon some years ago and it was confirmed tonight. He's a killer- not just a bomb maker- but a fucking killer, you guys."

"So fucking arrest him." Anthony joined the conversation now that Shelia was not on stage anymore.

"You know it doesn't work that way, Ant. I wish sometimes that it did, especially in this case. But there is the new information we gathered tonight. Someone called 'the Boss' has been directing part of the latest attacks on our favorite gay couple. We have to find out who she is."

"She?" all three asked in unison.

"Yeah. She. I swear this thing reeks of Queenie but that's impossible because she's in jail and not likely to see the light of day again because of all the murders she committed, Fred among them."

"But that doesn't stop her from having visitors or phone calls," Bruno said.

"No it doesn't but the calls would most likely have to be local and that's Florida. But there is something I'm missing and you may be onto something. I'll call the captain in the morning and have all the phone records pulled from the prison. Also I think we need to have her cell searched in case she has some dedicated folks within the prison system which would happily and illegally get her access to a cell phone while there."

Gareth smiled. "And that's why we love you. You're always so suspicious of everyone, even cops."

"Hey I'm a cop and I know that the last place anyone would look is at the police. In any event, Bruno, what's up? You got that family settled?"
"Yeah, Sarah, they're good and happy now. But we have other shit to deal with. Did you get the wire taps in place for Craig Taylor's phones."

"I did them myself."

"Why am I not surprised?" Bruno laughed while he shook his head. He'd never met a woman like her except for his ex-boss. Sarah Morrissey was resourceful, handy and a fucking dynamite agent. Her department would be lost without her. "Anyway, you need to check those tapes for the reason I am here."

"Why not just tell me now."

"Because your sleaze ball boss is out of the office. He and his equally sleazy nephew are looking this way."

"I know. I feel their eyes on my back and also know they're curious but you know what happens to curious cats right?"

Bruno smiled wide then. "They get burned by the Phoenix."

She returned his smile. "Exactly. So what the fuck will I be listening for?"

"The hit he tried to get me to do tonight."

"To whom?"

"You, Sarah. He wanted me to kill you. You need to watch your back and that includes those on your team."

"I will. Do you think you can all meet me at the Taylor-Kinneys later tonight. I'm pretty sure that party is still going on."
"It is," Gareth confirmed. "I'll call Brian to make sure. We can probably meet inside his office. Although it's inside his house which is fucking huge, it's still pretty secluded in a back corner of the mansion."

Sarah nodded. "In the meantime, Anthony, I need you to collect your wife, Ty, Todd and get the hell out of here fast. Bruno, I need you to alert Frankie and fill him in on everything we just spoke of."

"What about you?" Anthony asked.

"I'll be there as soon as I can. I also need to put in a call and get my contact here to Pittsburgh within the hour. There is a heavy piece of business that needs to be resolved but I'm going to need Justin Taylor's help doing that."

"Not Brian's?"

"Oh his too but there is more at stake for Justin than he realizes. Now get moving, guys."

Sarah turned on her heel and left the table, moving in the direction of her dressing room. On her way she was accosted by Gary Saperstein and Sean.

He grabbed her arm. "Hey. I'm not paying you to chat it up with your boyfriend," he sneered at her.

She looked him dead in the eyes, green scowling into blue as she flexed her deceptively strong arm. "Kindly remove your hand before you end up missing it and kissing the floor."

He held it tighter. "Who the fuck do you think you're talking to, Phoenix?"

She wasted no time. In a move that shouldn't have been possible in the outfit she wore, Sarah pushed Gary out away from her body, pulling him back in just as quickly and flipped him onto his back. She placed her boot on his throat, leaning her weight into the action effectively limiting his air supply. Sarah relished hearing the wheezing sound as his marginal breath sawed in and out. She pushed her foot a fraction deeper, watching as he grabbed at her foot trying to remove it to no avail. She laughed at his efforts while the others looked on. She threw a wink to Gareth, Bruno and Anthony who watched and guarded a stunned but delighted Shelia. "I quit," she said softly but succinctly. "By the way, you might want to be careful the next time you try to bully someone. You never know what they know."
She walked to her dressing room laughing softly thinking about the way his eye bulged out of his head. *The Sapersteins numbered days just became limited to mere hours.*

*Where Do We Go From Here (1989)/ Stacy Lattisaw featuring Johnny Gill*

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Chapter 37- HAMMERS by Nichelle Wellesly

Author's Notes:

I used "Hammer to Fall" by Queen for the inspiration. I think you'll understand why...LOL

CHAPTER 37

HAMMERS
The atmosphere was jovial and everything Brian and Justin could have wanted or expected. *God bless Emmett Honeycutt*. Despite all the revelations of the day, their reception was beyond what each of them had ever imagined. Brian was surprised at himself most of all. It was late in the evening, the time when he'd been ready to fuck for hours and yet he wasn't in a hurry to end the party. Seeing Justin dance and smile was his everything just now. As always when the two of them danced, they forgot everything and everyone else; they moved as one. Brian couldn't have asked for a better end to celebrate him and Justin.

"Hey now you two, no fucking on the dance floor," Gareth said as he approached forcing Brian and Justin back to reality.

"You'd pay to see that, wouldn't you?" Brian said, laughter evident in his voice.

"Only if you would watch Celene and I when we fuck."

Brian and Justin laughed aloud. "Nope, not on your life pal. Besides I warned Justin long ago about the dangers of watching hetero porn. What kind of role model would I be if I went against that?"

"You're hardly a role model, Old man," Justin said, his good nature shining through.

Gareth still marveled at the difference in Brian Kinney from the one he'd met so many years ago. Gone was the inherent restless playboy and in his place was a mature, well-settled and happy man. "I came to tell you both that you are requested in the office. A friend and colleague of mine and Celene's need to speak with you. It's quite important."

"Fuck! Another crisis to be averted?"

Gareth looked a little uncomfortable but shrugged nonchalantly. "I guess you could say that. But she-"

"She?" Brian and Justin questioned at the same time.
"Yeah, she requested both of you. Sarah is a very unique character... and a dangerous one but I think the problems you've been having warrants meeting with her posthaste."

Brian and Justin took in Gareth's demeanor. The rigidness set of his shoulders spoke of his anxiety and in turned heightened theirs. But they trusted him, Brian more so than Justin. Justin got the sense that as dangerous as this Sarah person was, the man in front of him was a slouch either for all of his calm, self-assured manners. He could see why and Brian were friends.

"Have you spoken to Jules?" Justin asked.

"Just a little while ago. She told me to tell you that she was thinking of you, Justin and that she will see you soon."

"She's coming here?"

"Her services might be needed... or at least that's what Sarah thinks." They headed back toward the office unaware they were being watched by two casual observers. "I can't tell you much about Sarah Morrissey. You have to experience her for yourself but I will tell you this, if there's a way to stop the bad guys and keep you safe, she'll make it happen. If it wasn't for her, Celene and I... well let's just say neither of us would be alive. Trust her."

With that last bit of advice, the three men disappeared into the office, shutting out the sounds of everyone else having a fabulous fucking time.

Complex Triangle

"Hmm... why the long face, Jason?" Emmett asked genuinely curious of the man who had been watching and at the same time avoiding Brian and Justin all night.

"Not so much a long face, Emmett, more like dreading the conversation about some actions of mine."
"Ooh, do tell," Emmett cooed. Never one to turn down good gossip, Emmet wondered what Jason could have possibly done. He knew that he Jason was well-acquainted with the happy couple but if Brian and Justin allowed him to stay at Britin, his actions couldn't have been all that bad.

"You're aware that I've know Brian since college?"

Emmett nodded. "I remember hearing that in passing. Did you know Gareth, too?"

"A bit but not as much or as well as Brian. He and I would trick together but never with each other. Both of us are confirmed tops so it always made for a healthy competition between us as well as trying to get the other to bend over. I was sad that it never happened and that we had lost touch for awhile after we graduated. I would see him whenever he came to New York though. The last time I saw him face-to-face was when he was up for that job with Kennedy and Collins. We reconnected and have been emailing each other for the better part of the last fifteen years."

"Okay but that still doesn't explain your apprehension."

"I fucked Justin. Or more accurately, he fucked me." At Emmett's gasp, he continued. "Not recently but when he was in California some years ago working on that movie from the comic book. Anyway, I was there doing some real estate work for Brett and in comes this really amazing twinkie with an ass that wouldn't quit. He practically vibrated with excitement as he and Brett began talking about the set designs and possible camera angles. Later that night we all went out for drinks and naturally I hit on him. I mean who wouldn't want to hit on Justin? When Justin excused himself to the restroom, Brett warned me about how he was."

"What do you mean?" Emmett was a little wary of the turn the conversation could take. If Jason was a threat to his friends in any way, Emmett wouldn't hesitate to hurt him. Brian and Justin had come through too much, had seen too much and with all they were facing now, they didn't need one more strain on their relationship.

"Brett told me he had a boyfriend- more like a partner- and that they had an arrangement." 

"Yep. Justin only bottoms for one person and that's Brian." At Jason's surprised look, Emmett laughed. "Oh honey, I've been friends with Brian for what seems like forever. I was there the night those two boys met and let me tell you... I never thought in a million years that I would see the Great God Kinney felled let alone by a cute blond twink. But we all soon came to realize that if there was anyone walking God's green earth who could match Brian in debauchery, it was Justin Taylor."
Jason chuckled. "Yeah, I found that out real quick." He smiled softly at the memory. "We went out
dancing later that night and next thing I know we were high as hell but sober enough to fuck. Justin
took charge and I have to admit, I was surprised by how commanding and forceful he was. It was a
major turn-on. I figured if I couldn't have Brian, I would have his boy toy. Only he wasn't a boy toy
then; Justin was all man in spite of his sweet nature out of bed. Not a biddable lad at all but
commanding and demanding- almost menacing but in the best of ways."

"So is it that you want him again?" Emmett wasn't sure of their stand on monogamy. However, he
knew that he hadn't seen them in the backroom as much since Justin came back from his trip to
Rochester. *Hmm maybe?*

"I'll admit that I wouldn't mind but based on how possessive they are of each other, it probably
wouldn't work."

"Not with them in the Honeymoon phase. But I think we should go ask them."

"Why do you want to know?" Jason raised an eyebrow.

Emmett mimicked the motion. "Because if that's going to happen, I want ringside seats and a big vat
of popcorn. That is an event NOT to be missed."

Both men laughed as they headed off in the direction of the office. Jason was glad that he talked to
Emmett. The man was funny and campy but he had a way about him that out a person at easy. Must
be all that sugary sweet Southern hospitality he oozes. They arrived at the office some moments later.
The loud voices coming forth told them that it wasn't the time to interrupt but neither man could
move away. Their curiosity at listening to Justin arguing with a woman- two women- was intriguing
especially since neither had known Justin to raise his voice in anger the way he was. Emmett and
Jason continued to listen, shocked at the conversation and the vehemence laced with venom pouring
from the younger man.

*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Full Circle

Justin couldn't believe what the fuck he'd just witnessed. His father was on screen being fucked by a
woman... *with a dick!* And not just any woman either... Federal Agent Sarah Morrissey. All these
fucking years of being berated and estranged and Craig Taylor liked cock as much as Justin did. Except that cock had to be wielded by a woman with bouncing big tits.

Brian couldn't keep the smile off his face. He'd always suspected that there was more to Craig Taylor than met the eye but even his imagination didn't take him this far. Craig wasn't gay but like a dick up his ass? How the fuck did one interpret that? The smile turned into an outright bark of sharp laughter seeing the look on Justin's face. He was disgusted, bewildered, shocked and oddly turned on at the same time. Brian decided that it must have been seeing his father taking punishment that did it along with the woman's provocative declarations. Brian couldn't deny that the woman dishing it out was skilled- a Domme in every since of the word. Everything about the agent screamed hot, saucy... and fucking lethal even in a role such as taming Craig Taylor.

"Oh my God, you made him-" Justin lost his gift of speech in that moment watching the finale of what Mistress Phoenix had his father do.

"Problem?" Sarah grinned watching her final revenge of the evening on Craig Taylor. The man deserved that and a whole lot more as she was concerned.

Justin looked at her wide eyed as did Brian both in shock at what they had just witnessed but Brian recovered first. "You are fucking unbelievable, you know."

Sarah laughed. "While that's not the first time I've been told that, coming from the legendary Stud of Liberty Avenue, I'll take that as a compliment." She finished her statement with a wink and a smile that would rival Sunshine's. "Now that I have provided you a little leverage to use against your father, I think it's time we got down to another matter of business."

Justin shook the remaining images from his head, catching the last part of her sentence. "What business?"

"I think you should take a seat. My friend and colleague will be back in the room at any moment. She just went to get a drink from the bar and has just arrived from New York."

No sooner than she finished say that, the office door opened to admit someone Justin hadn't expected to see until his next show. "Nicole, what are you doing here?" He rose from his seat to hug her. He hadn't seen her since he left the City to reunite with Brian in Pittsburgh. They kept in touch but there was nothing like seeing the woman who was not only his therapist but someone he called a friend.
"Well this is part of a two-fold visit. I've been called in to help Sarah on a case- one I couldn't pass up. Secondly, I knew that you would need me. The fact that you and Brian have finally gotten your shit together and made this thing official is all gravy."

Justin laughed. "Yeah it took awhile but I've finally succumbed to his charm."

"I think you succumbed to it fifteen years ago, Sunshine." Brian raised an eyebrow as Justin blushed at his reference to the night they met.

"The same could be said of you, Stud." He leaned over and planted a brief but lush kiss on the man he loved before turning back to Nicole and Sarah. "You said you were working on a case. I didn't know you did work for the FBI."

"I don't normally but as I said, this case is special. And Sarah is a very good friend of mine. It's not often we get to collaborate for a joint cause."

"Which is why we needed to see you and Brian, Justin," Sarah said. Her team along with Gareth, Anthony and the woman Justin was introduced to but Brian knew named Shelia, all nodded to Sarah's response.

Justin's innate defenses went up immediately. A sense of foreboding had gripped him making his fight or flight set off within this tense body. Brian noticed and placed a hand at the base of his spine, stroking lightly. "What is it?" Justin breathed, trying to shut off the adrenaline beginning to pump furiously within.

"We need the journal," Nicole said, her voice soft and eyes steady on his blue orbs. At the mention of the book, Justin flinched ever so slightly. She knew what she was asking of him and as much as it pained her, it held all the first hand information they needed. "Justin, I wouldn't ask but that it's pertinent to our investigation. Have you told Brian about it?"

Justin closed his eyes momentarily but snapped them open again. Fear and anger swirled in their depths. "No."

"Told me what?" Brian looked between his lover and his therapist trying to gauge why Justin had gone so rigid at the mention of some book.
"Nothing," Justin answered quickly while at the same time Nicole blurted out, "Everything."

"Well which is it? Nothing or everything?"

"It's- now is not..." Justin couldn't keep his voice from faltering.

"It should have been done long ago, Justin," Nicole stated her voice adamant. She had advised him to reveal this to Brian during a trip to Italy a few years ago. Part of her felt bad for having to make Justin relive this nightmare but the other part was determined to see this through.

Sarah interjected then. "Look, Justin, I know this is hard for you..."

"No you don't, you couldn't possibly fucking know," Justin ranted. He got up from his perch on Brian's lap and began to pace.

"Yeah. I do," Sarah confirmed. "My sister was once in a position that you're in right now but she didn't make it out. I wasn't able to save her in time."

"What's that got to do with me?" It wasn't like Justin to be so unfeeling and uncaring but he couldn't help himself right now. They were asking him to open up dialog with Brian about something he would have rather cut out of his fucking brain than remember at all.

"It's fair that you would ask that," Sarah said, not taking offense to Justin's attitude at this moment. In any other circumstance and with any other person she might have. "I need to bust Saperstein and his nephew tonight. That meeting your father was at was held inside of his new club. I've staking out the place for a few months and I can tell you that the same thing that almost happened to you, actually happened to a few of the women there with his help... and a few of the bouncers too. Gary is no longer small time, Justin and the club is just a cover for he and his nephew to keep rising in the Northeast drug trade. He had to leave New York because of what he and Sean tried to do to you. I need that fucking journal...NOW!"

"Wait... Saperstein? Gary Saperstein?" Brian questioned in disbelief. He thought name would never have to pass his lips again. "What the fuck has he to do with Justin?"

"Justin, it's time you tell Brian all of it," Nicole said.
"But-"

"Justin, I need to know it," Brian said softly. "Full disclosure, remember?" He looked into the angry fearful eyes of his lover knowing that he wasn't going to like what was forthcoming but willing to put his own anger to the side for now. "Please."

Justin crossed over to the windows, looking out onto the landscape without really seeing. The memories of fourteen years ago assaulting his psyche- conjuring up the images of the boys who were too drugged to fight back as they were raped over and over again by the party goers at Sap's house. It was a nightmare then and it was a nightmare now.

"Do you remember the night you spent in jail, Brian?"

"Yeah when Michael got flip at the lip with that cop for speeding while Ted and I were drunk off our asses. I remember you went to Sap's party, having to work so that you could have the weekend off to complete some project for school. Did something happen that night, Sunshine?"

Justin took a deep breath which could be felt by all the occupants of the room but none more so than Brian. He mentally braced himself for what he instinctively knew was the first part of the story.

"When I got there, it didn't seem so bad. There were men everywhere. One of the guys I worked with made small talk with me until he was pulled away from me by one of Gary's friends. Every drug and drink imaginable was there. Gary offered me a hit of his weed. It was really strong shit and I knew it had to be laced with something although I didn't know what at the time. I was already apprehensive about being there, remembering our slight argument before I left the house. When Gary told me to take off my shirt, I asked him why and he confirmed that I was there for decoration. But that was a lie. Another one of his friends came up to us and said that I looked thirsty. A look that I didn't understand at the time passed between them when Gary told him I would have one later."

Justin turned from the window and faced the room, faced Brian before he continued speaking. "I was left on my own for awhile, still feeling like a fish out of water but I couldn't leave just then. It would be a long time before I could since I was being paid double what I would have made working a night at the club. I couldn't afford to let the money go."

"Yeah you could have," Brian said, anger beginning to lace his voice at the remembrance of their many arguments about Brian's money.

Justin looked him into his eyes deeply, almost willing him to understand. "No, Brian, I couldn't. You
were always paying for me to do something- like eat, and live. Fuck you were still paying my hospital bills from the goddamn bashing. I didn't want you to absorb my tuition, too. Anyway, there was coke laid out on the table. I did a couple of lines and chased it down with two Beams. I wasn't feeling any pain. I'd begun to dance around; I felt better than I had in a long time right then. Gary appeared beside me, handing me another drink which I gulped at but handed my half empty glass back to him. ‘Let me show you my place’ he said. Up until then I only stayed in the area with the most people. I followed him and we entered this...large room. It was like a well-lit playroom which I thought was unusual at first. I mean, you and I have been to BDSM clubs Brian and they were always moderately lit but this room..." Justin shook himself out of the memory to continue. "I saw the three of the guys I worked with in drug induced stupors, each being hoisted into a sling. Gary asked me if I'd ever been in one. I told him no. From that date to this one, the only person I ever trusted to confine me- to tie me up- is you Brian. So my adverse reaction to his enticement was automatic. He tried to force me into one but when that didn't work, a couple of his friends started touching me and holding me up against them, pinning my arms out. Gary was down on his knees in front of me, determined to get my pants open. I used what little sense I had left and kicked out. I didn't miss my target, kicking out his two front teeth. I was immediately let go and I ran...and ran. I ran until I reached Daph's. She took one look at me and knew that something had happened but for the life in me, I couldn't tell her what just then. She allowed me to shower and sober up. I'd arrived at the Loft about an hour before you got there. Although I wondered where the hell you were, I was also relieved that I wouldn't have to explain to you why I missed our three a.m. arrangement. I looked over at the bed. It was the exact same way we had left it the morning before so I knew you hadn't slept in it. I changed clothes, threw out the one's I'd left in from the night before. Outside of the way the probably smelled, I wouldn't have wanted to see them again anyway. The shit with Sean some years later didn't go much differently except that he almost definitely succeeded. You had just left and called me to let me know you made it back to the Pitts safely. My beer was open and on the coffee table while I was in the kitchen. Sean was sitting on the couch waiting for me to tutor him. He was still pissed off at that show you and I put on in the backroom of Therapy a few nights before." Justin smiled softly at the memory as did Brian before Justin became serious again. "I didn't know at the time that my drink was spiked with GHB so I finished it, wanting nothing more than to get rid of him so that I could call you back and we could have some hot phone sex which was our custom. About five minutes after I finished my beer, I felt the change. I couldn't focus on shit that I knew in my sleep. I felt hot and cold at the same time. I couldn't move anything but my eyes. At first I thought I was having a stroke or something or it was some fucked-up remnant left over from Chris bat. My head was fucking pounding and I couldn't get Sean to get the fuck up to get me my migraine meds. I could hear and see everything but couldn't respond at all. Inside my head I was screaming but couldn't get my voice to cooperate. While I was processing all of this, Sean was ranting about you and how he was better than you; how after he was through I would leave you for him." Justin laughed bitterly. "As if I would have. During all this he was taking off my clothes and there wasn't a fucking thing I could do about it. Sean stopped when he had me naked, grabbed my phone and shut it off. He then picked up his phone and called someone. At the time I didn't know he had called Gary and told him that I was ready and to hurry up. He moved into position just as Daphne opened the door with her boyfriend of the moment in tow. As initially expected, she thought I was fucking on the couch and began berating me. It was later that she told me how she realized something was extremely wrong. First, I didn't snark back and secondly, I never bottom for anyone but you. That was what spurred her into action. After it was all over and my symptoms started to resemble those after I was bashed, she made me an appointment with Nicole. I couldn't see you because I knew that you would take one look at me and know something was wrong, so I made it a point to keep busy, Brian. I took whatever job was available so that I wouldn't be available or tempted to see you or even enough to sleep for fear of the nightmares that tormented me. It wasn't until we were in Italy at the same time, working for Maserati, that I was able to let anyone near me. I flew Nicole out there from New York so that she would be close by for the week you were there. With her advice I let you heal me again...let you fix me again. Fuck! It always seems that when I'm broken... anyway, now you
know, Brian. Is everybody fucking happy now?!” Justin yelled angry and hurt and feeling victimized all over again for having to relive the terrors.

"I'm sorry you needed to go through that all over again, Justin," Sarah said. And I would be pissed at all of us too if I were you. Where's the journal? The dates are important."

Justin wearily crossed over to the other side of the office where his personal safe was. He could feel every eye in the room watching him but he felt Brian's presence directly behind him. Justin was barely managing to keep the trembling from engulfing his entire body. Brian hugged him from behind and as he had always done, Justin leaned into the embrace absorbing the strength Brian willed into him. "I'm so fucking sorry, Brian," Justin whispered. Brian acknowledged his apology with a slight nod of his head. Tears which Justin couldn't hold back, traveled down his face, leaking onto the white silk of his shirt. He felt Brian's hand swipe them away gently while he wished for the horrible feelings assailing him to go away. Never had he wished he had heeded Brian's warnings as much as this moment when it was all out in the open. He retrieved the leather bound book from the safe then locking it back, turned to face the room stoic in his resolve once more. Without a word, he handed the book to Sarah and promptly left the room, and leaving Brian behind as well.

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This story archived at http://www.midnightwhispers.ca/viewstory.php?sid=3187
When the night has come
And the land is dark
And the moon is the only light we see
No I won't be afraid, no I won’t be afraid
Just as long as you stand, stand by me*

Justin stood looking out of the massive windows of his studio for the second time today. The thumpa-thumpa of the music and loud sounds of the crowd filling his house was oddly comforting. By the sounds of it, everyone- gay and straight- were having the time of their lives. And yet he stood there feeling like his world was falling apart. It wasn't that he was embarrassed by the revelations of...
the hour from Agent Morrissey and Nicole; it was that he had never told Brian... and now he knows. If Justin had had his way, Brian would have never found out about the two times in his life where he was too trusting and the most stupid. Daphne had been urging him to tell Brian about it for years—since both incidents happened, really—but it never seemed to be the right time. When is it ever the right time to admit that you were a damn fool.

He turned briefly at the sound of footfalls on the stairs. He instinctively knew who they belonged to and dreaded the conversation to come. No way Brian would let this rest but in all fairness why should he? Justin had years to process this brand of fuckery. *Shouldn't Brian be allowed to do the same?* He sighed and leaned back into the waiting arms enclosing his slender body. He'd always felt safe in Brian's arms no matter what the circumstances which led him there. Now was no different even though Justin could feel the anger and fear radiating off of the man in waves.

"I never meant for you to find out this way, Brian," Justin whispered as he folded himself into those strong arms more closely.

"Bullshit, Sunshine," Brian responded equally soft. "You were never going to tell me at all, were you?"

Justin debated with himself just then. He wanted to lie, to smooth things over; to deny everything and to hide from it all again. "You're right. I wasn't."

"Why? I thought this relationship was about full disclosure and total honesty. Yet I'm just finding out about the Sap and his fucking nephew? You asked me to trust you but I see now that it doesn't go both ways." Brian moved to detach himself from his lover but Justin held tighter not willing to let him go.

"This wasn't about trust, Brian. You know you have that from me in spades. This was about protecting both you and myself. It was why I asked you to teach me how to trust again in Italy just after Sean's attempted rape."

"Protecting me? Really, Justin? How does you withholding the fact that you were almost raped *twice* protect me?" Brian's voice was angry but the underlying hurt was embedded in each syllable.

Justin's heart broke again at what he was doing to the man he loved with every fiber of his being but Brian had asked him for the truth and he would give it. Even if it destroyed them both in the process. "Brian, what would you have done if you knew?"

"I would have fucking killed them for touching you," Brian spoke without hesitation.

"Exactly," Justin said, his voice soft but his conviction in believing his actions correct no less convincing to Brian's ears. "I knew that especially where Gary was concerned. The two of you have been like oil and water since the days he tried to fuck you and you denied him; since you made it a point to fuck everything that moved except him. Gary was determined to take the one thing you valued above all else even though you never admitted it aloud until years later. He tried to take *me* from *you* in the most hurtful way imaginable, Brian. After the bashing and not being able to be touched then, what do you think a rape would have done to us? What do you think extracting your pound of flesh from Sap's ass would have done to me, Brian? He would have pressed charges, you know; would have had you put away for a long fucking time. Maybe you would have gotten out by now—just now actually but by then where would we have been?"

"Not here."

"You would have been locked up and he would have been left free to terrorize me even further.
Gary knew that and I know within my heart that he expected me to tell you. What better way to have his revenge against you than to fuck me- your partner, your boyfriend, your boy toy or whatever the fuck they labeled me back then? You and I were never a secret and neither was the way we've always felt about each other whether we admitted it or not. As far as Sean goes, it was the same type of situation. I'm sure Gary told him that he couldn't have me because of you and that there was no fucking way I was leaving you without a good reason to. What better way than to destroy me mentally as well as physically? If Daph hadn't come home when she did, Brian, Gary and Sean would have gotten their wish. I would have never let you touch me again. Anyone else, maybe but not you."

"Justin-"

"No. Let me finish. I'm different with you than I am with anyone else. I'm whole and fulfilled in ways that anonymous sex or even Ethan Gold couldn't make me. For a time all those years ago, I lost sight of that even though if I realized the truth then, you were always the one to fix me. With Gary and Sean, you wouldn't have been able to, Brian. I wouldn't have let you. Not because I would have blamed you- you did try to warn me," Justin said with a small smile, "but because I would have been destroyed more than Chris and a fucking bat could have ever done; would have felt unworthy, dirty and used every time you tried to touch me. Chris may have taken part of my memories for a time and may have even tried to kill me but what they tried to do is something that I would have forever remembered. I wouldn't have been able to look at you and not see or feel what they took from me. No matter who I was ever with especially as a bottom, I always thought of you. It sounds sick, I know, but that's the way it has always been. They would have taken the joy of receiving you from me... and I know I wouldn't have gotten it back."

Brian nodded. He understood what Justin was telling him and he couldn't deny the truth of it. Brian bottomed sometimes in his youth but only for Justin as a full-fledged adult. He was the only person Brian trusted enough to do that with. Justin only bottomed for one other person other than him and that was Connor James a long time ago. Justin would fuck but only get fucked by Brian. Everyone knew that, including fucking Sap and his nephew. "Okay, Justin, I get it but no more secrets, Justin. I mean it."

Justin snuggled into Brian, throwing his arms around his neck. "No more, I promise, Brian."

**So darling darling stand by me**

**Oh stand by me**

**Stand oh stand, stand by me**

They stood there as the melodic strains of ‘Stand By Me’ drifted upstairs to fill the air around them with music with the moonlight filtering into the windows. It seemed fitting that they naturally swayed to it as they once again ironed out their differences and came to a new agreement. It was the way, Emmett and Jason had found them.

"Oh so this where the party is," Jason said as he entered the darkened room.

"I guess so," Emmett responded. Turning to Jason, he said, "Although I am taken, kind sir, surely you won't deny me a dance with the fifth most handsome man in attendance."

"Fifth?" Jason raised an eyebrow, a move he'd learned long ago from his former roommate, Brian Kinney.

Emmett smiled wide as did Brian and Justin. "Well there's my Drewsie, then the grooms here and
myself, so yes... you're the fifth."

Jason laughed. He really liked the tall queen who had made him feel at home all day even though the situation could have been really awkward. "Well in that case, Em, I don't mind if I do."

"What the hell are you two doing up here?" Brian asked somewhat impatiently although there was a hint of a smirk on his face. "Looking for a clandestine quickie, Honeycutt?"

Em rolled his eyes. He decided to let the use of his last name slide for now. "No way, Brian. I mean have you seen my hubby? I'd be a fool to fuck that up. But honestly, we were coming to make sure you guys were alright."

"We heard what happened in the office," Jason said.

Justin lowered his eyes but Emmett stopped him. "No, Baby, we're not judging. Never that since we both know what could have happened." 

"But we are saying that any and all help we can give, we will," Jason interjected. "After all, look what my brand of help did here." He smirked at the two men in front of him.

"Speaking of that, I ought to punch you in the mouth, Jason. That was downright dirty," Justin said. He was still a little angry behind the email Jason had sent to Brian in spite of how things got worked out.

"Yeah, I know it was low but it did the trick, didn't it? All fair in love and war, right?"

Brian laughed. "True but exactly which war were you waging?"

Jason smiled, cocking an eyebrow as he did so. "If you have to ask that, my friend, then you'll never know." Then he winked at Justin as he and Emmett continued dancing across the room, leaving the other two men to get lost in each other again.

*If the sky we look upon

Should tumble and fall

And the mountains should crumble to the sea

I won't cry, I won't cry, no I won't shed a tear

Just as long as you stand by me

*As Sung by Ben E. King

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This story archived at http://www.midnightwhispers.ca/viewstory.php?sid=3187
*I remember all of the things that I thought I wanted to be

So desperate for me to find a way out of my world and finally breathe

Right before my eyes I saw my heart it came to life

This ain't easy

It's not meant to be

Every story has its scars*

Brian laid there watching Justin sleep, looking around the room that Daphne and Troy had decorated to make Brian and Justin's first official night special for them both, since the previous night had been ruined by Michael and Ian's devious tactics. If this had been any other occasion, Brian might have secretly regretted asking Justin to marry him...or in their case commit to him. But he couldn't. After more than fifteen years of hard-won battles fought-- both individually and collectively-- Justin Taylor was finally his, permanently and irrevocably, and that fact made it all worth it.

But now there were all these new revelations; things Justin had been keeping from him. Justin's stated reason was to spare Brian, but Brian didn't believe that was the only deciding factor. Justin was scared. And it wasn't only a specific kind of fear either. It was that paralyzing, thought-provoking kind of fear; the kind which was the source of recurring nightmares both sleeping and awake; the kind Brian himself fought daily for many years after Justin's bashing. Sarah had told Brian to let her and her team handle the Sapperstein mess, but Brian knew from personal experience that the law could only work within limits. Chris Hobbs and the release of James Stockwell back into society was proof-positive of that. Brian wasn't about to let Gary and Sean Saperstein get away with what they had tried to do to Justin. If that meant Brian would have to do jail time because of the ass kicking he was about to administer, then so be it-- whatever it took for Justin to feel safe again.

*No river is too wide or too deep to me to swim to you

Come whatever I'll be the shelter that won't let the rain come through

Your love it is my truth

And I will always love you*

Brian watched as the blond tossed in his sleep, seeking the warmth and safety that only Brian's love could provide. Justin clung to him as one would a raft given to a drowning man. The incoherent mumbles coming from Justin continued to batter Brian's already bruised heart as he realized yet again
that he couldn't help Justin through this. It was another of the side effects from the trauma inflicted on him years ago. All Brian could do was croon reassuringly and hold Justin a little tighter to let his sleeping blond know that he was there. After a time, when Justin finally quieted, Brian exited the bed and poured himself a drink while looking out over the landscape from their bedroom. He relished the familiar burn of the amber liquid sliding down his gullet but the pristine view of the grounds surrounding the mansion did nothing to quell the inner turmoil Brian had experienced, the feelings of helplessness and misplaced shame he felt for not knowing the brand of mental anguish inflicted on Justin and his powerlessness to stop it...again.

*When the pain cuts you deep
When the night keeps you from sleeping
Just look and you will see
That I will be your Remedy
When the world seems so cruel
And your heart makes you feel like a fool
I promise you will see
That I will be your remedy*

Making a split second decision, he headed toward the closet, pulling out his favorite pair of black jeans and a dark turtleneck. Donning his well-worn leather jacket, Brian made his way back over to the bed. Justin was still sleeping; his breathing evening out, letting Brian know that he was no longer dreaming. Brian bent over and placed a gentle kiss on the blond mop top he'd come to know and love, then exited the bedroom before he had a chance to change his mind. He raced down the stairs toward the kitchen, hoping to get out of the house before anyone woke up. It was just before four a.m. and he knew that Drew in particular would be up for his morning run momentarily. Grabbing the keys off the hook, Brian was surprised when a voice came from behind him.

"I figured you'd be up soon, if you even bothered to go to sleep," Sarah said, sitting at the counter as if she magically appeared out of nowhere.

"Should I add ninja to your long list of talents, Agent Morrissey?" Brian asked, his voice dripping with exasperation and reluctant respect. He sighed. "What the fuck are you doing up this time of morning?"

"I could ask you the same thing, Brian, except that I already had you pegged for a vigilante the moment I met you," she said smiling, her respect just as grudging as his toward her. She understood where Brian was coming from and told him so. "Ordinarily I would agree with what you have planned, but you and I both know that this is not the way to avenge Justin."
"And just what do I 'have planned'?

Sarah scoffed at his attempt to play dumb. "You're going after the Sapersteins. Don't play ignorant, Kinney, it doesn't become you."

Brian gave up all attempts at being civil. "All you care about is getting this case solved and getting to the big fucking fish, whomever it is. I care about Justin and Justin only."

"I'm perfectly aware of that, Brian," Sarah agreed. "But if you think that is my only stake in this, then you don't know me too well. Why don't you fix us some coffee and I'll tell you a story."

"I don't want to hear any fucking fairy tales. I don't have the time for it," he said even as he unconsciously tapped the start button on the machine.

"Good because I wasn't going to indulge your need to be coddled with happily ever after. This isn't that type of story." She raised both of her eyebrows, daring him to challenge her reasoning or assumptions in reference to him. "Just make the goddamn coffee and sit your ass down. It might actually help you to understand a few things about the people we're dealing with, including me."

Brian rolled his eyes and smirked at her response, acknowledging that there was more to the statuesque agent than met the eye. Somehow that bit of knowledge helped Brian to calm down enough to hear what she had to say whether relevant or not. Grabbing two mugs from the cabinet, he took his time about pouring. He couldn't help the smile which graced his lips when Sarah confirmed that she took her coffee similar to the way Brian made his own. The grudging respect continued as she took a sip and nearly moaned aloud at the flavor of the robust Italian dark blend.

"Now that you have your morning fix, you want to tell me what the fuck is going on? Why did you and Nicole feel the need to ambush Justin like that?" Brian was still pissed off that they had done it.

Sarah nodded. "That was Nicole's idea, and from the results, I'd say we were right to do so. Although she had kept his confidence and didn't reveal all of contents of their meetings through the years to me, she did warn that he would be more than reluctant to talk about any of it. Justin has developed an avoidance disorder. I suppose it has served him in the past but he can't afford to indulge it anymore."

"It didn't just start," Brian said. "It's a defense mechanism which began many years ago. I'm partially at fault especially after the bashing. You see, as much as Justin was going through his own trials
trying to come to terms with it all and what it meant for his career, so was I. It was just easier for both of us if we didn't speak about it. Self-medicating was the better option." Brian smirked.

"You mean drugs, alcohol and endless sex?" When Brian nodded, so did Sarah. "Been there, done that, wrote the handbook and made fucking t-shirts." Brian snickered before she continued. "I did the same right after my sister died because of them. It took me awhile to understand that. It was just easier to blame everything on myself, you know?"

"What happened to her?" Brian was genuinely interested. If this slight but strong creature had some inclination of who was trying to destroy them, then he was all ears. All Brian and Justin wanted to do was live their lives, have sex, and be rich, successful and together while doing it. They weren't interested in furthering a political agenda as most with long money would be. They just wanted to live in peace; they deserved that much.

"My sister worked for a Microsoft-esque company with ties to the ‘organization’ hell-bent on eradicating everything which doesn't serve their purpose including gays, the working middle class and poor people. If these people were to pool their resources and talents together, the folks currently in office who were in charge of let's say, the drug trade in America, wouldn't have been elected. Instead it is to their benefit to spread hate and keep everyone divided."

"What does that have to do with Justin and me?"

"It's simple really. You two have entirely too much money between you. If one of you did decide to have a political agenda, you certainly have the money to back whomever would serve your own purpose. Anyway, my sister found out about one of the higher ups in the organization and the man just happened to be her boss. Fred Pierce, along with his adopted sister, Tamara St. Giles, ran the biggest drug and human trafficking operation on the East Coast until a few years ago. Tamara, also known as the drug pin Queenie, has a son by a Senator who was helping her gather information. At the time Lissette found out about Fred, she was dealing with her husband's leukemia and the effects of that as well. Fred, whose public persona was good and upstanding..."

"Much like Jim Stockwell's--" Brian added.

"Exactly like Stockwell's." She nodded before continuing. "He had done a lot of good for the community including erecting 24-hour daycare centers for single parents who had to work nights. Yeah, he was a real fucking good samaritan to those who didn't know the bastard who began to blackmail her. Either she fucked him until he said he was through with her or she could kiss her job goodbye. No matter how he phrased it and made it seem like consensual sex, it was rape. Unfortunately, she didn't confide in anyone until it was entirely too late. Due to the leukemia, she and her husband couldn't have children so imagine what happened when she found herself pregnant."
"Fuck! How...is she?"

"Dead. She killed herself," Sarah said, sighing deeply forcing back the tears. "I didn't find out until after she was already gone. A friend of mine who worked for the same company was put in the same position. Thanks to her, we've put Tamara away, but it still has not lessened her influence."

"And this Fred guy? What of him?"

"Tamara killed him personally. Dismembered, disemboweled, and decapitated him."

Brian winced at Sarah's matter-of-fact tone. He couldn't imagine women being such vicious and cruel bitches as the agent was describing. Brian swallowed hard at the thought as he continued to piece together the information Sarah was giving him. "This friend of yours... is that the friend of Justin's?"

"Julienne McKay. Indeed it is. She's as blonde as Justin and just as fucking smart and brave. Her story is... well it would have been unbelievable if I hadn't been a part of it. If you think it was your worse fate to have a mother like Joan Kinney, you should have met Julienne's who had contracted her own daughter into sex slavery years prior to this case to pay for her and her husband's repeated drug use. Fred and Tamara had inherited the business...or more accurately Tamara ordered assassinations in her father's name while he was on vacation. She put hits out on the head of the other families under her father's rule before she forced him to turn the business-- both to include drugs and human trafficking-- over to her. It became Fred's job to lure the women; Gary Sapperstein was a lure for the men since he was gay and had access to that world. Sean was the tool which Gary used for obvious reasons since the twink is extremely attractive with his dimples and curly hair. As for Queenie, she lured both men and women since she's bisexual and attractive."

"And they wanted Justin?" Brian asked bewildered.

Sarah smiled but there was no warmth in it at all. "Their purpose in wanting Justin was three-fold. First they wanted to fuck him but that's a given. He's beautiful and picture perfect; any man would want him...women too, I suspect. He is like Julienne in that they are both beautiful, blond and have an innocent quality about them even though they are anything but." This time when she smiled, it went straight to her eyes which softened as she thought about the blond sleeping upstairs but then she got back to business. "The second purpose was to have revenge on both of you. There was no question that Justin was totally and completely in love with you, and although you have an open-relationship.."
"Had," Brian corrected immediately and without thought.

"No shit?" Sarah's eyes connected with Brian's trying to gauge the truth of his words. Everyone within their world-- gay or straight-- knew about Brian Kinney and Justin Taylor's sexual proclivities. It wasn't something they bothered to hide. "Well that's news to me. Anyway, it rankled that he wouldn't even consider a 'relationship' with Sean since the boy was head-over-heels in love with Justin. Sean knew that the only way to get him away from you was to fuck him, not the other way around. It was public knowledge that no one other than Brian Kinney got into Justin's ass. So Sean figured that if he fucked Justin, you wouldn't want him anymore and he would take Justin from you by default. Then when he was done, he'd hand him over to Gary for either sale or as his personal slave."

Brian nodded at her revelation. "And the third reason?"

"It would destroy you," she said simply. "Justin meant more to you than you would let on, but it doesn't mean other people haven't or didn't take notice."

"So they would destroy him to get to me?"

"They would destroy BOTH of you, Brian. This is NOT your fault. They are warped in ways you can't possibly imagine and they are power-hungry. Based on what you and Justin did with the Stockwell campaign, they have reason to fear you should you two choose to organize again."

"But Justin had little to do with that..." Brian began only to be silenced by Sarah's look. He shook his head and released a harsh sigh. "Okay, I'll give you that, Sarah. Justin and I have always worked well together."

"Yes you have, and although individually you guys are great, together you are unstoppable. Look at your careers. By yourselves, you each have made vast amounts of money, but now Maserati won't even consider a company like Vanguard to look at their campaigns."

"That's just good business," Brian waved the compliment away.

"No. That's the magic of the Taylor-Kinney faction and this is no different."

Brian swallowed a large gulp of coffee while digesting her words. "So you're saying that they will
try to make a play for Justin again?"

"I'm not sure but I trust no bitch or mitch, and you guys certainly seem to attract both."

"So what can we do?" Brian asked, already knowing the answer but needing to hear it anyway.

"Let us handle it," Sarah said almost pleading with Brian to understand the importance of her statement. As expected, he started to argue, but she cut him off. "Brian, these people... they're ruthless and will use anyone and anything to achieve their goals. I don't want Justin, or you for that matter, to end up like Lissette or Julienne. She still has nightmares and panic attacks. If you don't believe me ask Gareth, Celene, Anthony and Sheila since they have been through it with her and they know what we're facing. The network is very large and very dangerous."

"If that's the case then how the fuck are you going to be able to protect us, Sarah? Justin and I can't hide ourselves away, if that's what you're thinking. Our businesses and families depend on us more than you could possibly know or understand."

"I get it, Brian, I really do. So our only other option outside of protective custody, is to guard every one of you. You, Justin, and those closest to you including your son Gus."

"Gus?"

Sarah almost bit her tongue off for what she just disclosed. But she reasoned that if she was going to gain Brian and Justin's trust and cooperation, then she needed to level with them as much as her job would let her. "There was some question about whether Gus-- as a straight man and regardless that he's your son-- could be turned against you. With John's defection from the organization, they need another insider."

"And they would think to use my own son? That's fucking sick."

"If they used Craig's hate for Justin and John's pseudo-hate for you, what would make you think they wouldn't stoop so low as to use your own flesh and blood?"

Brian thought about what she said. There was bad blood between Craig and Justin as there was between Brian and Craig. John's situation was a lot different because the opinions he'd originally formed of Brian and Justin were not his own; they were Claire's and Joan's. "Fine."
"Fine?"

Brian shrugged. "Yeah fine but I want a favor."

Sarah looked at him cautiously over the rim of her coffee cup before taking a sip. "What kind of favor?"

Brian made his demand without hesitation. "I want to deal with Saperstein personally."

"Brian, I can't--"

"You want my cooperation, this is the price of it."

"Not your life?" Sarah asked, trying to make him see reason.

Brian answered, determined to make her see his point. "I could give a fuck about my life right now, as long as Justin is safe. He IS my life, Sarah. All that matters to me is that he's free to live his life fearlessly."

"And you think taking care of Gary and Sean will achieve that?"

"For me it will. Well at least at first. I know that the Saps are the little fish in the big pond but they have the best chance of getting to Justin especially since John is no longer available for service. Look, you can even go with me as long as you don't get in my way."

Sarah laughed. She looked at the man before her again. Brian Kinney was a man on a mission, and as determined to protect his partner as she was to do her job. Sarah shrugged her shoulders before answering him. "Well I always did enjoy walking the fine line between upholding the law and operating just shy of it. One thing though...you can't kill him."

Brian smiled for the first time since finding out about the Sapp and his nephew's machinations. "I wouldn't dream about killing him. I just plan on issuing a sternly-given warning. Gary Saperstein
always was a coward and an opportunist."

"Both of which you plan to take advantage of?"

"I wouldn't be as successful as I am if I wasn't good at manipulating the situation to suit my own ends."

"Does that go just for business or in life as well?" Sarah asked genuinely curious. Brian struck her as unfailingly honest.

"A little of both. The largest and most lucrative part of selling an ad campaign is creating an idea in a customer's mind that they can't do without what I'm selling."

"And did that work for Justin as well?"

"Not a fucking chance," Brian laughed. "But then, the little blond imp has always been on to me."

Sarah joined in the laughter. "Based on all he's written in his journal, I can say that the feeling is entirely mutual. But that brings up one more issue."

"And that is?"

"Ethan Gold and Michael Novotny. Justin was pretty clear on his feelings about both of them." At Brian's sudden wary look, she rushed to reassure him. "He hadn't written about Ethan for many years except in the comparison to Sean Saperstein which was given in detail and was a major turn-off, per his words. But there was more regarding Michael Novotny. Enough for several volumes really. I have to say I was surprised by his ambivalent feelings regarding the man especially since Justin is a man who either takes a strong like or an even stronger dislike to someone or something."

Brian nodded. "To say there is a strong feeling of dislike between them at the moment would be an understatement. I suppose someone told you about what happened at dinner last night?"

"Yes. Jennifer, with numerous interruptions by Debbie of course."
"Of course." Brian sighed audibly, the sound reminding Sarah of heartbreak and weariness. "Michael has always been territorial. From the very beginning of my involvement with Justin, he's done many things to interfere with that. On any number of occasions Justin has tried to overlook or excuse his behavior refusing to put me in the middle and force me to make a choice between my childhood friend and the love of my life. It continued to be a sore point until yesterday."

"Justin said he was more hurt than angry, and then his attitude toward Michael became irate and combative."

"That sounds about right but it wasn't without good reason. Outside of the fact that Michael is a person that doesn't like change, he also doesn't like that Justin was able to get something from me that he wasn't."

"Your heart?"

Brian raised his eyebrow. "Among other things."

Sarah once again laughed. "Well if your reputation is any indication of what he wanted then I believe there will be a lot more people trying to separate you both."

"Justin has a similar rep as a top but honestly, he's the only one who could keep up with me as a bottom. Besides, the very man that Michael wants is the man that I've become, but only for Justin. And that's Michael's problem. I would only change for Justin and yet I haven't; Michael is the only one who sees it that way. He liked the mystique of me, the devil-may-care persona I showed everyone, but wanted out of me what Justin has brought out. If anything, Justin dared to pick at and peel the layers which kept the 'real' me hidden away and whereas I still don't show it publicly, the people that matter know about it. Justin, Daphne, Jennifer, Lindsey, Gus, Emmett, Ted and Cynthia--the people who have been with me and stood in mine and Justin's corner during our separation--know what Michael refuses to accept. Justin Taylor-Kinney is and will always be the only man for me. The sad thing is that his churlishness and childhood dreams of 'us' may have cost him a good man who loves him unconditionally. Ben deserves better."

Sarah agreed. Justin's account of the mess with Michael Novotny and the other accounts of the man she'd heard about, made her almost relieved that he was no longer a part of their lives. He would have been a complication and a possible tool that they just didn't need. Someone filled with that much hatred against one of the Taylor-Kinneys was definitely someone who would have to be watched carefully. Based on what he'd already done by having Ethan Gold show up in a place he was clearly not invited nor wanted just proved how spiteful and unscrupulous Michael Novotny could be. Shifting her focus to the problem at hand. "So how should we confront Gary Sapperstein?"
"Well since I doubt you'd let me borrow your gun, I guess we should come up with some nonviolent, ineffectual plan." Brian rolled his eyes as he refilled their coffee to continue his conversation with a woman who looked like anything but an FBI agent.

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Why Not Me?

Michael woke up from yet another dream of reminiscence. In his dream he relived the waking nightmare of just a mere twenty-four hours ago. The one where his best friend had officially traded his irrevocable and pure love for that of a blond twink. Brian had been more than clear that he wouldn't like the result of making him choose, but Michael had refused to listen, kept believing that their friendship-- that their relationship-- was worth more than Justin Taylor. He couldn't still couldn't believe that Brian had dumped him faster than a hot potato. What did Justin have that he didn't, other than a really hot ass?

When he had arrived on David's doorstep, it had been a welcome surprise to the older man despite his partner, Joseph's aversion to his presence. As far as Michael was concerned, Joseph could stick his own dick up his ass and get glad because Michael wasn't there to see him anyway. At first David had fussed and fawned over Michael, examining his still-battered face with gentleness and care he had not received from Daphne and Troy the night before. When David had asked what happened to him and who was responsible for turning his once brown eyes black, Michael couldn't help but spill the entire story, naming Justin as the culprit. Even as David radiated sympathy, Joseph laughed and said that he was lucky all he got was a couple of black eyes and a busted lip to show for his efforts to ruin what was supposed to be a happy occasion. David had sent Joseph into the other room stating that Michael had not needed to hear that at the moment. Michael was gratified by David's actions.

Michael readjusted the pillows on the guest bed as he thought back over their conversation once Michael was cleaned up. David had asked Michael if he finally understood why he and Brian had never gotten along while he dated Michael. Michael's response was because both men loved him in the same way. David had shaken his head at Michael's answer before speaking again.

"Michael, Brian never loved you the way you wanted him to. I thought so at first but after we broke up, I noticed that I held Brian responsible for something that was not his fault. I wasn't the only one to do that. Melanie did as well. You and Lindsey..."

"That's bullshit, David and you know it. Lindz and Mel had their own problems and Brian had nothing to do with that."
"That's right, he didn't, Michael. But same as you, Lindsey never hesitated to inject Brianisms into every conversation, or seek his advice on things that had nothing to do with him or try to keep Brian Kinney in a box specially marked 'my youth' so that he would never grow up and change. When he did, you felt threatened Michael. Whereas Lindsey had long-since grown out of her fascination with the man and allowed him to live his own life as he wanted-- with the man he wanted to-- you have not, despite the fact that you are married to an amazing man yourself." David said calmly, wishing more than anything that Michael would finally take heed to him.

"What would you know about it, David?" Michael asked. "When I met you, you were already settled in your life. You had a career, had been places...you had a son for fuck's sake."

"That's true, but so did Brian, Michael."

"Yeah but you wanted yours. You were more than a drop-in dad whenever the mood suited you. You didn't go to Babylon or drink and drug to excess."

"And I'm willing to bet that when Justin showed up in Brian's life he was on the verge of giving all of that up, too," David told the brunet. "There was a weariness about Brian no matter how much he tried to hide it from himself, from Justin, and from the rest of you who expected him to stay the same as he always was. You constantly told him to grow up while encouraging him to stay the same playboy he'd always been. However, Justin wouldn't let him. That kid allowed Brian to be the man you all kept him from being."

"What the fuck is that supposed to mean?"

David sighed. He really believed that he and Brian could have been at least decent acquaintances had he seen all of this when they were a part of each other's daily lives. It had taken Joseph to point these things out. "It means that you were in love-- are in love-- with a man who never existed Michael. You put Brian Kinney upon a pedestal, living vicariously through him and his exploits while safely achieving the dream you wished for you and Brian, with Ben. It's a case of 'wrong man, right life.' And now that you have seen that Brian is with his own Mr. Right, you have systematically destroyed both of the most important relationships in your life. Your marriage may very well be over, and you said that Brian wants nothing more to do with you because he won't jeopardize what he has with his husband."

"Justin is NOT his fucking husband," Michael retorted the venom clear in his voice.
"Semantics, Michael." David sighed. "For all intents and purposes, Justin Taylor IS Brian Kinney's husband. The announcement which was in the society paper yesterday here in Portland stated that clearly. They are officially Domestic Partners and Justin has added Brian's name to his own. In reality, their 'partnership' is more legally binding than having a marriage certificate Michael, and a helluva lot harder to get out of than a simple divorce." David got up and handed Michael the paper, watching his face pale as he read the same words David spoke.

"What the fuck am I supposed to do now?" Michael asked, the brokenness evident in his voice. When faced with Brian and Justin's commitment in the black and white print, he knew there was no longer a way for him to deny that Brian was serious about Justin-- something he'd happily done for the last fifteen years. The article even talked of their beginnings and living in separate cities even as they continued to have a 'relationship' of sorts.

David had reached across the table then to hold Michael's trembling hand. He spoke softly, his voice full of sympathy for the man he still considered a friend, "You're supposed to move on, Michael. You're supposed to decide what's best for your life. With or without Brian or Ben in it, you still have to live your own life. It's time to grow up now and stop living on the fringes of adulthood Michael. The first step to that would be to take responsibility for your actions."

"But I've done that, David. I've apologized to Brian," Michael argued but David shook his head.

"Brian's forgiveness is not the one you need. Justin is the one you harmed with your childish antics and churlishness."

"What the fuck do I have to apologize to him for? All I did was call attention to his and Ethan Gold's ongoing relationship."

David laughed but there was no humor in it. "You still don't get it do you? Whether there was a relationship or not-- and there certainly is NOT-- it wasn't your place to interfere, Michael. Your obsession with Brian Kinney has cost you more than you can admit even to yourself, yet you still refuse to acknowledge your part in its destruction." David got up from the table. "You can stay as long as you need to Michael, but you really have to decide what you want to do."

"Oh I'll just bet Joseph will love that."

"No he won't like it at all but he knows he has nothing to worry about where you and I are concerned, Michael. And also because he loves me, he won't mind me wanting to help my friend. The only question he will have is if my friend will be willing to accept the help. I'll leave you to think about that."
David moved off in the direction of the atrium. True to his word he explained Michael's presence to Joseph and although his reception wasn't warm, Joseph accepted Michael's presence with as much grace as the man could muster. His manner reminded Michael of Justin and Linsdey in its pseudo-warmth and Country Club affectations when they would really rather not be bothered. During dinner, Michael had looked at his cell phone. He had twenty-six missed calls from his mother but none from Brian nor Ben. He wasn't sure how to feel about Ben not calling but Brian not calling to check on him had such a feeling of finality to it that his already bruised heart shattered. Perhaps David was right and it was time to let Brian go since it had seemed that he had no problem letting Michael go. But again how the fuck was he supposed to do that? Either way, he needed to decide what to do about Ben. Was he really prepared to spend the rest of his life without love or getting to know someone again before love bloomed between them. Or was it better to go home and work things out with Ben? He really didn't know what he wanted anymore. Everything, his entire existence since he was fourteen, was centered on Brian, a man who no longer wanted him-- who had never wanted him the way Michael had wanted him. So now, what the fuck was he supposed to do?

Michael tossed in bed again. He knew in that moment that there was no way he could leave David's until he figured that out.

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For All His Faults...

Ethan left the hospital, still sore from his self-inflicted injuries and thoroughly disheartened from Justin's defection. What the fuck is it about Brian fucking Kinney? The thought popped in his head, not for the first time, since meeting Justin Taylor all those years ago. While he laid in his hospital bed he’d done a google search on both Brian and Justin trying to figure out an angle to get to Justin again. Yes, Brian was handsome but then so were a lot of men. Looking at Brian Kinney’s net worth, Ethan was both appalled and envious by turns, thinking that if he had a tenth of what the man had, Justin would flock to him like flies to shit. But then when he looked at Justin's net worth he had to reevaluate his stance about wealth. Justin had just as much money and property as Brian Kinney and that was saying a lot. He went through Justin's online art portfolio finally acknowledging that Justin's talent, which he had only thought of as a hobby when they were together. It was beyond fucking lucrative, his paintings now selling in the six-figure range. He was a fucking genius and once again Ethan felt the loss of Justin Cole Taylor keenly. He looked at their joint ventures as well as Justin's business, JT Designs and the Kinnetik annual report for 2014. All of these things were public knowledge and it became blaringly evident that Justin was not with Brian for what he could do for him financially. The last page of his search caused Ethan's heart to ache in ways that made his bruised ribs feel like a scratch. There in the society pages of Pittsburgh OUT was the announcement and full history of the Domestic Partnership of Brian Aidan Kinney and Justin Cole Taylor-Kinney, the latter who had officially added ‘Kinney’ despite a state issued marriage license. What the fuck?! Ethan realized in that moment that short of Brian dying, Justin would never leave Brian, especially for him.

He pulled the collar of his trench coat around him a bit more to try to ward of the chill from the air.
but mostly the cold emanating from the inside of him. Without Justin he never felt warm. Love radiated from the blond like heat from a well-serviced furnace and he spent years feeling like he was lost in a wilderness without Justin. The worse part of it was that he'd thrown it away with lies and fucking other people. The funny thing was that Justin didn't care about Ethan fucking someone else; he had his own promiscuous tendencies after being with Brian. It was that he'd broken a promise to Justin that was the deciding factor. Ethan didn't understand that at first, but he did now. The promise or idea of fidelity is not the same as being faithful in terms of relationships. All Brian ever promised Justin was to be honest with him, whereas Ethan promised that he wouldn't fuck anyone else; that Justin was enough for him. In retrospect, Ethan understood where the breakdown in their communication had stemmed from. And there was no way Ethan could get Justin back. There was no way Justin would let him take back the worst mistake of his life.

During the drive back to Pittsburgh from somewhere in West Virginia, Ethan tried to go through all of the scenarios that would destroy Brian and Justin's idyllic happiness. Everything he had tried thus far hadn't worked-- the serenade at the suggestion of Michael Novotny, Brian's planned arrest for his 'assault,' the intentional text messages which were designed to cause an irreparable rift between Brian and Justin...none of it resulted in Justin being free of Brian Kinney. Instead all of his efforts resulted in several restraining orders forbidding him from showing up anywhere Justin and Brian would be like their homes, businesses and certain eating establishments. He wasn't supposed to call or text Justin at all and had been advised that the police would be keeping an eye on Justin's phone records but he wasn't going to give up on Justin Taylor (he refused to acknowledge that he was married) now or ever. He would fight to regain Justin's friendship and ultimately his love. In his mind, Justin owed him at least that much.

He knew he had to have help but Cody was no longer a part of his life. He'd called Ethan while he was laid up in the hospital bed to tell him that it was over and that he'd received a job offer in New Jersey which he was taking. It pissed Ethan off more than anything, since he had been depending on Cody to pay the rent for the apartment he'd moved back into after his career tanked. He didn't know what became of Michael Novotny and honestly didn't care. He had served his purpose in getting Justin to notice Ethan at all in the presence of Brian Kinney. Of course that hadn't turned out the way he and Michael had planned but still it had gained Justin's attention so it was worth it to Ethan.

The more he thought about the impotence he felt in achieving his goal, the angrier he became. He hit the steering wheel, yelling "This is not supposed to be my fucking life," blaming Brian for all his carefully laid plans of the last fourteen years going wrong. He'd always thought that Justin would come back to him especially after he'd tried to isolate him from his 'family,' the group of misfits who had taken Justin in when he was kicked out at seventeen. He reasoned that if Brian hadn't taken Justin back all those years ago, then he and Justin could have picked up where they had left off. He would have apologized-- groveled if he had to-- and Justin would have taken him back because the sweet blond was forgiving and a naive needy little thing back then. But Justin isn't that man anymore, if he ever was, his more rational mind thought even while the selfish part of Ethan argued that there was no way Brian could make Justin happy. It never even occurred to him that Justin knew within his own heart that he and Ethan would not last; that he was simply a diversion and a self-inflicted punishment to Justin.
Ethan suddenly felt weary of thinking while reliving the past. Taking his eyes off the road while reaching for the radio, he switched the station until he happened upon the latest haunting ballad sung by Adele simply titled 'Hello.' As he closed his eyes briefly to absorb the lyrics into his soul and thinking how much the song resembled his feelings for Justin, he wasn't at all prepared for the upcoming traffic or the gray sedan which was heading in the opposite direction. He skidded into across the divider as he swerved to avoid crashing the car in front of him. He continued to press the brakes with both feet trying his best to stop the car which had hit the driver's side of the passing vehicle but due to the icy road there was no way to stop the inevitable. As a result both his and the other car fell off the ravine on the highway, both flipping numerous times. Ethan smelled the blood, burned rubber of his tires and the strongest odor of gas. He could only pray that it wasn't from his vehicle but knew the chances of that not being the case were slim to none. Tears fell from his eyes as he suddenly stopped seeing the world upside down when the car was jarred. He looked at the tree which had stopped his car's progress almost laughing at his luck but cursing the fact that he could not move. Ethan looked down at his mangled wrists, the smell of gas still permeating his nostrils. He watched in slow motion as the driver of the other car sat up, eyes wide; watched as realization dawned in the other man's eyes that he also could not move to save himself. The guy was saying something to him but Ethan could barely understand. 'You. Fucking. Idiot. You fucking faggot.'Then Ethan couldn't hold his neck up anymore to pay attention to the other driver. Whatever the guy was going to say couldn't have been that important anyway. Ethan already knew his type-- a bigot even in that. His last thought was Justin, I love you as the darkness enveloped him.

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Crossroads

Kevin Dixon had his orders from the ‘Boss.’ As a result he was on his way back out to the mansion known as Britin to dispose of Brian and Justin Kinney personally. It would be his pleasure but first he had to ask for pseudo-forgiveness from Justin himself. It was the only way to gain his trust and do what his assignment called for. By all accounts of the young man he had become, Justin was quick to forgive even sometimes at his own detriment. The problem with that was that the blond was also intelligent and wise beyond his years. From what he remembered of Taylor before he announced he was gay, was that the boy was a good judge of character. He sure had his father pegged all the years they’d been estranged, and even before that really. Justin never stopped trying to reach Craig Taylor emotionally but eventually he realized it was a lost cause, especially when the older Taylor had the younger arrested. It still puzzled Kevin how Craig could actually work with the Hobbs family regardless of the reasons or the fact that Kevin had arranged for the bashing in the first place. He didn’t know if he could be that heartless...but then again, he didn’t have children for that reason either.

He was still pissed off at the Taylor-Kinneys and their offspring, Gus, for causing him to lose his fiancee and with it the joint account Janice was close to setting up with his name added on. Although she was well off individually, she was also a trust fund baby which was unusual as a black embedded in the WASP nest. Daphne Chanders and her family were another of the phenomenon. No, they would never reach the upper echelons that he, Samuel Hobbs and Jennifer Taylor's husband, Tucker, had reached but they were damned close. A little too close for his cohorts' comfort, which was why he'd been ordered to snap Janice up and keep control of her.
Now that he had failed in containing the Kellys, it was up to him to permanently contain the Taylor-Kinneys from the inside out. He had also been ordered to dispose of John Townsend who knew too much and had entirely too much loyalty to his queer uncle to be trusted. Kevin had noticed the younger man he was with and wondered what the connection was. It was something that no one had been able to pinpoint or if they had, no one had bothered to mention the association. There was too much about the Taylor-Kinney faction that didn't add up including why Jennifer Taylor...or better yet Jennifer Armstrong was still associating with Justin. He was given to understand that they were estranged as well. Apparently, Craig Taylor had not been as forthcoming with information and one had to wonder why. He'd noticed Molly Taylor at the reception and while she looked daggers at him, she had kept her distance. Was there some opportunity in that direction?

He was so deep in thought that he pressed his brakes as a delayed reaction...Oh FUCK!!

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Opportunity Knocks

Craig Taylor had spent a restless night wondering what Madison was up to. He called Saul back a few hours ago advising that Madison had voluntarily left him and he had no idea where she'd gone since she'd left her cell phone behind. After getting his ass verbally chewed out and threatened that if he couldn't keep control of Madison, Saul would help her divorce him taking everything he was worth in the process, Craig had hung up the phone feeling even more disheartened than he did the night before. His world was coming apart at the seams but it didn't just start with Madison's defection. It honestly started back before Justin was bashed, when he'd first cheated on Jennifer. Even though he couldn't hold Justin responsible for much outside of his disgusting lifestyle, he knew that Justin also knew about the women over the years leading to his teen years. Craig often wondered if Justin had kept his secrets but then he would discount Justin's knowledge or involvement. He would never want to hurt Jennifer like that and if Justin was nothing else, he was loyal to the woman who had given him life. Craig still fumed that he had not inspired that kind of devotion in his oldest son, many times wishing he could go back and just make him straight. He remembered confronting Justin one time about him choosing to be a homosexual instead of being a real man, having a family and fulfilling his duty to carry on the Taylor name with dignity, honor and respect. Justin had laughed in his face stating that it was actually funny when straight parents blame their gay kids for being attracted to the same sex instead of what they deemed morally correct. He suggested plenty of contraception with spermicidal lubricant for the hetero population so they could stop giving birth to gay kids and then the species could die out knowing that they were saved from the 'homosexual agenda.' That was the last conversation he'd ever had with the man he used to consider his son.

By all accounts, Justin was doing extremely well... and without his help. Craig couldn't deny that it pissed him off that the little faggot was almost richer than anyone he knew and even that was subject to change. He'd kept track of Justin's success even though he would never admit it aloud to anyone—not even himself. If he was straight, Justin could be a son Craig would have been proud to call his own. But no...he was joined at the hip with that bastard child molester, Kinney. Yes, he knew that technically Kinney was well within the law regarding the age of consent but still there was a fucking
twelve year age difference between his son and the slut of Pittsburgh. What was it about Justin that
attracted Brian to him? Brian Kinney was the one with all the money so it had to be more sinister,
right? Fuck it didn't matter in the end since Justin had made his choice. Now he would be destroyed
along with his whoremongering lover.

But that would come later....first he needed to help. Without the funds in his joint account, Craig
knew he was living on borrowed time. He respected the fact that he should have listened to Madison
when she told him to pay off the mortgage to the condo and the cars but instead he had invested in
Stockwell's defense and various causes to ferment homophobia that were now coming back to bite
him in the ass. Once the divorce from Jennifer was finalized years ago, he was required to pay back
every cent of the trust fund her father and grandfather had left her which he'd drawn off of. He was
the executor but he wasn't supposed to touch a penny of it in case they divorced or he died. He
thought he'd had plenty of time to put the money back but he'd miscalculated just how intelligent
Jennifer was and how knowledgeable of his many affairs before Madison he'd had. Shaking his head
out of his reverie, Craig picked up his cell phone and scrolled the phone book before he reached the
number he wanted.

He was gratified when the desired voice sleepily answered the phone. "Do you know what the hell
time it is in the morning, Craig?"

"I'm sorry about the time Jennifer, but Madison has left me, she emptied the joint checking account
and... I really need your help."

"You don't say," the blonde answered him nonchalantly.

"Oh come on, Jenn. Don't be like that. We've always been civil to each other," Craig nearly pleaded
with her.

"Correction Craig. I've been civil while you've been the same self-serving shit you've always been."

"Okay. I suppose I deserve that."

"And more," she answered, her voice sharp.

"Look, can you loan me some cash... just until Madison gets back?"
"When will that be?"

"I...I..."

He heard Jennifer laugh full and long at his expense. "You don't know, do you Craig?"

"No I don't. She just said she needed time away and she took the children with her."

"I guess she's smarter than I gave her credit for after all she got away from you while she still has her sanity."

"That was uncalled for Jennifer. I suppose you forgot all the times I bailed you out of trouble."

"What by actually paying the alimony that was due me? Craig, if anyone on these phones is suffering from selective amnesia, I believe that it's you."

"Look Jenn are you going to help me out or not?"

"I'll help you on one condition and it's non-negotiable."

"And that is?"

"You need to speak with Justin. Even if I wanted to, I can't give you the help to the extent you need."

"Ask that faggot for help? Surely you're joking, Jennifer," Craig said the disgust evident in his voice.

"Suit yourself and good luck being homeless," Jennifer said but before she could disconnect the call she heard his voice pleading with her again.

"Wait! Wait, wait, wait please Jenn don't hang up!" his desperation was more than evident in his
"I'm listening although I really don't know why I'm bothering. We both know that as soon as you get what you want, you're going to become a world class asshole again."

"Fine, I'll talk to Justin. Where is he?"

She chuckled. "You didn't think it would be that easy did you? You're always telling our son...yes OUR SON, to be a man and yet you're trying to take the coward's way out. If you're serious about asking for his help, the least you can do is ask him in person-- the same way he's asked you for your help paying his college tuition when you denied him, the same way he asked you to stop the attacks when you had him arrested, the same way you stand and supported the fucking homophobes who bashed him and you celebrated with them. The least you could do is ask the man who will potentially save your miserable ass in person if he would be kind and forgiving enough to financially help the man he used to call dad."

Craig swallowed hard at Jennifer's accounting of his and Justin's tumultuous relationship. The list of his shortcomings in terms of supporting Justin was so miniscule even since before he turned seventeen. And Jenn had no problem pointing it out. He grudgingly admired her for being able to speak her mind. Married to him, she wouldn't have dared but he realized now after all these years that it wasn't out of fear and due to her upbringing but love for her children. She wanted them to have a father whom they could respect and she led by example. But when she'd had enough of his emotional and psychological abuse, she'd left him and didn't look back. He wondered if that was what Madison was doing, if she was preparing to cushion her fall from the lofty heights of being Craig Taylor's wife. He admitted to himself that he wouldn't be surprised if she was.

After agreeing to Jennifer's terms, Craig showered and dressed. Climbing into the family sedan instead of his sports car, he headed to the freeway on his way to the West Virginia estate. As he drove along, he thought of all Jennifer had said and of the two relationships he knew Justin had been in since leaving home. If he had his pick between Ethan Gold and Brian Kinney, he would have chosen Ethan Gold. When Justin was dating him, he'd done his research on the talented violinist. They were of an age and both attended PIFA which meant the boy had a future. And yet, Justin had still ended up with that fucking Kinney. What was it about the man that appealed to every faggot known to man? The one thing he knew was that it couldn't have been about money. If it was Justin wouldn't have left Kinney when he did even though he himself was penniless since Craig had basically kicked him out. If it was about money, Justin would have denounced his homosexual lifestyle and come home, played the game, gone to Dartmouth as Craig had demanded and played straight until he could support himself. No whatever the appeal, it had nothing to do with money but then the little fucking violin player cheated on Justin. How that was any different than what Brian Kinney did to him, he did not know. And truthfully it didn't matter. All that mattered was that Justin come off of his high horse, think for himself instead of letting Brian Kinney guide his decision and decide to help his father-- the only blood male blood relative he had. Craig would say or do whatever he had to to achieve that end. God knew Justin could afford to be charitable, but whether he would want to was a different matter.
The road to West Virginia was icier than Craig expected and suddenly he was glad he took the sedan.... or at least he was until...

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Letting Go of Ghosts

Justin had awoken in bed alone. He wasn't sure how to feel about that but since it was after seven in the morning and Brian was generally an early riser, he didn't dwell on it. Instead he focused on the revelations in the office the previous night and the long overdue conversation he'd needed to have with Brian. It definitely wasn't a want; if he'd had his way, he would have never let Brian find out about those two potentially dangerous moments in his life. He knew instinctively that Brian's protective streak was going to be more unstable than it had in the past. He'd see ghosts and shadows when there weren't any. Sometimes it was a real turn-on to know and see just how precious he was to Brian Kinney but right now they couldn't lose focus. There were people-- dangerous people-- trying to destroy all they had worked so hard to build; their businesses, their family and quite possibly their very lives. Justin shuddered to think of what would have happened if Gary and Sean had succeeded in their nefarious plans. He was well aware of Julienne's ordeal at the hands of her now deceased boss and his sister and there was no doubt in his mind that the Sapersteins were just as unscrupulous. But there was a more immediate specter of his past he needed to lay to rest.

With that thought in mind, Justin exited the bed. He was still a little stiff and sore from the previous night's lovemaking. Brian had been gentle the first two times treating him as if he was glass. By the third time, Justin had had enough and climbed atop Brian, riding him more roughly than he'd ever done. And his ass was paying the ultimate price for it the morning after. He couldn't help the small smile which graced his lips as he looked in the full length mirror seeing the bruises on his hips and shoulders when the addictive passion had become animalistic especially when Brian kept him on the edge of orgasm for over an hour.

As Justin stood under the hot spray of the multi shower heads, he couldn't help but remember the nightmares he'd endured during the night. But Brian's presence had made the night more than bearable. Even when the man wasn't touching or speaking reassuringly to him and Justin was trapped inside the dreamstate, he knew he wasn't alone. He knew Brian would never willingly leave him but it was amazing to feel that his secrets hadn't destroyed Brian's devotion just then. He was still apprehensive about facing everyone else but he decided he would take it moment-by-moment to keep his sanity and to protect Brian's. It was what he'd always tried to do and it was a habit he didn't intended to break ever.

Justin dressed quickly in a pair of sweats, his favorite t-shirt of Brian's and a pair of canvas sneakers before alighting from the room in search of coffee. As he reached the bottom of the stairs, he put his hair in its customary man-bun on top of his head happy that he had the forethought to grab the band for his heavy tresses before leaving the bathroom. It was too much but Brian refused to hear of him
cutting his hair. Justin chuckled to himself. Brian was always such a slut for his hair whether it was buzzed off as he'd worn it in his pink posse days or prep school look of Justin's youth. But Brian had always loved it when he could wash it and grab it; when he could tangle his big hand in the tresses and tether Justin to him or change the tenor of a kiss simply by pulling his hair and in return the action would make Justin even more anxious to fuck. Yes...There were definitely moments when Justin appreciated having a head of hair just as much as Brian enjoyed playing with it. Justin sipped his coffee lost in his salacious thoughts until a familiar voice interrupted him.

"Well. that looks like the smile of a man in lust if I've ever seen one," Jason said smirking easily discerning Justin's thoughts.

"What the hell are you doing here, Jason?" Justin asked cutting right to the chase.

"Well good morning to you too, Sunshine," Jason chuckled. "Any more coffee?"

Justin nodded as he turned around to the coffee maker and to grab an additional mug from the cupboard. He couldn't deny that Jason looked delectable even sweaty from his morning run. He always did. Justin absently thought that maybe it was time he got back into it and then shook his head at the thought. He was still in top twink form, enough to keep Brian lusting after him and that was enough for him.

Handing Jason the completed cup of coffee and adding cream liberally to it the way he knew Jason liked it, Justin repeated the question. "Now that you have your seven a.m. fix, answer my question. What the fuck are you doing in my house this weekend?"

Jason laughed. He always did enjoy Justin's feistiness. "To answer your question, I'm here with Avlossa."

"I thought you were in real estate."

"I am but I'm also a silent partner in the company. Bethany and Shar knew that the three of us are acquainted. They also know how condescending Gardner Vance could be toward women in business and thought that he wouldn't dare act that way with a man, even a gay one."

Justin nodded at Jason's reasoning and at Bethany and Shar's good business sense in this case. It was no secret that Gardner was from the ‘old school’ of business where women were more valued as arm candy than for their brains. "Brian and Vance had many arguments about that very thing, Jason, so
Bethany and Shar were right to bring you along."

"I wish you could have seen them. I sat silently and let them handle the meeting which they always have in reference to Avlossa. Bethany, in particular, had him almost pissing in his pants. She can be a charming tyrant when she wants to be for all her movie star looks. Shar can be too but Bethany can be an outright bitch when needed and it was certainly needed in that meeting. She also exudes sex which didn't hurt matters in the least. In fact I think if she didn't tell him straight away that she and Shar were together that he might have tried to piss on her leg to mark his territory. The guy's a real dog, Justin."

"He used to pant after Cynthia, Brian's assistant, so I'm well aware that he is looking diligently for wife number five. But that only partially answers my question about what you're doing in my house."

"Come on, Jus," Jason sighed. "You can't still be pissed about that email. It worked didn't it?"

"It almost didn't Jason. We had a huge fucking argument because of it. You had no right--"

"I had every right, Justin. It was time for Brian to either shit or get off the pot. He needed to claim you or let you go once and for all."

Justin rolled his eyes. "It was always my decision to stay, Jason."

"I know that. You think I don't know that? When I saw you in Rochester I saw what scared you. You talked to me about your fears but I also saw what scared you and by all accounts according to what Emmett told me, you were absolutely right to fear the influence of Brian's family. That Michael guy...if he was here I would punch him in his damn mouth myself."

"Already done," Justin said. They both burst out laughing.

"Yeah. I heard about your Muhammad Ali moment. You still have that left hook that could fell a 250 pound man, huh?"

"I can hold my own but then you know that all too well."
Both Justin and Jason were lost in their memory of trick who wouldn't take no for an answer and thought he could manhandle Justin. Jason had gone to step in but Justin had taken care of it before Jason could reach him. It was one of the surprising things about the sweet-natured guy that Jason had come to love. "I'm sorry, Justin. I didn't really want to cause problems between you and Brian but I won't deny that if he didn't snatch you up, I would have."

"Jason--"

"No Justin. If we're going to clear the air and be friends as we always have, then you need to know this. You are the only guy I would ever bottom for-- at least right now. You're probably the most caring man I've ever met and that's saying a lot since Brian and I are quite similar as you well know. I would have jumped at the chance long ago to make you happy but anyone with eyes could see that only one man had your amazing heart. It was time that Brian remembered that."

"He didn't forget," Justin said quietly.

"No. I reckon he didn't, but it never hurts to remind guys like us once in awhile." Jason smiled and winked at Justin. "So can we be friends again? Real friends? I have few of those."

Justin smiled brightly back at Jason. "I know. It must be that charmingly surly personality and your rapier wit."

"Don't flatter me too much, Justin. My poor heart is still fragile from your loss."

Justin laughed then. "You're so full of shit, my friend, but in the best of ways." Justin went around the counter and hugged the man whose intentions were good but had a warped way of doing things much like Brian. No wonder Justin loved both of them although in very different ways.

"Am I interrupting?" Emmett asked from the side door leading from the lounge area off the kitchen,

"Not at all, Em," Justin answered. "Just chasing some ghosts this morning."

"Well an exorcism over coffee sounds just fine this here morning," Emmett said as he entered the kitchen area fully. "Where's Brian? Did you wear him out?"

Justin blushed as the two men snickered. "He's probably at the office. You both know him."
Emmett nodded before responding. "Workaholic. Fuckaholic. It's all the same when dealing with Brian. By the way are you two..."

"What?" Justin asked.

"What Emmett is trying to ask is if you two have become monogamous?" Jason asked, shuddering as the word passed his lips.

Both Justin and Emmett laughed at the man's antics before Justin answered. "We've talked about it," he said noncommittally.

"Well it's a step in the right direction. Not the monogamy bit but that you guys are actually talking." Emmett said.

"And that there is still hope for me to convince you both that the answer should be NO," Jason said making the trio laugh.

"You would say that, Jason." Justin shook his head. "Who knows what will happen. Maybe I'll say yes, maybe I'll say no but..."

"Wait. He asked you to be?" Emmett asked genuinely surprised. He knew that Justin had wanted monogamy from Brian years ago like he wanted his next breath. But he also knew that the reason he wanted it had everything to do with other peoples' ideas and idealism of what constituted a 'real' relationship. Michael and Lindsey had been most vocal of the monogamy bullies-- one out of pity (well mostly) and the other due to pure spite (definitely). Though Lindz had her own problems with monogamy whenever dick was involved, Michael just had a problem with BRIAN being monogamous with anybody, especially true in Justin's case. Emmett often wondered why since it was more than evident that Brian would never have fucked Michael even if he was the last man on earth with an open hole. He thought that Michael's problem with the idea of Brian being monogamous with Justin stemmed from one of two things: either Michael was afraid of losing his 'Best Friend of Brian Fucking Kinney- Stud' status or the fact that Michael lived for the stories of Brian's weekend and didn't want anything or more specifically ANYONE interfering with his Monday fix. Well whatever it was, Brian had willingly abdicated his Studly throne and all for the hottest ass to ever grace the gayborhood since the year 2000. The Taylor-Kinneys (ooh he loved the sound of that!) would always be the King and Crowned Prince of Liberty Avenue by which all others are judged but this new phase they were entering was good. Personally Emmett hoped to God that Justin would take Brian up on it because he knew how much it took for Brian to even broach the subject with Justin. But he would take a page out of Brian's book and keep his thoughts on the subject to himself. He had more fun watching events like this unfold anyway.
Justin nodded. "You know Brian, Em. It's all up to me now. I'm just a little older now than the age he was when we met. He doesn't want me to feel like I'm missing out on anything. That's always been the basis by which our relationship has run even though sometimes he thought he knew what was best and pushed my ass of the Kinney Cliff more times than should have been allowed by law. But he promised no more of that shit this time which is why I agreed to-- for all intents and purposes- - marry him. God I still can't believe this happened."

Emmett smiled. "I think we all saw this coming. Well all of us except he who shall not be named."

Justin nodded again. "I almost feel bad for Michael though, Em."

"Don't, Baby. You did the right thing where Michael was concerned. You said what needed to be said and let your fists do what they have been aching to do for at least the last ten years. I know so don't deny it," Em said when he noticed Justin about to protest his valid reasoning. Only when Justin conceded the point did he continue. "Most importantly, you gave Brian the room to think and move all on his own. That's something Michael never has, never will and never would have done. He would have whined Brian into submission, forcing his compliance just to get him to shut the hell up. You would have never put Brian in the middle whereas Michael always has. And you didn't put him in the middle this time either when you had every right to as his husband. So, no, don't you feel bad one damned bit, Justin. Mr. Novotny made his bed and now he has to lie in it like everyone else. Michael is NOT the exception to the rule, sweetie. It's time he learned that."

Before Justin had a chance to respond both the doorbell and his phone rang. Looking at the caller ID, he noticed it was his mom calling and asked Emmett to get the door.

"Mom, why are you calling me from upstairs? Come down and have a cup of coffee with me."

"I will sweetheart but first we need to talk. After that if you still want to have coffee with me, I will gladly come down but I think you might need some time to absorb what I have to tell you."

"Okay," Justin said, confused but willing to listen. He gingerly took a seat and settled himself. Jason noticed and chuckled knowingly at Justin's discomfort even as he moved to the other side of the counter to refill his and Justin's coffee cups. "Alright Mom, what's this about?"

Jennifer sighed before launching into her tale. "Madison has left your father. He's basically penniless and wanted me to ask you for a loan. I told him that if he wanted a loan from you, he should ask you directly so he is on his way here to do that."
"MOM!"

"I know, honey. I shouldn't have but... well it's your decision and you should be able to make it without anyone's interference. Not only that but the same way you went to his house and asked for his help face-to-face he should have the decency and balls to do the same."

Justin rolled his eyes heavenward. Will the drama this weekend never end? "I understand your reasoning Mom, I really do, but I really don't want to see Craig. I'm not sure how I should act knowing what he is trying to do to me and Brian or that he was standing by applauding when I got bashed or that he is still associated with Samuel Hobbs. I-- I just don't know, Mom."

"I understand, Honey, but you have to do what's best for you and your conscience whatever that may be. Then be man enough to let the chips fall where they may. I know that you will make the right choice for yourself, Justin and not anyone else."

"What would you do?" he asked her genuinely curious of her answer. He knew his mom was responsible for Madison leaving in the first place.

"Uh-uh, Justin. What I would do and what you would do could be two entirely different things. I will NOT influence your decision in any way. I just wanted to give you a heads up about your impending visitor."

"Okay but I want you, Tucker and Brian there when I meet with him. Craig likes to twist the truth of things to make himself look good and I won't allow him to do so. But I want witnesses. I don't trust him any further than I can throw him."

"Will do, Son. So am I invited for coffee or not?"

"Of course Mom. I'll see you in a bit."

Justin hung up the phone and thought about all his mother said. He really didn't know what he wanted to do. On the one hand, he would never be as selfish and self-righteous as Craig had been when Justin had asked for his help in the past. But the more vindictive side of Justin's personality was screaming for revenge. Justin had all the money and power this time and Craig wanted-- no needed-- some of it to live. Perhaps there was a way he could make all of it work to his advantage. He didn't have anymore time to think of it though because Emmett was tapping him on the shoulder.
with a weird look on his face. What now?

*Remedy by Adele

End Notes:
BTW... the music inspiration for this chapter came from Adele's 25 album. If you haven't heard it yet, it is a MUST HAVE! I can't stop listening to it.

Scene 1 (Aftermath of Justin's Revelations- Brian's POV): Remedy

Scene 2 (Michael's talk with David): A Million Years Ago and When We Were Young

Scene 3 (Ethan's musings): Hello

Scene 5 (with Jason and Justin): Send My Love (To Your New Lover)
Meanwhile Thirty minutes before the last scene ended....

Daphne woke up feeling on top of the world. Or a more apt description would be on top of Troy's world. After they arrived back at her house from Britin, things took a decidedly steamy turn when Troy wasted absolutely no time making his wishes known. Although she hadn't made up her mind if she was going to have sex with him, he'd used his talented tongue to metaphorically sweep away any and all indecision on her part. Troy was forceful when she wanted it and loving when she needed it and she couldn't have been happier that she had allowed him into her body. He was like a balm to her battered body and soul after the miscarriage and revelation of packs of lies told by her former lover Stephen. He was her reward.

She could not help but smile as she watched him stretch languidly under the smooth caresses she placed on his torso as she had watched him sleep. Part of her dreaded the conversation that had to happen after such a glorious night with him but she knew she had to be honest about her feelings. If he was willing to stay on as her fuck buddy, it would be a situation she would welcome with open arms and legs. But if he wanted more... she wouldn't allow herself to think about it now. She just wanted to enjoy the peace and tranquility of the here and now; to let the future with this man take care of itself.

"Good morning beautiful," Troy said, his voice gruff in a term she'd heard Justin describe as sleep-sexy. She finally understood what he'd meant.

"Morning," she whispered back. "Do you want to run first or should I make breakfast.

Troy chuckled. "I must have been damned good if you're offering to make me breakfast."

Daphne tapped his chest lightly, her shoulders gently shaking from her own laughter. "I make you breakfast, just not as often as you make it for me. You usually beat me to the kitchen after our morning run."
"I can't help it if running with you makes me hungry. You're a hellion."

"And not this morning?"

Troy responded by pulling her face to his and tangling his fingers in her hair, tethering her to him. He kissed her with everything he had in him in that moment, hoping that his lips were saying all the right things. When he pulled back to look at her he said, "Last night was filled with the things wet dreams are made of, Daph. And I don't want it to stop." He could see the relief but also the wariness so he continued. "I'm not asking for much, just what you're willing to give."

"And how long will you be satisfied with that, Troy? I'm...I," Daphne stammered out.

"One day soon, Daphne, it will all be clear to you. We don't have to talk or make any decisions now. We're not like Brian and Justin; we won't run from whatever this is. When the time is right to actually have this particular conversation, we'll know."

She nodded her head but before she could respond both of their cell phones rang. Troy moved to answer his as she also made to reach for hers. Once she looked at the caller ID, she knew instinctively that their romantic idyll was over at least for the interim. Daphne headed off toward the bathroom as she heard Troy belting out orders. She started the shower checking the temperature as she advised that she would arrive at the hospital shortly after the ambulances did. Troy raced passed her, stepping under the hot spray just as she disconnected her own phone call and joined him.

"So much for a peaceful morning, huh?" Troy said as he began to soap himself.

"Never a dull moment," she answered, her mind going to the next three people she had to call. "Fuck! I don't want to do this!" she exclaimed, unable to hold back the tears beginning to spill from her brown eyes.

Troy wrapped his arms around her from behind and pulled her slight body into his own larger one. "Do you want me to do it?"

She shook her head in the negative. "I'll take care of it, but thanks for offering." Daphne turned in his arms to look at him before asking, "Will you come with me?"

Troy smiled down at her pulling her even closer. "I'll drive."
They exited the shower, dressing in record time in their scrubs and exited her house, each lost in their own thoughts. Troy was thinking about the day ahead. Daphne wondering how the fuck she was supposed to deliver the news to the Taylors.

*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

A Gross Miscalculation

Brian, Sarah and Bruno arrived at Struts. It was early in the morning but based on Sarah's information, Saperstein never left the club before eleven a.m. She knew he had to keep strict accounting of every penny in order to split the profits four ways- a quarter to the organization to go toward yearly dues, a quarter to the local law enforcement to keep them from darkening the club's doors for anything other than entertainment, a quarter to the BBB to keep any complaints filed against the establishment or its owners off the record, and the remaining quarter was for him to live modestly and inconspicuously. Anyone who knew Gary Saperstein understood just how much of a sore point that last stipulation was. The man was a slut for wealth and prestige, both of which would ultimately lead to his downfall.

Sarah bent at the knee, examining the lock designed to keep intruders out. Bruno had already taken the liberty of temporarily altering the CCTV feed, making it look like the standard view of the parking lot and surrounding grounds. It was times like those that Sarah was doubly glad that she had granted Bruno Joshsam another opportunity as a free man. Removing a set of lockpicks from her boot, she made quick work of lock which allowed them entry.

Brian couldn't help but chuckle to himself at his companions. He would have prefered to have this meeting alone but after his conversation with Sarah, he understood the importance of this case to her. He remembered listening to her speak about her sister and about Julienne knowing that if Gary and Sean had succeeded with their plans, Justin would have been far away from Brian, and he none the wiser. While they were formulating their plan, Sarah had explained the organization's process by which candidates for the human trafficking trade are picked. In Justin's case, as in Julienne's, he seemed to be the perfect candidate. Of course they would have had to keep him drugged to make him biddable but they were more interested in his talents- both sexually and in business. According to Sarah there were only three people who had the money to purchase him, two which were their off-shore representatives and Gardner Vance. If anyone had a chance of really ruining Brian's business, it was his former boss. And Justin and Julienne's acquisition would have made it all possible.

The trio stealthily crept up the stairs leading from the main floor to the office at the top. Sarah had explained that although Gary used the office on the lower floor during business hours, the other office was used for accounting and stashing drugs both for sale and for Saperstein's personal use. They heard loud yelling coming from the closed door but weren't sure of its source until just prior to entry.
"I fucking can't believe it! I just fucking CAN'T. BELIEVE. IT! They're fucking married! All of our planning is for shit now Sean. Why the fuck did they get married?! It's not like he knocked up the fucking twink." Gary ranted, pacing back and forth. "Gardner is going to be more than pissed when he finds out."

"What the fuck can he really do to us, Unc? Besides maybe it's for the best that Brian and Justin are married. I mean it will make getting to Justin easier since he'll feel a false sense of security now."

"You have no idea what Gardner is capable of, Sean. You also have no idea what Kinney is capable of. Fuck! I knew we should have nabbed that fucking blond brat when we had a chance. We've had plenty of them. We could have even done it when he was in Rochester on business. Kinney would have thought that the little shit had left him. It would have been fucking perfect except...

"Except that he had friends in high places there as well, Uncle Gary. Jason Dumas and his friends are very tight with the government officials in Monroe County because of how much revenue their companies bring in."

"How do you know that?"

"You don't see men as fine as Jason and his twin brother and not inquire or pay attention," Sean answered as if the answer should have been obvious.

"Well maybe this Jason character can work to our advantage even without knowing so. He and Justin are good friends aren't they?"

"Yeah and from what I have seen they could be more. When Justin was in Rochester he stayed with Jason."

"Well that's interesting," Gary said. He thought back over all he knew about Brian and Justin's relationship. If nothing else, Brian Kinney was a territorial and jealous man, although in public he appeared not to give a fuck what Justin did. Justin Taylor was always his Achilles heel, not that Gary could blame the man. The blond was intelligent, talented, well-spoken and a real beauty- probably one of the most beautiful men he'd ever seen. And that beauty had lent itself to Babylon once upon a time and then to the population of Therapy when he chose to visit the club in New York. Gary had never wanted a man more, except Brian himself, but Kinney hadn't paid him any mind. Brian fucked everything that moved, right in front of Gary even as he ignored the existence of the man. Justin had done the same, especially after the party at his house fourteen years ago. It was like they were
rubbing it in his face that he wasn't worthy of being fucked by either of them; that he wasn't worthy of fucking them. It still rankled that Justin kept escaping his plans, as a slippery fish would a net. Every time he had set a trap more airtight than the last, the younger man would just barely dodge it. And now he'd gone and become the domestic partner of one of Gary's greatest enemies. It was not to be borne! "I think I may have a plan to get Justin back where he belongs."

"Do tell," Sean said excitedly. "I've wanted into that ass for a very long time."

"And you'll get into it, Sean, but only after--"

His sentence was interrupted by the booming voice of a most unwanted intruder. "WRONG, Saperstein. But then you usually are. You will NEVER have Justin," Brian yelled, gratified by the shocked looks on the other faces of the office occupants.

"You're too late, Kinney," Gary recovered to answer smugly.

Brian walked over to the disgusting man and punched him. He watched dispassionately as the body of his nemesis careened backward onto the wooden desk in the semi-large office. He moved closer in order to continue his assault on the felled man. "Motherfucker, if you so much as look at Justin," (kick to the ribs) "talk to Justin," (kick to the ass) "or even speak his name again," (quick stomp to the back) "I will fucking kill you," Brian said as he grabbed Saperstein by the hair and aimed a well-placed fist to the jaw of the blue eyed man. He reached down intending to serve another blow when he felt his fist being grabbed. "Let me fucking go," He said through gritted teeth.

"That's enough, Brian," Sarah said, applying a stern pressure to his fist. "Don't make me break this. Now I said ENOUGH!"

"There's no such thing as enough where this asshole is concerned. Did you hear what they were planning next? Did you hear it, Sarah? This fucker doesn't deserve to live for another fucking second," Brian spat angrily as his fist continued to be held captive.

"I heard every word, Brian, same as you. Same as the recorder in Bruno's pocket and same as the videotape here in this office. Justice will be served this time; the evidence is irrefutable. But it will NOT be served by YOU. Now stand down!"

"If I were you, I'd listen to her, man," Bruno said as he held on to the squirming twink known as Sean Saperstein. "I know from personal experience that she's more than capable of breaking that
strong hand of yours with just a flick of her dainty wrist. Let her do her job, dude."

Brian looked back at the FBI agent seeing the sadness and understanding written in her eyes. He could acknowledge that his and her pain were the same in reference to this, and yet, he was tired of waiting for justice. It never seemed to come for Justin...never seemed to show up for him. Brian sighed deeply while allowing his hand to be led to his side. Sarah gave a small nod in solidarity and right then he knew that she would do what she must for all of them. He noticed the movement at his feet as Gary began to come back to consciousness. Brian fought the strong urge to hit him again just on general principle, but refrained.

Sarah looked away, hiding her mirth. "You know Brian, for someone who detests violence, you sure are good at it." She wanted to hit the asshole too, but she had to refocus her attention before the urge to let Brian finish what he'd started got the better of her. "Bruno, did you call?"

"I sent the text on the way here. The guys should be downstairs by now," he answered.

"I wouldn't count on it," Sean interjected. "The Boss would have told them to stand the fuck down. Evangeline is not the type to let anything or anyone stand in the way of her money."

Sarah gasped before she could suppress it. "What the fuck did you just say?"

"I said Evange....oops." Sean just realized what he'd said when he was only trying to be smug.

"Yeah, ‘oops, Kid," Bruno shook the waif he was holding. "I guess we know what your bitch partner has been up to. You have to call Higgins NOW, Sarah. This can't wait."

"What the fuck is going on? Partner? The ‘Boss' is a fucking cop?" Brian asked nearly becoming hysterical. Only his iron will was pushing the words out in anger instead of screaming horror and he was grateful for it.

"About to be an ex-cop and an ex-friend," Sarah confirmed as she grabbed her cell phone. As she dialed she looked toward the door to see the rest of her team coming up the stairs. "Frankie, Ty, I need you to take these two pieces of shit downstairs. Bruno go with them and call Gareth. Make sure Justin doesn't leave the house."

Frankie moved to grab Gary's still-writhing body off the floor. "Jesus! What the fuck happened to
Both Brian and Sarah laughed when she answered. "He had couple of run ins with a size 12 and a really big fist."

When he looked to Bruno questioningly and receiving a negative shake of the giant's head, Frankie looked to the only other occupant in the office. "No fucking way. The Label Queen?"

Brian laughed. "Fags generally have to fight all their lives against hetero bullies. Don't let the fact that I spend more time shopping and in suits than in barroom brawls fool you. Justin and I can definitely hold our own even if we are pretty boys."

Frankie laughed and nodded his head. "And modest too. Okay, point well taken, Rocky Marciano. Did you call Higgins yet, Phoenix?"

"I'm just about to."

"Well I think you better hurry up. By the way, don't take the freeway back to the house. Huge fucking accident involving more than one car. Where the fuck are we going to keep these two until Higgins can commandeer a station?"

"I'll tell him to get right on it, although I think he'll also be on the first flight out coming here. This shit just keeps fucking dying and stinking- he's gotta come and deal with Evangeline personally if he wants her in a cell. I'm more apt to kill the bitch than to put her behind bars." They all nodded in understanding. Evangeline Charles' days were apparently numbered, especially if Sarah Morrissey aka the Phoenix had anything to say about it.

"I think I have just the place, if it's alright with you," Brian offered. "It's the one place no one would ever think to look for the Sapersteins."

Realization dawned in Sarah's eyes and she couldn't contain her laughter as the other guys in the office, including the two prisoners, stood puzzled. "I like the way you think, Kinney. But first things, first."

*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*
The doorbell ringing interrupted kisses over coffee. Lindsay and Colby had arrived from the party the previous night, drunk as skunks and high as hell. No matter what anyone had to say about Brian Kinney, the one thing he could always be counted on for was premium smoke. Granted he indulged a lot less in recent years but when he did, Brian always managed to find the best. After a night of sexual innuendo and tension, Lindsey had manhandled Colby- her patience having been worn down. Anyone seeing her would never have recognized the blonde WASP with high-morals sometimes which bordered on obnoxious and who was a lesbian by all accounts including those of her parents and former lover. It didn't take very much convincing on Colby's part. He couldn't wait to be let into Lindsay. Upon their arrival, it had been a nonstop fuckfest of epic proportions. Melanie had come down in the wee hours and told them to keep it down but Lindsay and Colby just laughed it off. As a result, the morning after they were freshly showered, pleasantly sated and sore in places they hadn't been in a long time.

"You should probably get that," Colby told Lindsay in between kisses.

"I'm actually fine right here. Perhaps they'll get the message and go away?"

Colby chuckled. "Not bloody likely, Lindz. Whomever it is this fucking early in the morning is insistent as hell. Just get it over with and then I can fuck you on the counter this time."

The idea, coupled with Colby's deep brogue caused a deep body moan to escape Lindsay. Not since her short-lived affair with Sam Auerbach had Lindsay felt so satisfied that she could purr at any moment. Brian had once told her that every ten years or so she needed to be fucked with a stiff dick and she had to admit that he was right, as always. But there was much more to her attraction to Colby than there ever was to Sam. With Sam it was about admiration and lust; with Colby it was mutual respect and... well she wasn't sure, but she knew that it was even more than what she had with Melanie for many years prior to Sam. She wondered briefly what that said about her and her ability to form lasting relationships but she would examine that another time.

Making her way to the door, Lindsay tightened the belt on her silk robe and smoothed out her hair as best she could. She peeked at herself in the wall mirror in the foyer to make sure she was as presentable as one would expect in the early morning. She was kinda proud of the freshly-fucked look her appearance gave off; her skin was actually glowing denoting the many orgasms she'd had during the long night. She thought to herself, Colby's cock definitely works wonders since she no longer had the matronly look she'd donned for so many years that she couldn't begin to count. She felt young again, and free... at least for the moment.

She was greeted by a woman when she finally reached the door. "Hello, may I help you?" The woman looked familiar but for the life of her she couldn't place the face.
"I was hoping you might, Lindsay. I know you probably don't remember me..."

"You're right, I don't," she replied haughtily.

"Well, I'm actually looking for Melanie. Is she here?"

"She's asleep. I'm sorry but I didn't catch your name," Lindsay responded coolly to the uninvited guest standing on the doorstep of her home. A sense of foreboding immediately assailed her when the woman answered her question.

"Marianne McDonald. I was at a baby shower you gave Marie some years ago."

"Oh right, I remember now. How is she doing? Last I heard she moved to Vermont and had remarried a few years after Dusty's death." Lindz moved aside to allow the visitor in. "Would you like some coffee?"

"That would be nice, thank you. Marie and the kids are doing great. Her new partner Iris, is a real estate broker there and is doing very well. Also Marie went back to law school and is studying for the bar now that the kids are teenagers." Marianne took in her surroundings upon entering while following Lindsay past the open living concept living room to the kitchen at the back of the house. "You have a lovely home."

"Thank you. I like it much better than I did our place in Toronto. It's good that Marie has build a new life for herself. The kids must be around Gus' age by now. So what brings you by?" Lindsay couldn't calm the urgency she felt in the pit of her stomach even as Colby poured a fresh cup of coffee for Marianne and refilled her own.

Before Marianne had a chance to answer, Melanie was alighting from the bottom of the stairs. "Lindz, who was at the door this time of..." the remainder of her sentence trailed off as she took in the appearance of their unexpected houseguest.

"Surprise, Baby," Marianne said, crossing over to stand in front of Mel. "I thought that we should spend our anniversary together and you were taking so fucking long to come back to Toronto."
"I... I... Marianne how did you find out that I was here?" Melanie stammered.

"Oh it was relatively simple but we'll get to that later. Come have coffee with us."

"Yes, Mel. Come have coffee with us and explain what Marianne means by anniversary. I'm truly interested to know," Lindsay said in the most nonchalant tone she could muster.

Melanie looked decidedly uncomfortable. It wasn't like she never meant to tell Lindsay about the affair with Marianne but it was such a sore point for Lindz. Years ago when Mel had an affair just after Gus was born, it was with Marianne. She and Lindsay had talked about it after Mel had decided to forgive her for the Sam Auerbach affair. She knew that Lindz had forgiven her but now she was faced with that betrayal all over again... they both were. She looked straight at Lindz while speaking. "Marianne and I met up again about three years ago while I was doing some legal work for the company she works for."

"I was transferred shortly after the Babylon bombing. My company decided to expand in case any other homophobic psychopaths decided to take aim at businesses owned by homosexuals. Once Babylon was rebuilt, they decided that they should keep the other office open since it was doing well and gave them a market in international waters."

"Congratulations for them," Lindsay said snidely. She really didn't give a fuck about the reason Marianne was in Toronto, just that she was while Melanie and Lindsay were trying to build a life there and let sleeping dogs lie.

Melanie understood Lindsay's tone and decided to continue. "Marianne and I occasionally met for drinks over the course of three years. We became friends. Lindz I..."

Lindsay pasted a cold smile on her face even as she narrowed her eyes at her former lover. Placing her coffee cup down on the counter, she asked, "So tell me, when did this friendship lead up to what is now known as your anniversary? I'm really interested in knowing that tidbit of information."

"Today makes two years. Isn't that great?" Marianne gushed. "I never thought it was possible to be in a long-term relationship, having been a career dyke since the early days of high school. But Melanie was special."

"Yes," Lindsay agreed, her icy tone lost on the other woman but not on Melanie, "I suppose Melanie is very special. So special in fact that she couldn't bear to be honest with the woman she had been
with for more than twenty years. So special that she took issue with me moving on with my life and followed me here, demanding my presence back in Toronto until we got everything straightened out between us in order to remain friends. But now, I'm not so sure we can Mel."

"Lindz, honey..."

"Don't you call me ‘honey!' You no longer have the right. In fact according to Marianne you lost that right two fucking years ago, Melanie. Why couldn't you be honest even up until this very moment. I would have taken it a lot better than to just have your lover showing up on my doorstep."

"You're one to talk, Lindsay," Melanie retorted hotly. "I swear for a lesbian you sure like dick, A LOT."

"I've only recently come to the realization that I'm Bisexual and you know it. But I was HONEST with you. Too bad you didn't feel like you could have been the same." And with that Lindsay left the kitchen even while Colby stayed behind.

Melanie having no one else to turn her ire on, rounded on him. "What the fuck are you looking at?"

"I'm beginning to wonder that myself," Colby answered. "Looky here, Missy, I'm not the one who fucked up, you are, so don't even think to get pissy with me. A word of advice: Apologize, mean it and maybe just MAYBE she'll forgive you. One thing I'm learning about the lass who just stormed out of here is that she is pretty fair. You betrayed her trust even after you two called it quits. You can't really blame her for needing the time to absorb something that you've had quite a few years to come clean about. And she was faithful to you and your family since leaving Pittsburgh so technically she's allowed her anger, Mel. Look I like you. Your no-bullsht approach isn't everyone's cuppa tea but I can deal with it, so I'm going to use the same approach with you. You need to back off and let her deal. End of story."

He left the kitchen in search of Lindsay, allowing Melanie and therefore Marianne to absorb the gravity of his words.

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Reunion

"Baby, Daphne and Troy are at the door," Emmett's voice began. "Also some other people are here to see you."
"Move on over and let me at him," a shorter blonde moved Emmett forcefully out of the way. "Well Blondie, are you just going to sit there looking woefully ignorant and surprised?"

Justin laughed loudly. "Julienne McKay, I should have known you'd pick NOW to arrive. Ever heard of a phone?" Justin asked sardonically even as he stood to embrace his friend.

"Sure I have but what was the use in wasting my quarter? You need me and I'm here. My reinforcements are already here. Gareth and Celene sent the jet with a message from Nicole and Sarah telling me that Saperstein was in town."

Justin frowned and closed his eyes. "Yeah, he's back and it seems my nightmare with that asshole just won't fucking end."

"So Brian knows?" At Justin's slight nod, she tightened her arms around him. If anyone knew the trauma Justin had been through and what could've happened to him, she did. "Listen, Lil' Bit, he'll eventually understand everything. Sarah won't let this matter rest."

"I know, Jules but this.... this was just too much. It's like I can't get any fucking peace and the nightmares are back. It's like I can't..."

"I know," she cut him off. And she did. Not so long ago Julienne had to explain things to her husband Ben, and although she knew he'd had a hard time accepting everything that went with having to allow herself to be used sexually as she had, he'd eventually understood that her life was at stake and they moved passed the situation as a couple. Julienne had no doubt that Brian and Justin could do the same. Deciding to lighten the moment, she detached herself from him looking around and asked, "So where is that ultra-fine husband of yours this morning? Don't tell you let him out of bed already. I was hoping for a show."

Justin laughed as Jules waggled her eyebrows at him. "You're such a freak, almost as much as Daphne. Speaking of which, what are you doing here so early, Daph? I thought you and Troy would sleep in this morning." Justin directed his comment to the woman who'd been his best friend as long as he could remember.

Daphne took a deep breath. She gripped Troy's hand, needing the comfort. Jennifer and Molly flanked her as she approached Justin. She had already talked to them. "Jus, we've gotta be on our way to the hospital. There's been an accident--"
"Brian?" Justin gasped, the worry in his voice evident.

She shook her head briskly to reassure him, watching as his shoulders deflated marginally. "No. No, Jus, it's not Brian but Craig."

"What about that bastard?" He looked up at Jennifer and Molly. "What's happened?"

"We have to go to the hospital, Justin. Craig was involved in an accident but he wasn't the only one."

"What the fuck does all this have to do with me? I'm not his proxy; his wife is."

"Not exactly, Justin. Craig asked for you and..." Daphne took a deep breath. "...Ethan was in the crash as well. You are his medical proxy. Look, I know how you feel about both of them..."

"No, no you couldn't possibly know Daph. I know you have been here but you don't know how this makes me feel at all."

Daphne yelled, "I know enough about you Justin Cole Taylor to know that if you don't get your ass in the fucking car now and get to the goddamn hospital you'll carry this shit for the rest of your fucking life. Now. GET. THE. FUCK. IN. THE. CAR. I don't have time for this shit anymore."

Everyone in the room blinked stunned at the venom spewing from the usually giggly, mild-mannered doctor. The only one who wasn't stunned but equally angry was Justin. They'd had plenty of arguments in the past where he had gotten to know her temper very well. "You're... you're asking too much of me this time, Daph," Justin said brokenly.

She crossed to him, putting her warm solid hand on the suddenly slumping shoulder. She knew what the situation was costing Justin; what the situation was going to cost him, but she couldn't let him shirk the responsibility to someone else. Brian wouldn't let him and neither would she. "Justin, you are the strongest person I know. If anyone can face this head on, it's you. Regardless of the circumstances, you are not alone and I know that you will do the right thing. It's in your nature to do so. That said, come on Jus, and let's go do our jobs."

He looked into the reassuring brown eyes, his own watering. He knew that Daphne was right and that not only Craig and Ethan were counting on him, but also his mom and sister. Whatever the reason Craig had asked for him, he owed it to himself to see all of it through whether this was the
Julienne stepped up and placed a hand on his other shoulder and gave voice to his inner musing. "Justin, you have to see this through. If there is anything he could tell you about this untenable situation you're in, you need to hear it. You have to put your personal differences to the side if for no other reason than to lay your nightmares to rest. Go to the hospital, man the fuck up and do what needs to be done."

He nodded. "Em could you--"

Emmett, who had been silently observing everyone and mentally cataloguing the situation, waved his hand. "Baby, don't worry. It's already done. I'll get the message to Brian."

"Thanks, Emmett," Justin said while grabbing his coat. His movements were almost mechanical as he thought about everything that had already happened during the weekend. It was supposed to be a happy occasion; he and Brian had finally managed to get their heads out their asses and get their shit together. They were, for all intents and purposes, more married than even the law allowed. He wondered if Brian still thought this was all worth it.

His doubts must have shown on his face because Tucker, of all people, spoke up. "Justin, if there is one thing that we are all sure of, it's that Brian's policy of 'no regrets' has and always will reign supreme when it comes to your marriage. As long both of you are determined to make things work, you have nothing to worry about...ever."

Justin smiled slightly then. "Thank you. I think I understand what my mom sees in you now."

Tucker in turn smirked. "That's not all, but we'll let you think that. You know, for your own sanity and the fact that bleach isn't good for your eyes." Everyone laughed.

"Well let's make it people. My patients aren't going to operate on themselves and Craig is refusing to go into surgery until you get there," Daphne ordered.

Critical
Making good on his promise, the minute Daphne, Justin and company left Britin, Emmett got on the phone. It took six tries to get through to Brian but Emmett was relieved when he finally did. He didn't think Justin could survive anymore bad news just then.

Brian heard the melodic strands of "I Love the Nightlife" playing and knew right away that it was Emmett calling. "What?" he answered, irritation coloring his voice. He had already had a busy morning, handling the Sapersteins. He was in a pretty decent mood once he'd deposited them in the old soundproof backroom in the basement of Babylon. Since the room was made of reinforced steel, it had been mildly affected by the blast, only requiring emptying out since the door had been left open. Sarah and the others had chuckled when they heard Gary practically begging not to be put into the room. Brian explained to them that prior to him taking the club over, Gary had deemed the room an S&M fuck pad. Bruno and Frank had noticed the chain grooves and built in St. Andrews crosses throughout the space and made good use of them. Although the room was soundproof and no matter how much Gary and Sean yelled, Brian thought it would be fun to ball-gag them both anyway. Considering all of that, Brian was not in the mood for more bullshit to rain down on he and Justin. He just wanted a moment of peace and a long slow fuck from his husband. "I'm on my way back now so this call had better be absolutely necessary and doesn't require me to stop any fucking place."

"Good morning to you too, Mr. Kinney. I just called to tell you that Justin is on the way to the hospital," Emmett snarked back.

"Shit! What the fuck happened?" Brian yelled into the receiver. His heart rate began beating out of control at the mention of Justin and hospital in the same sentence. Automatically, his mind flashed back to that long ago night when Brian wasn't sure Justin would live.

"Calm down, Brian. Justin is okay but he is going to need you. There was an accident on I-79 this morning. Daphne and Troy got the calls and came here. Apparently Craig and Ethan were involved. Did you know that Ethan had Justin listed as his proxy? Anyway, Craig is refusing to go into surgery until he speaks with Justin."

"What the fuck? Can he do that?"

"Apparently he can since he's somewhat lucid. According to Daphne as long as he remains so, they can't do a fucking thing to him without his permission."

"How was Justin when he left?" Brian asked, wheeling the car around despite Sarah's puzzled look. He'd tell her what was going on eventually but right now his main focus was his husband.

"Spooked and pissed off but other than that he's okay."
Brian folded his lips briefly, swallowing hard to rein himself back in control. "He would be. Sunshine is strong; the strongest man I know."

"That's what Daphne told him but Brian this weekend has been a lot to handle. He's been having some doubts," Emmett said. His heart really ached for Justin.

"What do you mean 'doubts'?" Oh fuck! No fucking way was he going to let Justin pull a 'Kinney cliff' on him. He'd come to know Justin just like the blond knew him; knew all of the defense mechanisms Justin employed to keep Brian at bay. They were fucking married now, priest, law, license or none. Justin was his husband- the man he'd dedicated his life to in front of family, friends and foes- it was time to remind Justin that 'for better or worse' was not just a saying, it was their way of life.

"Tucker took care of them Brian and I think what he said made a difference but we all know Justin. He's you in little blond Kinney form."

"I was afraid you'd say that, Em, but I'm not letting go. I'll take care of him, you know that. Right?"

"I never had a doubt, Brian. In fact I don't think that his doubts are necessarily about you at all. All of the shit that's come up in the last day or two is mainly to blame for that. It's like he thinks that if..."

The panic was beginning to settle in his chest again. He knew exactly what Justin was thinking. Brian would have thought the same thing if the tables were turned. "I don't give a flying fuck what he's thinking or whatever Ethan or Mikey or any other asshole thinks. I would not have been better off without him."

He could hear Emmett's wide, country-mile smile through the phone when he answered. "I know that, Brian. And deep down Baby knows it too. You just remind him of that and make sure you give him a hug and a kiss from me, ya hear? I'll hold everything down here. You just take care of him."

Brian hung up the phone just as he pulled into the parking lot of the most hated hospital in his memory. He had revisited Allegheny General Hospital more times than he ever imagined a person would have. Once for Justin; once for Ben; once for Mikey and always in his dreams of Justin. He hated the place and would burn it to the ground if he could get away with it to destroy all of his fucked up memories of the place. But as always he would do what he had to do.
At Sarah's continued questioning look, he explained. "Justin's father and former boyfriend were in the accident on the 79 this morning. Unfortunately both of them deemed it necessary to include Justin in their medical care. If it were up to me, I'd let them both die."

Her eyes grew wide at the implications of Brian's tone of voice. She knew he could be a hard and resolute man- her dealings with him that morning proved that- but she never thought that Brian could be completely ruthless. "Well aren't they lucky it isn't your decision."

"You have to understand what those two assholes put us through."

"Us?"

Brian nodded his head. "Yeah 'us.' This weekend has just been the icing on the cake of their bullshit. I know Justin will attempt to do the right thing. I know it; that's just who he is. But if I had my way, I would dissuade the fuck out of him. They have more than earned their spots in hell, they dug it themselves for being the evil bastards they are. Ethan was... is using this to demonstrate that Justin still cares about his worthless, fiddling ass and Craig... he's probably the most vile creature who ever walked the face of the earth. I will be hard pressed not to give my honest opinion if Justin asks me what I think, Sarah. I hope he doesn't asks me. I've never lied to him; I don't want to have to start now."

Brian and Sarah alighted from the car just as her cell phone rung. "Go ahead, Brian. I'll be along in a moment. It's my boss."

"Take care of what you need to. I'll text you when I find Justin.

Unbeknownst to them both, someone else was already within the walls of the hospital also looking for the blond.

Removing Scales

Colby had made his way up the stairs, torn between looking for Lindsay or giving her time to absorb the arrival of her ex-lover's current lover on her doorstep. Sure they were over but he knew it still had to hurt. After catching glimpses and hearing bits and pieces of what went on in Melanie and Lindsay's relationship, he couldn't quite understand how these two women had ever thought they could make it work. It was apparent that Marianne McDonald was the first woman that Melanie had
cheated on Lindsay with. How many others were there? Did the full-breasted brunette really warrant a repeat performance especially since the first time Melanie cheated had been right after Lindsay had Gus? Questions like that were always the reason Colby avoided relationships. But Lindsay—being with Lindsay—had forced him to rethink his life running away from them. In the past, he would have never gotten involved in a rebound romance but the timing of his arrival in Pittsburgh, his decision to stick around awhile and lay put down some roots had all been compounded by the arrival of Lindsay Petersen in his life. He'd never planned to actually get to know the woman prior to fucking her brains out but that was exactly what happened. And he found that he liked her whether she was scolding him or taunting him; whether she was teasing him and definitely when she was pleasing him, Colby just liked the woman. Now he felt even more for her although he wouldn't tell her that. It wasn't what she needed to hear or deal with. What she needed was a friend and Colby would be that for her.

He knocked softly on the door. He half expected to hear loud screams and curses at being interrupted shortly after receiving the shock of her life. Instead when he pushed the door open, he found Lindsay, still dressed in her silk robe but with a parka and her snow boots on, standing on the balcony overlooking her property. Colby rummaged through her closet, finding a second parka with a furred hood and joined her. The slightly startled jump and subsequent snicker which emitted from Lindsay warmed his heart.

"You look ridiculous," she said even as she pulled the hood a little more snug around his head.

"Is that the thanks I get for being a good friend?" Colby couldn't help but laugh himself when he caught sight of his reflection in the sliding doors.

"Aww, you are a good friend, Colby." Lindsay reassured him before sobering. "Thank you for being here."

Colby wrapped his arms around her and pulled her close. "I know it hurts, Lindz, but maybe it's a good thing you didn't know before now."

"How can you say that?" She looked up at him with tears in her eyes. There was so much more than hurt going on with Lindsay. Although Lindz wasn't sure if Mel had cheated with other women, the fact that it was Marianne she'd had an affair with for the past two years rankled like nothing she'd ever felt before. "I just can't understand what..."

"What she has that you don't?" Colby finished for her. "The answer is nothing. But they do share a common interest, Lindsay."

"You know, the first time it happened, I thought the common interest stemmed from the fact that they
were both childless. At the time we had thought that Mel couldn't have kids and all of my time was being taken up by Gus. So I could understand why Mel would have felt a little left out or displaced; maybe even a little used since she was forced to work more so I could stay home full-time. But this time around, I can't understand it. I was the one who had to sacrifice everything so that she could have her career. I worked part-time when I could so that I could be there for Gus and JR, I cooked and kept the house, I was a good wife and mother; Melanie never lacked for anything."

"Except a lover, Lindz," Colby said matter-of-factly. "And you can't say that you haven't betrayed or even thought about betraying her too. That just wouldn't be realistic. You are a passionate woman-you both are- and you need to feel connected in some way to another human being through sex. There's nothing wrong with getting your needs met, but you both went about it the wrong way."

Lindsay chuckled. "Brian told me that years ago when I fucked a man for the first time in over a decade. And yes, I had a one-time-only deal with the curator at the gallery I worked at but it wasn't an affair. An affair implies emotions and I certainly didn't have any feelings for Henry Newton beyond the fact that he had a plump lips good for kissing, a nice dick and a shapely ass. After that indiscretion, we arranged our schedules so that there wouldn't be any awkward feelings between us. Sure we'd see each other during shows or business meetings and we were friendly but that was the extent of it. What Mel had was something completely different."

"And so you're standing here feeling a righteous indignation because she got her needs met several times while you took care of home and hearth. I wonder if the opportunity presented itself would you have gone back for more with this Henry person."

That brought Lindsay up short. Would she have gone back? Was her anger more about a missed opportunity than the act itself? "We'll never know, will we?"

"No we won't but Lindsay, it's over between you and Mel. Shouldn't you just accept what is instead of what was? It no longer matters in the grand scheme of your life and you're both allowed to be happy. From what I can see and from what you have told me from your own luscious lips, you two haven't been happy for a long time; instead you were both safe. There is a big difference between the two. You've both made mistakes, you're both friends again and you've both found someone new. Now move on."

He could see Lindsay processing his words. Colby couldn't deny that he wanted the blonde more than anything but he also wanted her to be happy. He wanted to make her happy but he also knew she had to be clear in her mind about what she wanted. Sure they would probably have an open relationship and that was fine with him. Since they were both Bi, it would stand to reason that he would want to fuck a man sometimes as much as she would want to screw a woman. But they would get clear and stay clear about their commitment to each other. That was the problem with Mel and Lindsay's relationship. Mel could certainly 'do monogamy' whereas some part of Lindsay would always lay dormant and unfulfilled. Commitment and monogamy weren't mutually inclusive terms,
and one word didn't lessen the value of the other the way many thought. Colby was brought out of his reverie when Lindsay spoke.

"So I've found someone, huh?"

Colby swallowed hard. He was nervous about her response but that was to be expected. "If you want me, lass, I'm here."

Lindsay smiled. She really felt better about the situation regarding Melanie and honestly she was ready to let it go. The reason she'd left Canada and filed for divorce in the first place was because she had felt like her life was on hold, like she was waiting for some opportunity that would never come if she didn't take life by the horns and dominate it instead of the other way around. Colby had pointed that out to her even while offering something she hadn't thought possible. He offered her freedom to be exactly who she was inside; something Melanie could never offer or understand. "Kiss me," she answered the tall man, watching his green eyes glitter in the daylight.

And with that kiss, Lindsay said goodbye to her past and hello to her future.

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A True WASP Nest

Julienne was delighted to have a moment to catch up with Nicole, a friend of hers from college who was working with Sarah. Ironically, Justin was in the same position she'd found herself in a while ago.... a situation that she would be forever grateful to have gotten out of.

During their conversation, a few stragglers came into the kitchen area. Julienne laughed as she saw Gareth, Celene, Shelia and Anthony joking around like most married couples do. It was funny to think of Anthony and Shelia as married at all. She was probably the most commitment-phobic person of Julienne's acquaintance and was much like Justin had always described Brian Kinney. But just as Shelia had changed, so had Brian and Jules was so happy that Justin was finally happy with his relationship. Only if it would stay that way.

It wasn't that she didn't believe in them as a couple- she had believed in her and Tanner too- it was that the situation that Justin was in was dangerous in ways that few could imagine. It was made of stuff that would turn the darkest person white and the stuff nightmares were made of. The people after Justin... and her to some extent, were not people to play fair. Usually if they wanted you they got you. Julienne had been damn lucky to have escaped and to have had Shelia by her side when she did. Human trafficking was big business where men and women without scruples and long money thrived.
"Are you all settled in?" The man whose name she learned was Emmett, asked?

"Yep. Thanks. Have you heard from Justin yet?"

He shook his head. "No I haven't. But I did speak to Brian and he's on his way there with Sarah."

Drew spoke up. "They must have finished that other business then."

That drew everyone up short but it was Tucker who asked him, "What other business?"

"I was supposed to go with them this morning but we heard Emmett stirring upstairs so I stayed behind. I must say that distracting Em is one of my favorite pastimes."

The tall queen blushed but he wasn't about to let Drew off the hook. "You'll pay for the distraction later, Drewsie but I for one want to know what apparently we all aren't supposed to know right now."

Drew inhaled deeply which was not lost on any of the men in the room. They all in some way knew that he didn't want to tell them what Brian was going to do but since Justin wasn't there, he thought the situation was as safe as possible. "He went to have a little chat with the Sapersteins this morning."

"What the fuck Drew?! You let him go? Alone?" Everyone looked at Tucker who usually wasn't a man to raise his voice. in fact if Drew had to bet money on who would have yelled at him, he would have bet Emmett not Tucker.

"He...he wasn't alone, Tuck. Calm down. Sarah and her team went with him."

Tucker's shoulders visibly deflated in relief. He would have hated to tell Justin that something had happened to Brian simply because the man wanted to be his son-in-law's avenging angel. "Well at least he isn't in jail or dead. What the fuck was he thinking?"

"I imagine he was thinking the same thing all of us would have been if it were our wives or Emmett," Gareth said. He had been through much with Celene regarding her ex-husband and Jules with the almost abduction of her person. There wasn't much that Gareth wouldn't have done had he been in Brian Kinney's shoes to make sure that his loved one was safe.
"I know you all are right but with everything going on with Brian and Justin; the people who are constantly trying to hurt them and therefore our family, I don't like that he took this kind of chance with his life, and Justin's by default. Do you all know what would have happened had Justin found out where Brian had gone this morning?"

Emmett nodded. "I've known Baby longer than any of you in this room and I can tell you that the tenacious and impulsive twink I met fifteen years ago hasn't changed one bit since he became a man. That's the part of his nature which never bores Brian and keeps the man completely engaged. True, it's a good thing that Justin didn't know but now I'm worried about what will happen when he finds out. For those of you who have never been present for one of Brian and Justin's infamous arguments, you're about to be."

Tucker and Emmett chuckled as the rest of them murmured. They couldn't imagine that the mild-mannered, well-bred young man that they knew would ever go toe-to-toe and insult-for-insult with Brian Kinney. None could imagine that Justin could be that verbally vicious but Emmett, Drew and Tucker knew a side of Justin that very few had seen. They were each interrupted from their reverie by the doorbell and a very unwelcome guest arriving.

"Good morning everyone," Kevin Dixon said, his voice barely concealing the sneer in it. "Where is Justin."

Tucker looked at the man he'd known almost all his life, first in disbelief and then in anger. "What the fuck are you doing in my son's house, Kevin? I thought it was made abundantly clear to you yesterday that you are not welcome here."

"None of your fucking business. After all the bullshit you have put him through over the years, you think an apology will suffice. I'll tell you what, I'll deliver you message, Kevin. And in the meantime do us all a favor and get the fuck out." Tuck was so angry that he was beginning to inwardly tremble. No, he and Justin didn't always see eye-to-eye but over the years they had learned to respect each other and their common bond through Jenn. He had finally learned all the details of the bashing that nearly took Justin's life so many years ago and the part the piece of shit in front of him played. There were no words for how much he wished he'd had a bat of his own so that 'Dickhead Dixon' could feel just what he'd put Justin through. "I think it's time for you to go now or I won't be responsible for my actions."

Kevin tsked at Tucker. "Such displays of vulgarity and temper. It's apparent that you have forgotten your upbringing, Tucker. But then I would expect nothing less from hanging around these godless
heathens and fags you call family beginning with the queerest of them all Brian and Justin Taylor-Kinney."

At the end of Kevin's speech, each of the men in the room rallied behind Tucker. Jules, Celene, Shelia and Nicole stood with them as well. Contrary to Kevin's belief, every single one of the women were prepared to kick his ass but it was Julienne who spoke. "Tell Evangeline that she won't get Justin."

Kevin purred at the blonde-haired, green eyed woman. "Julienne, I thought that was you. The boss will be so pleased and surprised to find you here. The last we'd heard you were living in some obscure place in South Carolina. You know, we haven't forgotten you and neither has Gardner."

She laughed mirthlessly. "I don't give a fuck whether you or any of the other assholes have forgotten me or not. In fact remember the ass whipping you all got the last time you came for me. It will be nothing compared to the one you receive if you touch Justin Taylor-Kinney. All of us in this room have our own set of friends and powerful connections so do yourself and Evangeline a favor and FUCK OFF."

"Tough talk little lady." Kevin moved a step closer to her, extending his hand toward her. Julienne McKay had always had incredibly soft skin which made his hands itch to touch. "I hear you have a daughter now and that she is a real beauty."

He made a huge miscalculation in mentioning Julienne's daughter. One: Julienne's husband was standing directly behind the lady in question. Ben Tanner was a six-foot-five, muscular brickhouse ready to crush the ignorant man looking his wife in the eyes for signs of fear. The second thing he should have anticipated was how fast and accurate Julienne was at defending herself. Without taking her eyes from the malicious visage of Kevin Dixon, Julienne smiled even as she palmed the switchblade she always taped to the inside of her sleeve since her own ordeal. She wasted no time slicing into Kevin's extended arm. She derived great satisfaction from the yell of pain-- a delayed reaction to the sight of blood dripping from his forearm-- which emitted from the odious man.

Tucker chuckled. "Again, Kevin, I think you better leave. Julienne was lenient; I don't think you'll find that kind of mercy from anyone else here."

"I'll see you in hell bitch," Kevin spoke through gritted teeth to Julienne.

"When you get there, say hello to Fred for me." His eyes widened at the mention of Fred Pierce, the man who was her ex-boss and tormentor along with Evangeline Charles and her business partner, Tamara St. Giles. Ironically, it was Fred's adopted sister Tamara who killed him. They all deserved
each other and whatever fate befell them. "By the way, tell Evangeline that Sarah knows she's the boss and is coming for her. Goodbye, Kevin."

Tucker escorted the man out followed by Drew, Gareth and Anthony. It took everything in him not to deliver his own blow to the asshole but he had to admit that Julienne's method did an admirable job. "Do yourself a favor, Kevin, forget this address. Go take care of your arm and go take a vacation somewhere. I hear Antarctica is beautiful this time of year. If you stay here then you deserve everything that's coming to you."

"Aww Tucker, are these fags rubbing off on you? I didn't think you cared," Kevin snarked.

"Trust me I don't. Make sure your will is up to date for the sake of your mom, okay." Tucker slammed the door in Kevin's face and shook his head of the memories. "Anyone up for coffee?"

Emmett laughed. "Is it too early to go for the Beam yet?"

"Probably, Em." Tucker was playing around with the cell phone which seemed to magically appear in his hand.

"Are you calling Justin?" Drew asked.

"No. Just trying to find a number."

Emmett looked at the phone again. "Hey when did you get a new phone?"

"This phone isn't new... well it's new to me but old to Kevin Dixon."

"You mean you..."

"I wasn't always a boy scout even within the WASP nest, Em. Someone needs to get ahold of Sarah now. I think this has all of the information she was looking for in those encrypted files."

"Let me see it," Jules demanded as she snatched the phone from his hand. It was times like these that
she loved her job even more. Being a programmer definitely had its perks. While she was going through the files, Gareth was on the phone with Sarah.

"Jules, Sarah said to upload everything to Higgins and send a copy to Frank. They're all at the hospital briefing Horvath on the morning's happenings."

Tucker, Emmett and Drew all breathed a sigh of relief hearing that Carl was at the hospital with Brian and Justin. Between him and Sarah, they would make sure that Brian and Justin stayed safe and sane.

"It's no problem, but Emmett, I'm going to need lots of coffee and possibly something sweet, preferably chocolate. It's my brain food."

Emmett laughed. "Don't you worry now Ms Switchblade, you do your job and I'll do mine. A little hot and sweet for the Spicy Chick about to help save Brian and Justin's asses."

It was back to business as usual at Britin for the moment... but at the hospital...

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Collision Course

After calling everyone's cell phones and not receiving any answer, she knew she was taking a huge risk. There was something not right about the silence. It wasn't done deliberately and no, she couldn't really blame any of them from distancing themselves but they were family damn it... and families stuck together! Which was why when Debbie finally got through on the house phone and was put through by Anita to Emmett, she was informed that Justin was on the way to the hospital. Her first inclination was to panic until Emmett cleared up the misunderstanding. Debbie understood that Sunshine and therefore Brian would be under a lot of strain and pressure but hers as a mother with a missing son, had to be understood as well.

Carl, who had been called to the hospital on a different matter concerning Brian and Justin, advised Debbie that Michael was a grown man and could take care of himself; that he would call when he was good and ready. He explained about the crash on I-79 a little more than forty-five minutes before and that Justin had to make some decisions. He was sure that Michael and his drama was not a priority in anyone's mind and it shouldn't be in hers either. Believing that he had made his point, Carl had left the house on his way to Allegheny General to meet with the FBI. Debbie also left the house, via cab though, on her way to Allegheny General to meet with Brian and Justin.
As she alighted from the taxi at the emergency entrance, she could only imagine the zoo the inside of the hospital must have looked like. It reminded her of the bombing of Babylon fifteen years ago, so many ambulances and people blocking the doorway. Standing almost-paralyzed she could hear the staccato issuing of orders followed by the word STAT. Debbie knew within her heart that it was probably not a good time to accost Justin, but Brian would have to help her. After all, Michael was his best friend and during his teenage years- well into adulthood- Michael was always, ALWAYS there when Brian needed him. She didn't, couldn't and wouldn't think about all the returned favors Brian had done for Michael, some as payback and others just because he cared. All Debbie could think or feel in that moment was that Michael hadn't returned any of her calls, and that numerous calls had gone straight to voicemail. Someone, somewhere had to know something about her baby. And Brian was going to help her.

With that determined thought in mind, Debbie entered the fray of activity within the emergency room of Allegheny General Hospital. She had been there on numerous occasions before, and it was always the same: the same sickly smell, the same scenario of waiting families, the same hard chairs and ticking clocks- the sea of humanity waiting on pins and needles while patients either survived or gave up the ghost. Yeah...she remembered the first time she was rushed in to have Michael, the first time she bought Vic in after he was diagnosed; the innumerable times she'd sat beside him when his meds stopped working; the hours she sat waiting to find out about Sunshine after the bashing that would turn his life upside down, and then finally the night and all the next day when it was her turn to worry about her own child felled by homophobic pricks with bombs. Debbie shook herself, running her hands over her face as if to erase the images flashing involuntarily through her mind. Looking around, she heard Brian's upraised voice before she saw him.

"Look, I will say it again. My partner's father asked to see him before he was wheeled into surgery. His name is Craig Taylor. Now I want to know where my family is. My husband, my mother-in-law and sister-in-law are wherever the fuck he is."

"Sir, I'm sorry but only immediate family are allowed in that area and since gay marriage is legal but you cannot produce proof, you technically are NOT married. Now if you'd just have a seat, I'm sure the doctor will be with you at the most available time," the nurse behind the desk huffed while turning away and speaking to the next family member behind Brian.

"Fucking cunt," Brian muttered. He pulled out his cell phone determined to get some answers as to where in the madhouse Justin was. Just as he was about to press the green button to send, he heard the familiar voice nearly screaming his name.

"Brian! I'm so glad I found you. We have a problem," Deb urgently relayed.

"Deb, as you can see right now, I'm in the middle of my own crisis."
Debbie barreled ahead. "I understand that Brian but look, I can't find Michael. He isn't returning my calls and no one has seen him since he left your house yesterday."

"I'm sure that Michael is just somewhere licking his wounds, Deb. Right now I have to find Justin."

"Listen here you asshole--""

"NO YOU LISTEN. Justin is MY partner and my FIRST priority, Michael is NOT. He's a fucking grown-up or at least he's supposed to be Deb. Let him be one. He will call you when he's ready to talk."

Deb was taken aback by Brian's outburst. She understood that he and Michael were not on good terms but that had never stopped Brian from helping him-- helping her-- before. "What the fuck is your problem, Brian? After everything we have done for you the least you could do is help me out here. He could be somewhere lying in a ditch or someone could have him.... I don't know, he could be hurt."

Brian closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose to stave off the migraine he was getting. Every time something went wrong in one of their lives, this was the conversation and frankly he was fucking tired of it. "Look Deb, as always, I appreciate everything you and Michael and Vic have done for me when I was getting my ass handed to me by Jack and Joan. But this thing with Michael is NOT my problem; it's his. You need to back off and give him his space, let him process whatever-the-fuck he needs to process and let me do the same. Justin's father was brought in here and he's demanding to see him before he goes into surgery. Not only that but that fucking idiot fiddler had Justin listed as his medical proxy and was in the accident on I-79 too. So forgive me if I am trying to find my husband because HE really needs me; Michael DOES NOT."

Brian walked away from Debbie then not sure if he could take another round of 'Where's My Son' before he lost it. He tried to be sympathetic- he really did- but that was always the problem with Debbie and Michael Novotny. It was always about their wants, their needs and their problems. For once Brian wished that Debbie would have understood his urgency instead of expecting to respond to hers. He would always consider her is true 'Ma' but at that moment Debbie seemed as much a stranger to him as Michael had become. Brian mentally filed away the disheartening episode and went back to scrolling the phone looking for Daphne's number. As he paced back and forth, Brian knew he needed to calm his already-frayed nerves before he gave into temptation to destroy the hospital and the phone. The headache he was determined to keep at bay was equally determined to torture him. His heartbeat was racing and his usually self-destructive urges were screaming to have free rein instead of the tight leash Brian was keeping on every other emotion except anger. He'd finally found the number but fortunately he didn't have a chance to even press the 'send' key.

Daphne had found him the minute she stepped off the elevator. There were few times that she could
remember Brian looking as if he was about ready to explode. He was usually so controlled and so arrogant especially during crises that she'd often felt like punching him just to destroy his composure. But as she looked at him, Daphne could tell that the man was just about at the end of his rope and she really couldn't blame him. Justin was the same way before she'd had to give him a shot to calm him down. He had gone into a rage after speaking with Craig. If Troy had not taken that surgery from her and pulled rank as the Chief Surgeon on staff, Daphne would have gladly lost her medical license to make Craig Taylor suffer.

She shook herself from her reverie even as she made her way over to him. "Brian, thank God. You have to come with me now." She gripped his arm and began dragging him back in the direction from whence she'd come.

"What's happening? I've been trying to find Justin."

"I'll take you to him and explain on the way."

They rushed passed the occupants of the emergency room to the service elevator. Brian caught the eye of and smirked at the woman he'd nicknamed Cunty Nurse who was giving him a hard time upon his arrival. Sarah and Horvath had disappeared a bit ago leaving Brian in the Emergency room to deal with Nurse Wretched by himself. He was never so happy to know a doctor in his life as he was at that moment. "Okay so tell me quickly what I need to know while we are in this contraption you all call an elevator."

"Brian, Justin had a panic attack. I'm not sure what Craig said to him but it caused Justin's distress. The asshole is in the OR now; Troy is operating on him. I couldn't trust myself to do it. I sent Jennifer and Molly to get something to eat. Craig has burns over the lower half of his body and they had to use the Jaws of Life to get him out of his car."

"Shit... and the fucking fiddler? Emmett said that Justin had his POA too."

Daphne swallowed hard. "He survived the surgery. I did that one but... he died about an hour ago. He had burns over 90% of his body and a lot of internal bleeding from when the car flipped over. We were able to stop the bleeding as much as possible but by then he had lost a lot of blood. Unfortunately we had to wait to give him a blood transfusion due to the trauma his body had already undergone with the accident and subsequent surgery. Any more would have killed him instantly. He did speak to Justin before he passed though, although Justin doesn't know yet that he's dead."

Brian felt like laughing and crying at the same time. He also felt angry and bitter that all of this was happening to Justin. Picking up on Brian's feelings, Daphne stood on the tips of her toes and threw
her arms around Brian's neck. She felt so sad for both Brian and Justin. All this on the weekend that they finally stop fighting fate and made the choice to embrace it. The elevator doors opened just as Daphne had released Brian from the hug. Brian was surprised when Daphne led him down the long corridor to where the Doctors' private offices were.

"What are we doing down this way? I thought you would have just put him in a private room," Brian said.

Daphne shook her head. "I was able to speak with Horvath a little before you got here. Apparently Sarah's superior had briefed him over the phone and warned him of imminent danger surrounding Justin. That's why he wasn't sent back down to the general waiting room in emergency after his talk with Craig and Ethan. Given the circumstances we all thought it would be best if he waited in Troy's office. He was told not to open the door for anyone and that anyone who was allowed in would have a key or would call his cell phone first. I've given him a mild sedative so he would calm down. By the way where were you this morning?"

Ordinarily Brian would have avoided or deflected such a question. It was no secret that Brian hated answering to others especially when it pertained to Justin. But Daphne was one of the few that he trusted more implicitly, and honestly she had more than earned her right to know what was going on. "I settled the score with Gary and Sean Saperstein."

To her credit, Daphne smiled wide and punched Brian in the arm. "That's my boy. They're lucky it was you that found them and not me, Brian."

He looked at her good. He was surprised to see the near-murderous glint in her eyes. "Boxing lessons have been paying off?"

"More than you could possibly know," she answered. She took the key out of her lab coat and ushered Brian into the main office. Moving silently and knowingly to the door at the back of the large office, Daphne placed another key into the lock. Opening the door wide, she moved to the side for Brian to sweep into the room. The sunlight from the window graced the form of Justin slumbering on the surprising full-size bed within the space. His blond hair was draped a little over his eyes blocking out some of the light filtering through the blinds, his hands folded under the side of his head. If Brian had his way, Justin would always look so peaceful when he was asleep.

He nodded to Daphne, who closed and relocked the door after she left. Brian removed his shoes and jacket after emptying his pockets. He lifted Justin's legs to shift and pull the covers from beneath them, relishing the deep breath and slight snore coming from the top of the bed. Brian smiled softly remembering the first time he'd heard that sound. It was the very first night they fucked, after Justin had cum Brian did something he'd never done for another trick ever. He'd gone into the bathroom and retrieved a warm washcloth and cleaned Justin up before tucking both of them under the covers.
Even high as a kite, Brian still remembered doing that. He climbed into the bed beside Justin and after settling himself, spooned his body behind his lover. Draping his arm over Justin, he whispered in his ear, "I'm here." He smiled when Justin shifted closer to him instantly seeking his warmth and finding it sighed in relief and gratitude. Brian watched Justin for a few more moments before drifting into sleep himself hoping against hope that when they woke up, the nightmare of the day would have come to an end.
Chapter Summary

Special, Special SPECIAL THANKS to my fellow Writing Divas of the LLLC! Without your encouragement, love and guidance I don't know how I would have kept sanity. This is as much your victory as it is mine and I thank you all!!

Evangeline Charles was pissed! Beyond pissed actually. All of her carefully laid plans for Brian and Justin Taylor-Kinney (she mentally spat at that) was going to shit and there seemed to be very little she could do about it. It didn't help that she couldn't get ahold of Saperstein and his idiotic nephew, and had yet to receive a report from Kevin Dixon. The phone meeting with Gardner Vance was even less productive and she hated all this incompetence. Apparently the Taylor-Kinneys were secured, guarded and protected more than fucking Fort Knox.

She crossed the luxurious hotel suite in search of another cup of coffee and some peace. As Evangeline looked over the seemingly endless view of the river, she reflected on the situation which started this all. James Kilpatrick was the love of her life- or so she thought. At 5'10 and her occupation, it was often difficult for a man to take interest in her. There was no doubt that she was attractive- it was part of her problem- but she was also intelligent and could overpower many of the men she was attracted to. Whenever she would walk into a room, James used to sing the 'built like an Amazon' verse from Brickhouse. She snickered briefly at the memory. But easy camaraderie and companionship ended when James had confessed that he was gay.

She had been looking through bridal magazines, preparing for their nuptials only six weeks away when he'd come in.

"Hey Babe," she said cheerfully. "It looks like you and the guys lit up the nightlife but good."

They had been living in Miami and she was working on thwarting a long-term case. No one knew she was crooked and she was happy to keep it that way. Tamara was her sorority sister and had some powerful connections in the world of organized crime which would benefit her in the long run. Evangeline had never thought to be an FBI agent forever but it didn't mean that she wanted to be broke and without her own funds either. Going into business with Tamara and her brother, Fred, seemed the perfect next step. If that meant she had to falsify records of missing people, help their drug trade to bypass customs, give them a heads-up on the latest investigations and execute enemies and bury the bodies to turn up much later then she would do it. Evangeline had no qualms or conscience when it came to achieving her own ends.
"Yeah, we had a good time," James had answered her distractedly.

"So... what did you guys do? Went to a game, played a game, stayed home all night drinking?" Evangeline asked. She was a little puzzled by James' lack of response. He usually came back full of stories from his 'Guys Night Out' escapades. She had fun listening to him and his deep voice and the sex was always amazing afterward especially if they decided to watch porn. So when he spoke next, Evangeline couldn't curb the sense of foreboding assailing her.

"Darling, we need to talk. There are some- some things you need to know."

That little stammer caught her ear immediately. She put the magazine down and crossed the room over to where he was standing overlooking the balcony. "You know you can tell me anything, sweetie. I love you."

James breathed a sigh of relief, looking for all the world like a weight had been lifted off his shoulders. He knew Evangeline, of all people, would understand. "I wasn't with the guys last night."

"Oh? Okay, so where were you?" That feeling in the pit of her stomach intensified. She didn't like it at all.

"I-- I went... I went to the White Party."

"For gays?"

James nodded. She knew that as far as anyone else was concerned James was straight, same as her. But like James, Evangeline was bisexual. He knew of many times that she had fucked a woman even though it was either her sorority sister Tamara or someone she was trying to entice information from for her job. "I met a couple of fags. We had a threesome and they were... they were fucking hot. Brian and Justin are from Pittsburgh- if you can believe it- but God... Evangeline, I can still feel both of them. They were the best fucks I've ever had male or female. A pair of beautiful fuck machines, they were. They kinda reminded me of the angel/devil theory. Justin was all blond and gorgeous, Brian all tanned and beautiful. And they are completely in love with each other and yet they still allow the other to get their needs met. So I got to thinking..."

"What? What did you begin to think, James?" She was truly interested in knowing.
"I got to thinking that I want what they have."

"You have that already with me."

"No, Evangeline, I don't. Look, I love you and I know you love me, too. But you are...

"I'm what exactly? Are you calling me your beard?" She couldn't fathom that James was fully gay. Bisexual, sure but wholeheartedly, rimming, ramming, sucking and fucking gay? NO!

"Yes. That's exactly what I am telling you. I've known for a very long time that I was."

"But you and I fuck all the time, James."

"We do. But not without me envisioning you as a man," James said and lowered his eyes. He watched as the woman he loved like a best friend crossed the room to put distance between them. He wasn't sure what he was expecting her reaction to be but that wasn't it.

"So let me get this straight. We're planning a wedding and after being with two men for the whole night fucking, you've decided that you are completely gay?"

"Not just because of last night but yeah, I'm gay. I've decided to live my life as a gay man, Evangeline. I know it's a shock considering where we are in our lives but there it is. I would rather have this conversation now than wait until we both resent each other later. Perhaps we can still--"

He never got to finish that thought. Evangeline had pulled her gun equipped with a silencer from behind the silken pillow on their couch. Well her couch now. She moved back to where James laid crumpled on the parquet floor and looked dispassionately upon his muscular form. If she felt loss at all, it was for his ten inch dick which he would never ram her with again. His announcement had killed any feelings of love she had for him. She reached into her bra and pulled out her cell phone.

"Hey Tamara. I need you to do me a huge favor." As she told her sorority sister and sometimes lover what she needed, Evangeline began to mix the solution to get the blood stains out of the floor. Donning disposable rubber gloves, Evangeline told Tamara that she wanted to know who Brian and Justin from Pittsburgh was and why she would be unable to do it from her office. "Higgins and Morrissey would be on my ass if I start to ask questions about some fags in Pittsburgh. They have nothing to do with the case we're working on. I need this to be off the record, Tamara. I will make
them pay one way or another. Call your contact within the Senate and get me what the fuck I need."

From that day to this one, Evangeline had worked with Tamara to bring Brian and Justin's empires down. Originally she just wanted to see them broke but since that hadn't worked she wanted their lives. After extensive research, finding their numerous enemies and joining forces had been as easy as taking candy from a baby. People in very high places hated them with fury and passion, a few of them related to both of the men. It was the perfect revenge since she wasn't homophobic by any means; she just hated gay men. No one would suspect that she had a hand in bringing down two of the most notorious A-gays worldwide. But now it was all going to hell...FAST. Well fuck that! They would pay in the most sure way possible. Either one or both of them will lose their lives under the pretext of homophobia and the people who worked for her would pay for it. Evangeline smiled. Who the fuck could argue with that?

She picked up her phone again and dialed the familiar number. "Mark, get your ass over here now." Not waiting for a response, she disconnected the call. She dialed another number; the same one who she'd disconnected only minutes before her reflections. She tapped her foot impatiently until the cultured voice answered the call. "Gardner, find out what you can about where their son is and arrange for a little visit. No apologies or excuses will do if you fuck this up; simply put I'll kill you. Get on it NOW!" She couldn't help the little bubble of maniacal laughter which escaped from her. Today would mark the end of Brian and Justin.

*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

Gus had the most awkward feeling as he stepped into his new home. He couldn't explain the weird feeling of tension assailing his senses as he made his way toward the kitchen from the front door. Admittedly, things had been strained since Mama came to live with him and his mom. It was great being with Jenny again and although everything seemed to be going okay between his two moms, it was clear that something happened to change that. He'd noticed the attention Colby had been giving his mother since he arrived in Pittsburgh. Initially Gus was wary of the big Irishman but as he'd come to know Colby, he appreciated his presence and friendship. Being a bisexual male was tricky and although the talks with both of his fathers helped tremendously, it wasn't exactly the same. It was still difficult facing his budding sexuality as someone attracted to both men and women but talking to Colby made it easier to understand. And it didn't seem like such a bad thing to Gus that Colby and his mom were growing closer. She seemed happier and as long as she remained so Gus wouldn't have a problem.

He grabbed a cup from the cupboard making a beeline for the coffee. In all the drama he'd witness at Britin that morning, there never seemed to be enough time. Gus had spent most of the morning working with John to piece information about the organization. Peter was there as well doing research on the money behind it and their Pittsburgh connections. At first John and Peter were concerned about getting Gus involved but ultimately decided that with his WASPy knowledge of the Pittsburgh elite and the boy's innate intelligence, the extra help was appreciated. Gus remembered the stories he'd heard over the years about them and relayed the information to John, Peter and the others. What he was unable to fill in, Emmett, Tucker and Julienne were able to. The list of people
who had a vendetta-- real or imagined-- against Brian and Justin was astounding. To Gus, it made no sense since his fathers were definitely not interested in furthering any political agenda. They just wanted to live their lives in peace, with their money and those they considered family. But these people would always consider the men a threat because they knew how to organize and the money to back up the action.

Gus was so focused on his thoughts and fixing his coffee that he didn't immediately realize the soft-speaking but firm voices escalating from the sunroom. When he did, he immediately recognized his mama's voice which sounded angry and pleading all at the same time. The second voice was just as angry but was what too sultry to be his mom's. He neared the partially opened doorway listening to the accusations flying.

"What was the purpose in coming here, Marianne? I told you that I would contact you when I figured out what I was doing," Melanie said. There was no doubt that she was pissed about how all of this was coming out. She was going to tell Lindsay but in her own time. She hated being backed into a corner.

Marianne shrugged. "You were taking too long and I needed to come to back to Pittsburgh anyway. When are you returning to Toronto?"

Gus heard Melanie sigh deeply before answering the woman. "I'm not," she said simply. Gus couldn't help but rejoice at those two simple words. Sure he knew the whole situation regarding custody but it was still wonderful to hear from his mama's mouth.

"What the fuck do you mean 'I'm not?' Melanie, we have a life already established there. The agreement was that you would make Lindsay come back so that you could have the full access to JR while still being with me. What the fuck changed?" There was no doubt in anyone's mind that Marianne was pissed off at the latest developments. She never cared about anyone the way she did Melanie Marcus. She was brilliant, smart, funny and a fucking sex machine. It didn't hurt that she was well off either. Marianne made a decent salary but she could always use a little extra help to reach the next level in her semi-extravagant lifestyle.

"Look, Marianne, what changed doesn't matter. What does is that moving back to Pittsburgh is what's best for my children and for myself."

"You mean it's what's best for Lindsay and you. Gus isn't even your fucking kid."

Melanie raised her voice then. "Not my fucking kid? Are you serious? I have been there with him since the night he was born; before that even. I have been his mother from the time he was
conceived. Just because we don't share DNA doesn't mean we're any less family. I love him more now than I did then and every fucking minute my love for him grows. I may not show it to him as often as Lindsay does or even Brian for that matter but it doesn't change the fucking facts. HE'S MY SON and I'm doing what I should have done a long time ago. I'm putting my children's needs and wants before my own. If you can't or won't be a part of that, then fuck you."

Gus was surprised at the venom and words spewing forth from Melanie. There were many times over the years that she displayed a cold indifference toward him; had said things against his father that Gus had found offensive and made him want to leave her. In some ways he could understand that Melanie lived her life in fear that Gus wouldn't love her as much as his biological parents. He got that now that he was on the outside looking into their dynamic. But he loved her just as much as he did his parents. She was the one who taught him to ride a bike, talked Lindsay into letting him take driver's ed so that he could be independent and first gave him the encouragement to begin carving his own life the way he wanted to live it. It was what his father always preached to him and whereas Lindsay had a hard time letting Gus do that, Melanie had encouraged that philosophy. That was when Gus began to realize just how much alike his dad and mama were and it made the hostility in their relationship more understandable. Now this bitch, whomever she was, was trying to destroy his family.

Gus straightened himself up to his full height before he stepped into the door of the dining room. "I think it's time that you leave, whoever-the-fuck you are."

Both Marianne and Melanie stood in shock for a moment before his mama recovered. "Gus, language."

He smiled at her briefly before turning his attention back to the matter at hand. "I could hear you two arguing in the kitchen. Mama. I don't like the insinuations this... woman- and I use the term loosely--was making. Biological or not, you are one of my moms. If she doesn't like it, she can fuck off. In fact, I highly recommend it since she's standing in MY house insulting me and my family."

Marianne recovered her voice then. She narrowed her eyes menacingly at the teenager. "Look you little shit..."

"No you look," Melanie interrupted. "You don't call my son that. Yes, that's right...MY SON, Marianne. You may not understand the dynamics or the reasoning behind my decision; you may not like them at all which you clearly don't. But you will respect them especially since you cannot, will not change them. You owe Gus an apology and then I suggest you find yourself a hotel room to stay in. You are most certainly not welcomed in Lindsay and Gus' house. And right now, I don't blame them." Melanie crossed over to Gus and put a comforting hand on his shoulder. With all the family was going through at the moment, this situation was the last thing he needed. He needed to be a kid. "What are your plans for the day?"
Gus smiled at his mama. That was the first time in as many years as he could remember her asking him something so mundane. It meant the world to him. "Actually, I was going to ask you if Jenny and I could hang out for the day. I made plans with Carmela and her mom to see a movie and I thought she could use a break from the Parentals today too."

Melanie laughed. "The Parentals, eh? Well since Michael seems to be M.I.A. and I need to meet Myrna and Quinn regarding the move and other financial issues, I think it would do you both some good. I'll talk to Lindz about it but I'm sure she won't have a problem."

Gus hugged her tight. "Thanks, Mama. I'll make sure Jenny eats on time and REAL food, not that junk she's attracted to at the concession stand."

"You sounded just like your father just then, Gus. Perish the thought that you too are about to become a health and fitness fanatic."

The boy shook his head. "Not likely since I'm more like Justin in that regard. But Jenny takes junk food to a whole other level and we can't have her with hips like Grandma Deb. Her frame is too small to carry all that."

Before either of them could say anything else, Marianne interrupted. "Don't think this is over, Melanie. I have waited years to be with you, listening to your promises of how things were going to be different. I can't imagine why or what is so important that you would give up a new partnership at the law firm only to downgrade yourself and career for the old stomping ground."

"Didn't you hear a word I said, Marianne? This isn't about me and my career for once. This is about my family. I am still the same caliber of attorney if not better than before I left. If anything having dual citizenship will increase my business but even if it doesn't, no sacrifice is too great and nothing more important than giving Gus and JR the time they need to grow into well-adjusted, well-rounded adults. We both know what happens to people who don't, which apparently is the reason that we're still talking about this."

"What is that supposed to mean?" Marianne asked, her hackles on full display.

"It means that if you can't think selflessly for one fucking minute about what I want, what I NEED, then there is nothing left of this relationship to fight for. Right now you're acting like a spoiled child being denied a trip on the merry-go-round because you just got off the rollercoaster. You're acting like a jealous housewife who just happens to be jealous of her own fucking kids."
"Oh you mean how you were acting when you met me the first time?" Marianne threw back. Melanie's barbs were hurting her more than she would ever admit.

Marianne closed her eyes and thought back to their first affair. She was feeling vulnerable and left out, wallowing in self-pity because of the attention Gus was receiving from Lindsay. She was drowning in work having taken on extra cases so that Lindsay could stay home and care for their son. She'd always thought that meeting Marianne at that baby shower was her sanity saver but right then she wasn't so sure. "Yeah, Marianne, exactly like that. And admittedly, I was behaving like an asshole just like you are now. I think Gus is absolutely right. It's time for you to leave."

Gus took his cue from his mama and raced to the front door. Opening the door he watched as the other brunette gathered her belongings and moved sedately through the door. When she turned back, he couldn't help but feel a little compassion for her and even a little disappointed in Mel for beginning the affair in the first place. But he put that to the side. They were 'adult' issues and would be dealt with between the grown-ups in his life. Sometimes they made things so fucking complicated and all the drama could've been avoided a long time ago if everyone had just been honest with themselves and each other.

"This isn't over," Marianne said.

"No it isn't," Melanie agreed. "But there was no reason for you to come and piss on your territory which is exactly what you were trying to do, Marianne. Lindsay has moved on with her life; I'm doing the same with mine. You need to think about whether you want to be a part of that or not. I'll be in touch."

With those parting words, Melanie took the door handle from Gus and gently closed the door. She leaned her forehead against it, closing her eyes to regain her equilibrium. The morning had been a fucking nightmare come to life and she wasn't sure how to process it all. She felt Gus' hand on her shoulder. In her reflection, she had forgotten that he was there.

"You hungry?" he asked.

She turned to see his smiling face. Sometimes it still rankled how much he looked like Brian but it was in moments like this that she saw the kindness she very rarely ever saw in Brian's. She smiled back. "I could always eat."

He looked at her critically encased in her bathrobe. "Yeah, you could stand to gain a few pounds. You look like the stick figures I used to draw when I was five."
Melanie playfully smacked him on the back of the head. "Smart ass. Well you're cooking so get to work."

Mama and son moved off toward the kitchen just as Lindsay and Colby alighted from the stairs, freshly-showered and fully-dressed. Each of them froze for a moment, lost in their memories before Gus had arrived home. Lindsay broke the silence first. "How about you go get changed and then we'll talk."

Melanie smiled at Lindsay's attempt to extend the olive branch. Melanie knew that there was a lot to say but Lindsay was willing to be civil even after the pain and shock. "Sure. Gus is cooking breakfast."

Colby laughed. "If Gussie is cooking, I sure as hell won't go hungry. I missed my run this morning but something tells me that will be a good thing. I'll have more to work off later."

"Blame Justin, Colby. It's because of him that Gus can't do without the works first thing in the morning," Lindsay said laughing. "I remember the first time when Gus was just learning to cook that I walked into the loft after Gus stayed the night with Brian and Justin. There was enough to feed all the queers on Liberty Avenue. Brian and I just groaned but couldn't deny that the food not only smelled delicious but the mess they made was beyond anything you could imagine. It was decided that if they were cooking, Brian and I would do the clean-up. It was a fucking disaster area."

"Hey I've gotten better and so has Jus," Gus defended.

"Yeah Son, you have. I'll go wake JR and change," Melanie agreed moving off toward the stairs after touching his face gently. She felt a peace in her decision to move back to Pittsburgh that had alluded her until that moment. Sure things were still a bit raw between her and Lindz but the hope of a solid friendship was being renewed. And Melanie couldn't be happier about that.

Justin woke up first. His natural inclination was to panic, not knowing where he was or how he got there. The soft white walls in the medium sized room screamed psychiatric hospital. If he was honest with himself, he wouldn't have been surprised that he'd ended up there. As he laid there staring at the blue sky visible through the blinds, his memory of where he was began to surface.

He was in Troy's office. How he got there he still wasn't sure but he knew why he was in the one
place he'd always tried to stay away from. Allegheny General Hospital- the most hated place of his existence. The place where he had recuperated from a crime of passion and hate that was ultimately termed a simple assault. The place where Ben stayed when his HIV meds stopped working and he was in a coma. The halls he'd walked with Brian 18 times for his chemotherapy and radiation treatments when he suffered from testicular cancer. And where Michael was brought when some lunatics decided to set off a bomb to stop a piece of legislature to grant people like him the right to a prosperous life, whatever-the-fuck that meant for them.

Conversely one of the best nights of his life was when he had run the halls with Brian and Michael going to meet Gus for the very first time. Justin sighed deeply. Nothing could ever compare to the feeling of watching Brian hold Gus close; few things did. He shifted a little as he felt the familiar arm of the man he loved above all others tighten about his waist in an effort to stave off the inevitable. Justin closed his eyes again trying to absorb the peace and safety he'd always felt within Brian's arms. It was what he needed more than anything else in that quiet moment.

When Julienne and Daphne had arrived at his door that morning, nothing could have prepared Justin for what he would be facing, the decisions he would have to make or the revelations he would have to endure; the truths he would have to accept. Walking through the Emergency Room doors, Justin had felt the urgency and foreboding in from the top of his head to the soles of his feet. He listened as both Daphne and Troy were brought up to speed on the medical conditions of their patients. Despite everything, it was not easy to hear the extent of the injuries from the car accident that forced part of I-79 to close indefinitely.

Justin held onto his mom and Molly as they made their way down the long corridor leading to Craig's room. Justin had given up a long time ago on having a father which made the fact that Craig had called him his son bittersweet. He sent the two women ahead of him so that he could make the necessary decisions regarding Ethan Gold's care.

Ethan. Even in this, he was the biggest mistake of Justin's life. No doubt that Ethan was there for Justin at a time when he was unsure of himself, unsure of Brian, unsure about wanting to even continue to live. Ethan provided a safe haven for Justin-- a place to get away from the turmoil that had become his and Brian's relationship. He boosted Justin's self-esteem by telling the blond all the things he needed to hear from Brian but wouldn't until years later. It was with Ethan that Justin had learned what love was and what it wasn't.

Daphne had followed him into the room automatically sensing that Justin would need her support. He couldn't have been more grateful to have an astute best friend as he was in that moment. Ethan was writhing on the bed in pain but like Craig, he refused to go into surgery without first seeing Justin. When Justin had crossed the room to stare down at Ethan, he felt pity for the once vibrant brunet. Ethan was a gifted musician for all his lack of career and the way his arm was bent and burned, it was evident that he would never play again. Justin remembered the feeling of lost hope when the doctors told him that there was a 85% chance that he would never draw again. Before Brian and Adrienne had finally gotten through to him, that figure had loomed in Justin's mind. He couldn't concentrate past the feeling of doom to absorb that he still had 15% chance to work with.
Instead he'd indulged himself in his own brand of pain management. Booze and insatiable sex with at least five men per night was his currency during that self-destructive time. Brian had waited patiently and sometimes not-so-patiently for Justin to decide whether he wanted to give up or regain his life. A few days after Brian had given him the computer and after his talk with Adrienne, Justin had made the decision to fight for his life- to recapture some of what Chris Hobbs took from him. Ethan would not be so fortunate. Between the burns, the grotesque breaking of his limbs and his ribs, it would take a long time before Ethan could even think about playing again.

"Jus!" Ethan smiled and then cringed. Part of his face was badly burned from the release of the airbag while the rest of his body was burned from the car fire. He tried to shift which caused him to moan. "I knew you still loved me."

Justin refrained from rolling his eyes at the man. There he was lying on a hospital bed about to be wheeled into surgery and all he could think about was some twisted fantasy. Justin shook his head. "I'm here out of obligation, Ethan. Love has nothing to do with it."

"Be that... as it may... Brian will be pissed.... and dump you when..." Ethan gasped in obvious pain before he continued. "...he finds out... that you... rushed to my bedside."

Justin closed his eyes. This was not the conversation he would have considered having before sending the man off of surgery and he told him so. "Ethan, your first priority should be to yourself. I told them to do whatever they can to save you. It's going to have to be enough."

"Tell me you love me," Ethan demanded.

"I can't do that."

"Tell me or just let me die right now, Justin. I can't live my life without you."

"If you don't let Daphne take you into surgery right now, you won't have a fucking life left to live." Justin nodded to Daphne and the surgical staff to prepare the man. He didn't want this on his conscious but he refused to lie and give Ethan false hope. "We'll talk about it after you're done."

"Promise?" Ethan insisted. Justin could see the small smirk which graced Ethan's swollen lips.

"Yeah. Fine," Justin answered out of patience. Turning to Daphne he said, "Let me know when it's
done. I have to go see Craig."

Daphne nodded as he left the room in search of the man he used to call dad. When he got down the hall, it was to find Molly standing outside of the door crying. He knew that the two of them hadn't been close for years and Justin felt responsible for that in many ways. Because of his decision to live his life as he chose, Molly and his mom were forced many times to pick sides. After Molly had graduated high school, she decided to have as little to do with Craig as possible due to his disparaging comments about Brian and Justin. When her father threatened to cut her off, Molly dared him to stating that she would sue him for every dime he had and had yet to make since the money for her education was supposed to be in a trust-protected account. When Brian had hired a lawyer to investigate, it was discovered that Craig had been embezzling the funds for years to support his new wife and kids. He had already run through all of the money put away for Justin's college fund—money left to them by their grandfather. It was part of the reason Craig had demanded that Justin go to Dartmouth. The tuition would have been discounted to the Alumni rate and would have covered Craig's crime. It wasn't about legacy the way people thought; it was about saving Craig's ass both literally and figuratively.

Justin approached Molly, hugging her close. "Is he...?" he asked hesitantly.

"No, not yet. But if they don't get him to the OR soon he might. Did you take care of Ethan?"

"As much as I could Mollusk. The asshole had the nerve to make dire predictions of the fate of me and Brian. Him keeping me as his POA was a ploy to show everyone how much I 'love' him."

Molly's blue eyes grew stormy at Justin's announcement. "That idiot asshole. I swear he needs a lobotomy since he's already a brainless bastard."

Justin chuckled. Molly was always a human stick of dynamite and was never one to not say what she thought. It was a much needed and appreciated comfort to him. "Yeah well. I did my best to disabuse him of that notion. I don't know how well it worked though. He's a lot like Michael in that respect."

She nodded. "Only sees and hears what he wants to see and hear but never the truth. Jesus Justin, I think you need new friends."

Jennifer came out of the room before he had a chance to answer. She looked at both of her children and Justin saw everything that she would not give voice to. They had spent much of their lives together; there was history there. It was expected that she would make her peace with the father of her children before he was wheeled away. She cleared her throat. "Justin, no matter what he says, don't let it get to you. Your father-- Craig-- is..."
"I know, Mom. There is no rhyme or reason to the inner workings of Craig Taylor. I've given up a long time ago and I can't say that I'm sorry I did. Whatever he asks I will try my best to honor. Not because he's my sperm donor but because I'm an honorable man regardless of what he thinks."

Jennifer placed a kiss on his cheek and whispered. "I'm proud of you Justin."

"I'm proud of you too, Mom." He smiled at her remembering that long ago day of his first PRIDE when they had uttered those same words to each other.

Taking one final deep breath, Justin pushed through the door where Craig Taylor was waiting for him. He took a moment to look at the crumpled and burned form lying on the bed. He tried to dredge up the pity he should feel in that moment, tried to recall the good moments of their existence as father and son so that he could display sympathy for the man he'd once respected; the man he once loved. Craig had killed that with his hate and fury at not being able to control Justin. As a result, all Justin felt was indifference. It was a scary place for someone like Justin to be. "You wanted to see me?"

Craig turned his head from the window to look dispassionately at his oldest son. He recalled all the high hopes he'd had for him and how those dreams had been shattered the moment Justin announced that he was a homosexual and 'in love' with Brian Kinney. That fucking name was the bane of Craig's life even as he laid on what was possibly his deathbed. But it was time to clear his conscious...or what was left of it. "You know I had such high hopes for you. I wanted to tell you that you've disappointed me."

Justin laughed. "What else is new? Yet you were coming to ask said 'disappointment' for help with saving your sorry ass, Craig. Even now as you lie there you can't utter the words of apology for misjudging me and underestimating me; can't bring yourself to regret ruining what we once shared with your hatred and bigotry."

"No I can't!" Craig coughed. The hacking sounds coming from his chest due to smoke inhalation and according to Daphne, a possible collapsed lung. When he finally managed to get his breath back, Justin wasn't prepared for what he said next. "You should have died, Justin. First the bat that damaged your fucked-up brain then the blast at Babylon that I arranged but no. You just couldn't, wouldn't fucking die. You and that twisted perverted animal you call your partner. I've been waiting for you to, you know. I'd even taken out a four-million dollar insurance policy the day you turned eighteen but you just wouldn't fucking die, Justin. Ever the disappointment!"

"So what do you fucking expect me to do now?"
"DIE!!! You should be the one lying on this fucking bed with your sinful deviant ways, NOT me. You're a freak of nature, a product of degenerate sperm from when I fucked your naive mother while tripping on acid. To die in my place is the least you can do but never mind. They're coming for you and there's nothing you or anyone else can do to stop them." Craig's cold laughter chilled Justin to the bone. "Whether I survive this surgery or not, you will be meeting your maker by tonight. Even now, Kevin is on his way to your house to take care of it and Mark.... he's a bomb expert, you know? He's going to make sure that the fucking palace you call home blows the fuck up. That miscreant you call a son will be an orphan by nightfall; he's just as disgusting as the rest of you considering he has a dirty fag for a father and cunt-licking lesbian for a mother. There's no way anyone will let him perpetuate the filth running through his veins. Blood will always tell."

Justin stood stock still hearing the venom spewing from Craig Taylor's mouth. Before where he only felt cold indifference, he now felt rage. Burning, all-consuming rage. He wanted nothing more than to kill Craig Taylor and be locked under the fucking jail to do his time. He couldn't believe that he was conceived with sperm from the most hateful bastard ever to walk the face of the earth who was still speaking as if lost in his own fantasies. He had to get out of there before he had Craig's blood on his hands. He could justify it and say he had done the world a favor by ridding it of the sadistic cretin. But Justin had a conscious- one that tormented him mercilessly- and he just couldn't do it. But the desire to shook him to his core, made him afraid of himself. He had to get out now....Had to!

Justin could hear Molly and his mother calling for him as he raced past them. After all the times he'd walked the halls of that hospital, he should have known his way out through muscle memory alone. Instead he felt like a rat in a maze, entering corridor after corridor, dead end after dead end. By the time Daphne found him an hour later, Justin was huddled in a corner within the Therapy ward, mumbling and rambling the conversation he'd had with Craig. It was on automatic loop within his head. The word 'DIE' repeating itself as if it was the only word in the english language he was able to pronounce.

Daphne had found him. Daphne. Daphne. The only person who knew the things he would never tell under the threat of torture. When he felt her inject him with he did not know what, all he could do was cry and thank her; to beg her to make his father's wish come true. He was so tired of his life, so tired of the threats of annihilation hanging over him and Brian. The only way Brian could live was if Justin was no more. They- whoever 'they' were- would leave Brian and Gus alone. The two most important people in his life could have peace. He was nothing but trouble; it was all he'd ever brought to Brian. From their first meeting and all throughout the years, Justin had brought nothing but misery.

He remembered being carried into the room where he now laid. He didn't remember Brian's arrival but remembered feeling it. Brian. How was he supposed to tell him all of this? Hadn't he endured enough because of him? Justin made to rise out of the bed, detaching Brian's arm as gently as he could so he could get some much needed rest. He looked out over the landscape which faced the back of the hospital. The sun dappling the man-made lake nestled within the bank of Evergreens. He sighed heavily as he thought over the last few months leading to that stitch in time; peace they could never regain and moments they could never get back. It wasn't lost on Justin just how little Brian had been able to let himself slumber, afraid that Justin would either run and disappear or something else
that he dared not voice aloud. He jumped a little when he heard the sleep-sexy voice come from behind him.

"Hey," Brian whispered as he hugged Justin from behind.

"How did you sleep?"

"Okay I think. When I came in you were knocked out. You okay?"

"No. Yes...I don't know," Justin answered, nestling further into Brian's arms. He wanted nothing more than to crawl inside his body and stay there.

"What happened with Ethan?" Brian asked. He knew some of what happened. Daphne had filled him in on what she'd heard although Justin didn't know the rest. Regardless, Brian knew that the conversation affected Justin deeply.

"Well you know Ethan, Bri. He's never one to give up without a fight. He reveled and prophesied that the fact that I rushed to his bedside proved that I loved him and that you were going to drop me after you found out."

Brian chuckled lightly. "Delusional as ever. You know nothing could make that happen, don't you?"

The uncertainty in Brian's voice caught Justin a little off guard. Sure the two of them had had their ups and downs- their power struggles- over the years. There was fault on both sides, some of which caused Justin to leave or to try to stay away. But they were drawn together, for better or worse; Justin knew that now. Even though he wanted nothing more than to keep Brian and Gus safe from him and the hardships that kept befalling him, he was finding out that he was also selfish enough to keep fighting for them. "I know, Brian."

Brian nodded with having the assurance that Justin wasn't going anywhere willingly. They were in it for the long haul and together. "Now that we have that clear, what happened with Craig?" He felt Justin stiffen in his arms and traced his hands up and down the smooth skin in an effort to soothe Justin. "I know that you had a panic attack and that it was bad. What I don't know is why."

Justin swiped his tongue across his lips partially in an effort to stall the answer and the other because his mouth had suddenly become dry. He didn't want to tell Brian all of it... hell, he didn't want to tell
Brian ANY of it. But Justin knew he had to and that broke his heart. He never wanted to hurt Brian and this would certainly hurt him. To know that Gus was in imminent danger because of their success and the hatred of others was going to damage Brian.

Brian watched Justin mentally categorize what should be said and what wouldn't. He knew Justin's means of operation inside and out. He turned the blond away from the window to face him. Brian was determined that Justin would not find an escape from answering his question honestly and openly. "Full disclosure, Justin," he whispered and watched as realization and resignation entered the worry-filled blue eyes.

As Justin began to relay the conversation with Craig, Brian found himself shocked and then angrier than he'd ever been in his life. Those sick fucks were going after an innocent boy simply because he was the son of the men they hated. Brian wanted to break something-- someone-- in that moment. He picked up his cell phone, dialing Horvath's number figuring Sarah was still with him. When she picked up, he hurriedly explained everything that Justin had told him, issuing threats of his own. When she told him that under no circumstances were he and Justin to leave the room they were in, he freaked.

"What the fuck do you mean we can't leave?! Did you not hear me? Gus.... They're going after Gus."

Justin listened in on the phone call and Sarah's response. In all the years they had known each other, Justin had never heard Brian sound so broken, so scared, so...NOT Brian. Brian was strength, arrogance and assurance personified. He was a man of action and when thwarted.... Justin sighed. He knew he had to do something to calm Brian down but what? He knew what Brian needed. In all honesty, he needed it too. It was the one thing they both had right here and now that would let them relieve the frustration they felt, the impotence of not being able to help those they loved; the one thing that would keep the rage at bay for the interim. To most it would seem that they always had sex on the brain but to he and Brian it was almost never about the act and always about meaning behind the actions. It was the one way they 'said' all that couldn't be voiced.

As soon as Brian threw down his phone after disconnecting the call, Justin attacked him. He kissed Brian with all the pent up fury battering his soul. He needed to feel useful, he needed to feel like he was accomplishing something. This wasn't sex for sex sake; it wasn't even going to be a vigorous bout of lovemaking. It was an exorcism brought forth by fucking-- pure, simple, dirty and selfish. Maximum pleasure, minimum bullshit. With trembling hands, Justin began to undress Brian even as he continued his onslaught.

At first, Brian was stunned but then just as fast as Justin had latched onto him, Brian responded. He could read Justin almost as well as the blond could read him. This was about control. But whose? Brian picked Justin up, depositing him none-too-gently on the bed. He would have laughed if not for the feral look in Justin's eyes just then. Brian knew what Justin needed. Hard and fast-- almost violent and he was going to give it to him.
Brian reached into his pants pocket for the requisite items before discarding them altogether. "No
lube," Justin demanded. Brian's eyes widened at the command but let Justin have his way.

He went back to kissing Justin hissing as their teeth clashed and tongues tangled. Brian grunted as he
felt the sharp sting of Justin's fingernails mark his back. He forcefully grabbed the younger man's
hands and pinned them atop the bed even as they continued kissing. Justin's lithe body writhed
wildly beneath Brian when the brunet shifted his focus to Justin's neck. Sucking hard on the
pulsepoint, Brian marked Justin. "Mine, Justin," Brian growled. "Every fucking part of you is
MINE."

Justin hissed at Brian's declaration and the bite he felt immediately afterward. He raised his legs and
locked his ankles, bringing Brian's cock in direct contact with his own erection. They both groaned
loudly at the contact. "Fucking more, Brian," Justin moaned.

"No. In my time, not yours," Brian said causing the aura of frustration around Justin to magnify. He
knew what he was doing; knew that giving Justin what he wanted just then wouldn't allow Justin's
mind to clear. Brian looked into the dilated blue eyes. He could see the shadows of Craig still lurking
in them. The man was fucking slime to do that to Justin. Brian could see the hurt, anger and anguish
the older Taylor had caused and he was determined to erase that memory.

Brian captured the plush pink lips again, forcing his tongue through and subduing Justin's. His lips
then dragged down to Justin's nipples. The pink flat discs puckered under Brian's ministrations. He
released one hand to pinch and caress one nipple as he licked, sucked and bit the other. Justin's gasps
of pleasure told Brian that it was what Justin needed. He watched as the blond closed his eyes
allowing himself to feel every flick of his tongue. Justin's brow was furrowed in concentration, the
moans falling easily from his lips. Brian groaned when he saw Justin's teeth catch his plush bottom
lip. He hurriedly moved back up Justin's body so that he could take over.

Brian grabbed Justin's legs roughly, struggling a bit to unlock them from around his hips. Placing
them on his shoulders, he froze. "Look at me," Brian rasped out. When Justin refused to open his
eyes, Brian smoothed his hand up Justin's body to pinch a nipple...hard. "I'm not going to say it
again, Justin. I'm not going to fuck you until you look at me."

Justin whimpered at the action and the command. Tears which he refused to let fall pressed behind
his closed eyelids. He willed himself to keep them at bay but they were too insistent, demanding
release despite his efforts. Justin struggled with himself, knowing what it was Brian wanted to see;
knowing what Brian would see. All the self-doubt, self-loathing and shame at his father's hatred and
words still assaulting his mind and the self-proclaimed curse Justin was forced to endure was there.
He didn't want Brian to know-- to see-- what he thought of himself right then but if he opened his
eyes Brian would. Brian would know it all.
"Full disclosure, Justin."

Brian's words replayed in his mind. If there was only one person on earth who wouldn't judge him, it was Brian. That had been proven over and over again for the past fifteen years. It wasn't likely to change. Squeezing his eyes tighter for a moment, Justin began to force his eyes open. The tears spilled down the from his eyes trailing their way up his temple to rest in his hairline. The saltiness left in their wake stung his eyes but he couldn't look away from Brian. Acceptance was there in the hazel orbs he'd come to know and love so well. Love was there and a peace even Justin himself didn't fully understand.

Brian breached him then and stilled his movements. Justin cried out in both pain and relief. The sting and burn of entry raced throughout his entire body making Justin tremble just beneath his skin. Brian moved another inch in intensifying the sensation. Justin was becoming a quivering mass under Brian's attentive eyes. He needed more. Locking his ankles behind Brian's neck, Justin sheathed Brian's cock fully within his body. A sharp gasp of pain left his mouth even as he relished the fullness inside him.

Brian held still, his eyes never leaving those of his lover. He pressed his forehead to Justin's, willing his thoughts into the man beneath him. "You are valuable to me and to Gus, Justin. Don't let the bitter utterances of a raving lunatic negate all that you mean to me. You're not going anywhere. You're mine. The lock is on the fucking door, got it?" Brian moved his hips into Justin forcefully punctuating his question with the action. He didn't wait for an answer; he didn't need one.

He began to rock smoothly into Justin, taking care not to injure the man who insisted on no lube. Brian tangled his fingers in the silky blond locks, pulling them harshly compounding the action with those of his dick. He rammed into Justin, loving the sound it brought forth. He did it again and again, until he could see passion instead of self-doubt; pleasure where there was once pain. Brian increased his pace, angling his hips to caress Justin's sweet spot on every pass.

"Fuck! Brian..." Justin moaned.

"That's right, Sunshine. Call me," Brian taunted even as he increased his rhythm once again. He was pounding into Justin then. "Whatever-the-fuck you were thinking when I woke up- whatever the fuck you were thinking when you refused to look at me- Don't. Fucking. Think. It. Again. Promise me."

"I... I..." Justin stuttered unable to catch his breath. He loved and hated that Brian knew him so fucking well.
"Promise me or I'll stop," Brian demanded putting actions to his words.

"NO! No... fuck... okay... I promise, Brian. I promise. Now fuck me like you mean it," Justin issued his own command which spurred Brian to action.

Grabbing Justin's ankles, he extended the blond's legs before pressing them back, exposing Justin fully. Using his weight as leverage, Brian drove further and harder into Justin eliciting a near scream from the younger man. Brian pounded into Justin, determined that he would never forget what Brian was saying to him with his body. He loved Justin with his whole heart. It pained him beyond words to see the man he loved hurting and not have been able to prevent it. But maybe he could heal it. That's what Brian intended to do and as he was ministering to Justin's needs, he was taking back what was his. Justin's heart, mind, body and soul belonged to him, not the creeps intent on destroying them. They couldn't have the precious jewel of a man who had seen Brian through some of the worst times of his life; through his joys and failures; through near-poverty and the reclaiming of success. They couldn't have HIS Sunshine mentally, emotionally or physically- Brian wouldn't let them. He'd always protected what was his and he played for fucking keeps. Justin Cole Taylor-Kinney was his to keep and Brian would do just fucking that.

Justin's near-incoherent begging for release brought Brian out of his reverie. Redoubling his efforts and launching himself forward, Brian captured Justin's lips while nailing his prostate repeatedly. He swallowed the gasps emitting from the younger man. Their bodies slick with sweat, both Brian and Justin moved in perfect synchronicity, each playing off the movement of the other. Brian felt the wetness of Justin's release coat their abdomens even as he kept pace. Even though Justin had cum hard, Brian could tell that Justin wasn't done. He kept driving into him, kept kissing him tangling his tongue with the blond. There was no one on earth like Justin and he was HIS. Every possessive tendency Brian ever had was centered on Justin causing him to fuck and buck wildly. He felt Justin's ass clamping down around his cock again; saw the panic in the man's eyes.

Brian whispered soothing words to Justin. "Breathe through it Justin. You're going to feel like you want to release again. There'll be a little bit of pain but mostly a euphoric feeling. You're about to cum for me again." Brian himself felt the telltale sizzle in the pit of his abdomen signaling his own advent into the blissful state he'd ever only achieved with Justin. The ripples assailing Justin triggered Brian's own ejaculation. Brian continued to drive them through it until the orgasmic crests broke and began to recede, leaving both men spent and heaving sighs of euphoric relief.

"Of all the times we've fucked, that has got to be my favorite," Justin said smiling.

"It was alright." Brian smiled in response.
"Thank you, Brian," Justin said softly, sobering for a moment.

Brian reached out gathering Justin into his arms. He kissed the top of the blond mass of hair once Justin settled into his usual spot. No words were needed between them as was so often the case. They understood each other. Brian pulled Justin even closer once he'd heard the soft snores of the man in his arms.

They would survive it all; Brian had no doubt about it but they wouldn't be unscathed by the experience. He closed his own eyes but he didn't sleep. He was tempted to call and harangue Sarah about the progress of the case and if they had found Evangeline yet, but he refrained. Right now he had to concentrate on keeping Justin calm since they were bound to be stuck under lock and key for the foreseeable future.

*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*

When Janice Kelly agreed to take her daughter Carmela out along with her new friends Gus and Jenny, the last thing she expected was to have fun with them all. The movie they saw was action-packed- something she never would have picked out for herself to watch. It gave her absolute joy to watch the three youngsters just be teenagers, full of life and carefree. After the traumatizing events at the Taylor-Kinney house during the weekend, poor Gus and Jenny certainly needed it.

After the movie, with their hearts still racing, the quartet went in search of something to eat. Although she wanted to go to the salad bar, the other three wanted pizza. A compromise was in order so Janice decided on taking them to Vittorio's Restaurant and Pizzeria. That way they could all have what they wanted as well as a decent dessert. She was obsessed with their cheese cake and thought being with the teens gave her the perfect excuse to indulge.

Conversation jumped from subject to subject. She especially liked that all three of the kids took their studies very serious and was impressed with the fact that Gus was being offered to skip a grade again. She could see why Carmela, who was older than Gus, was interested. Gus Petersen-Marcus Taylor-Kinney was extremely intelligent while at the same time down-to-earth and easy going. He could be intense but also had the ability to laugh at himself and simply find the joy in life. He loved his family and was especially close to his little sister although Janice was surprised to find out they weren't blood related. Gus called Jenny his sister-one-lesbian-removed. It was a unique perspective on what could have been a difficult situation to comprehend.

Janice was pleasantly surprised to find herself drawn to Jenny Rebecca the way she was. If she were able to have another child, Janice would want her to be like the teenage brunette. Despite everything that she had learned about the young girl's mother and father, Jenny seemed to be very well-mannered, independent and had a huge heart. But she was not a fool. She was the one person Gus was unable to evade questions from as he was wont to do. If Janice wanted an answer and Gus wasn't being forthcoming, she would ask Jenny who in turn would ask Gus. There was no doubt that once she discovered 'herself,' Jenny Rebecca would be a force to be reckoned with, no matter what she chose to do in life.
During the afternoon, Janice's respect for Brian and Justin also grew. She'd learned from the siblings the long and varied history of both men, even some facts that their family and friends knew nothing about which Gus and Jenny knew. They told of how the men would visit them in Canada or, if there was an emergency, how the two men would drop everything to rush to their sides. Jenny grew a little sad that her father didn't do that and that her mother was too into her career at times, but she was grateful that no matter what, she had Brian and Justin to rely on. It was a revelation to Janice who wasn't a stranger to gay causes or the haters who preached against gay parenting. The two children--the young adults--before her were more well-adjusted than some adults of her acquaintance. It was a true testament that it wasn't the sexuality of a person but the caliber that made a difference in how a child was raised.

Suddenly, as they were leaving the restaurant and filing into the car, they were accosted by three gunmen. Gus was ordered to come with them or the three ladies would be shot. Although all three had masks on, one of them was bold and indifferent enough not to give a shit that he was identifiable. Gus even called the fucker by name and asked that he not do it, to think long and hard about the time he would get in prison for being mixed up with those people.

The man simply responded, "It's not really you we want. You're the bargaining chip, but if you don't get into the fucking van right now, you and your friends here will die. Your choice Junior Kinney."

The voice was a raspy tenor but the words themselves chilled Janice to the bone. Gus looked back at all of them, assuring them that he would be alright. He looked at Jenny who was crying silently beside her, telling her not to worry; that he would see her soon.

The man followed Gus' line of sight, obvious in his confusion as to why the teen would pay such attention to the non-descript looking female with the dark brown hair and freckles. There was something familiar about her but he couldn't place what it was. He could take her with them but his orders were for the youngest Kinney only. His boss wouldn't be too happy with an additional hostage anyway. "Tell the Taylor-Kinneys we'll be in touch and if they're smart, call off the fucking FBI. Then maybe this little fucker here will live."

"Don't you hurt him! Don't you fucking hurt Gus!" Jenny screamed, moving forward even as Janice struggled to pull her back.

The loud bang caught everyone off guard, the gun still smoking from the man's hand. For a moment, Gus crumpled next to the girl asking her to please be okay. His hand came away bloodied from the bullet wound that began seeping from the middle of her arm. Janice watched helplessly as Gus was yanked up by his hair and thrown bodily into the van.
"Get the little bitch to the hospital. She's lucky I only shot her in the arm but it's near her brachial artery. You don't have much time," the mystery man said laughing maniacally.

"Carmela, start wrapping that arm, don't forget to keep it above the level of her heart and let's get Jenny to the hospital. We have.... we have...." Janice broke down even as she watched Carmela spring into action.

The young girl who hoped someday to be a surgeon or a genetic scientist began working on JR. Janice hopped into the car starting the engine. She knew that they didn't have much time but the fact that it was cold out helped some. Together she and Carmela got Jenny into the car, Janice climbing into the backseat with the teen. Carmela got into the driver's seat and floored the gas pedal. This was the one time her mother would not tell her to watch her speed. Carmela wasted no time getting out into traffic on her way to Allegheny General which was the nearest hospital. Janice put in a call to 911 detailing the events and to request police escort for their vehicle on the way to the hospital. There was already a cop with his lights flashing for Carmela to pull over. The teenager was steadfastly ignoring the siren behind her and the voice over the loudspeaker ordering her to stop the vehicle. Janice was too nervous and shocked to feel the horror of watching Carmela zip in and out of traffic, or watching as she literally drove on the mercifully-empty sidewalk in an effort to cut across the lawn of the park directly across from the hospital. Carmela drove like she was a stuntwoman reenacting a scene from the latest action movie even while Janice kept talking to Jenny, trying to keep her conscious.

When they finally arrived at the hospital, both ladies were thankful to see two familiar faces there waiting.

"Oh my God! Jenny?" Daphne screamed. "What the fuck happened?"

"No time, Doctor Chanders. Help her! Please..." Janice pleaded.

Carmela gave Troy the medical details of the incident and told him where the bullet entry was. If there was time, Troy would have been impressed with the young woman's detailed synopsis of the entry and exit wound of the bullet. He and Daphne rushed off to get Jenny prepped for surgery.

The officer who was originally going to arrest Janice and Carmela, instead congratulated them on remaining calm during the crisis, stating that it was genius to call 911 and explain the situation and that he needed to ask them what happened. It was then that Janice broke down. Carmela gave the officer all of the necessary information, asking that he call in the kidnapping, but noting that the officer was moving a little slow for her liking. As she watched the officer exit the Emergency room, the young girl reached into her pocket and pulled out her own cell phone.

"Hey... Emmett, look, I need.... listen, we have a problem. Gus has been kidnapped, Jenny's been
shot and... and... Emmett, PLEASE call Brian and Justin.”
LIKE A TAYLOR-KINNEY SCORNED Part 1

Chapter Summary

I supposed I should issue a M/F/F warning.... well you've been WARNED! LOL
Happy Reading!!

The Pitts

Josiah Higgins stepped out of the airport into the crisp air of Pittsburgh. It had been a long time since
he'd been back to the Burg. He'd grown up there with an abusive mother and an absentee father.
Despite his poor home life, Josiah worked his ass off in school and when possible took menial jobs
in order to eat and save money to put himself through college. He was determined that once he left
the Pitts, he would never return. The irony was not lost on him that his first return to Pittsburgh,
Pennsylvania was in an official and governmental capacity- something no one would have ever
believed him capable of.

"Captain Higgins, it's a pleasure to see you again Sir," Sarah said as she approached him.

"Cut the 'sir' Sarah. I'll call you for it when I need my ego stroked," he answered with a smile.

The answering smile which graced her face warmed him. Sarah Morrissey was his best agent and as
such she didn't smile very often. Granted, there was little to smile about in Sarah's life in recent years.
He'd often missed the bright girl with the ready smile and optimism that he'd plucked straight out of
the academy. Thanks to her connections within the Senate, Sarah was able to leave her own life in
the organized crime world behind, having worked in it since she was thirteen to support herself and
her sister. He watched silently and helplessly as she became jaded again over the years. The job of an
FBI agent with the Special Agent division had a way of doing that.

"A lot has happened since I spoke with you this morning. I have retired Captain Horvath and the
new Captain Larry Smith ready to meet with you. There have been some... developments that you
need to be made aware of."

He nodded as they began walking to her car. "And Brian and Justin, where are they?"

"As ordered, they are in a secure location Josiah. But I honestly don't believe they'll stay there once
they're brought up to speed on what's happening."
"Evangeline has made a move then?" He closed his eyes at the mention of Sarah's partner. The discovery that she was the one behind this rankled even more than he'd thought possible. She was always a wild card, which made her and Sarah's work together top notch. The two women were two sides of the same coin. There was no way the whole situation would go away quietly.

"She has Gus, Josiah," Sarah answered simply. "But in acquiring him, Jenny Rebecca was shot. She's in surgery now."

"Fuck! The bitch has no scruples. Who did she send to do the job?"

"We know that she contacted Gardner this morning. He contacted someone named Kip Thomas to carry it out. Whether he did it personally or had someone to do it, we won't know until Jenny is out of surgery. The other two ladies- one older and one younger- had never seen the man before."

"Have you heard from Ty and Brandon yet?"

"Just this morning. Chris Hobbs and his partner have been secured. He's on his way back. As for Ty, he's in. I was with him this morning at the Struts when he got the call, although I didn't know who it was from at the time. After we transported the Sapersteins to Babylon, he left. The GPS on his phone is connected and if he's able to get any pictures of it we should get a print of the compound layout soon."

The rest of the drive was made in silence. They didn't have a long commute from the airport to the 3rd Precinct just off of Liberty Avenue. Josiah thought of all the information Sarah had given him, both that morning and while in car. He still wasn't sure of the motive behind Evangeline's involvement but he was certain it had to do with a certain deceased agent who was a closet case. James Kilpatrick's death was made to look like a drug deal gone wrong during the weekend of the White Party in Miami. Thanks to the money behind that particular gathering of gay men and women, no law enforcement agency was able to touch it. James was working undercover to gather information on why so many beautiful gay men were suddenly disappearing at the party, never to be seen or heard from again. Josiah hadn't recovered his last report until a few weeks after the incident, but by then there was some key information missing which only led to dead-end questions.

As soon as they entered the non-descript brick building the first thing they noticed was an abnormal amount of officers milling about. A few were actually working but the number that were not was disturbing in its extreme. Sarah moved forward causing Josiah to follow automatically. She drew every eye and a few whispers as she made her way to the conference room where the rest of her team along with Horvath and Smith were already in assembly.
"What's being done to find my grandson?" Horvath said.

"Grandson?" Josiah looked at Sarah questioningly. It was definitely not a good idea to involve family on an active case as they could compromise the entire operation.

Sarah answered the irate man. "Carl, don't worry. We will get him back safe and sound. Has there been any word on Jenny yet?"

He rubbed his red eyes. "Not yet, Sarah. Daphne is operating on her as we speak. Troy just got out of surgery a little while ago and called to give the update on Taylor's condition. He's alive but he'll wish to God he wasn't. They were unable to reattach his spine."

All in the room winced at Carl's matter-of-fact way of stating that tidbit of information. But they all understood. The things that Craig Taylor had done to his son- the things he still kept trying to do- killed any and all sympathy each of the occupants of the room may have had for Craig and what his life would now be like.

Frankie summed up all their thoughts. "Talk about Karma. Not only is he alive and going to jail but he can't even walk. But it's still a better fate than what he planned for Justin and Brian. Fucker!"

"Has there been an APB put out on Kip Thomas yet?" Josiah asked.

"Yeah. But Gardner has been a bit trickier to nail down. He left his office at about ten and hasn't been back yet," Larry answered.

"According to the phone records, the last call he made was to Stockwell. I just got a hit on the tower from his cell phone. He's near the Wiltshire Hotel on the opposite side of the City." Frankie confirmed.

"Well Evangeline always did have extravagant taste," Sarah said sardonically.

Josiah nodded at Sarah's observation. Even on assignment, Evangeline was known for her creature comforts. Hopefully it would serve them well. "Frankie, I want you to cross-reference Stockwell's number with Vance's and find out if there were any other calls placed between the two men.
Something else is not adding up in this equation."

"Perhaps I can help with that," John appeared in the doorway.

"Who are you young man? This is official police business. You shouldn't have been allowed back here," Larry stated. He was annoyed beyond measure with the interruption and with the lackadaisical vibe his force was giving in front of the FBI.

"Feel free to tell that to the nitwits lounging around on the job up front," John answered as he moved to the other side of the conference table across from Frankie. "Sarah, before the craziness of the morning set in, Dixon was by the house. I have a copy of the list we made with Tucker detailing the Who's Who of the Pittsburgh elite. Peter went to drop off a copy to Quinn, Aurora, Ted and Myrna who are at the bank already running financial reports."

Taking the list from John, Sarah perused it with wide eyes. "How sure are you that it's accurate?"

"Tucker grew up in this atmosphere, so did Gus, although on the outskirts of it, but he was pretty knowledgeable of the history of run-ins with these people and Brian and Justin."

"Fucking hell. There are notable A-gays on here as well." Sarah looked stunned at the magnitude of hatred on the list. She handed it over to Carl who also knew most of the history of Brian and Justin's rise to success. "Do you see anyone familiar Carl?"

"Every fucking person on this list has something to gain by the demise of Brian and Justin. The trouble is that even though some are just average Joe Schmooes, it's the ones with the money that are a huge fucking problem. Their lawyers will be able to find some loophole to get them off without serving even a fucking hour in jail. FUCK! Kinney's own mother and sister are on this list! No wonder they never have any fucking money of their own," Carl fumed. He was even more appalled than Sarah was, especially since Brian basically supported them financially as long as they kept away from him. "They have been using his own money to try and kill him."

John closed his eyes, hearing that aloud. He couldn't believe it when he found out. It was one thing for him to hate his uncle based on misconceptions fed to him. But his grandmother and mother were literally living off of the man they hated even while proclaiming what a vile human being he was to any and all that would listen. He was thankful that he was getting to know them for himself; that Brian and Justin had given him and Peter a second chance to have a life and family. He would help to save those two men however he could.
John began to set up his computer. "Also thanks to my cousin Gus, I know a little something that may be of use to you. Gus has two cell phones; something Uncle Brian insisted on when he kept forgetting to charge his primary phone. They bought Jenny an additional one too against Melanie and Michael's wishes so they don't know about it." They all stood by and watched as John pulled out a keyring with about twelve flash drives on it. His brow furrowed as he studied each one, finally settling on the eighth one. "Anyway, he sent a confusing text message that I think you all would be able to help with. I'm not sure what it means but based on the circumstances, I think it's important."

Sarah, Carl and Josiah looked over his shoulder as John opened the screen. The message read: Kip-KDTyhr. Evang/MarkBOMB!Britin, LDin, Kinn, Baba, poss YOUR hse, HELP!Gramps!

"Carl...." the sound of her voice was calm despite the anxiety which gripped her. "get on the phone to Britin right now. Tell them not to let anyone into the house."

"What?" Carl asked confused.

"Don't let anyone into the fucking house, Carl. Tell them! If they're going to try to bomb Britin, it has to be done from inside the house. The brick and mortar can't be blasted unless dynamite is used. Mark won't use C4 for the house. He's more for using Molotov cocktails in situations like this. Since all of the windows in Britin have been changed to their shatterproof variation, Mark won't be able to throw it through the window; he or someone else has to get in. They're also planning to bomb the Liberty Diner, Kinnetik and maybe even your fucking house since tonight is usually Family Dinner."

Realization dawned in Carl's eyes then. He had never been so happy for Brian's paranoia as he was in that second. There were so many guests in residence at Britin, including some notable names like Leo Brown, John Remson and the Avlossa group- all who donated heavily to AIDS research as well as Hospices and care of aging Homosexuals around the globe, that the message behind their demises could not be overlooked. The fact that the blast which killed them would be in Brian and Justin's house would be an added bonus. Carl reached for his cell phone in a hurry.

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Securing Britin

Emmett dropped to his knees as he heard Carmela's voice over the phone. How the fuck could this have happened? He began to cry, unable to stem the flow of tears or the screaming going on inside his head at the unfairness of life for all of them. As he felt the strong arms wrap around him from behind, Emmett melted into them hoping beyond hope that it was a nightmare; that Carmela hadn't really said that sweet little JR had been shot; that Gus- who was as fierce, loyal and as intelligent as
his father had not been taken as a hostage to lure the Taylor-Kinneys.

As he watched Drew comfort Emmett, Tucker could still hear the voice of a young girl screaming for the tall queen over the phone. Picking it up, he continued the conversation. "This is Tuck, Carmela. No Em is okay but whatever you told him just now has him freaking out. Why don't you tell me what's going on."

"Jenny has been shot and Gus kidnapped. Doctor Chanders rushed Jenny into the operating room. My mom is trying to get ahold of Melanie and Lindsay but hasn't been able to," Carmela said. Then she filled in all of the information for Tuck stemming quite a few of his next questions.

He listened in horror as she explained how Jenny had ended up with a bullet to the arm and felt a chill run through him as Carmela stated what the unmasked kidnapper said to her. He listened as the remarkably-composed girl who was speaking began to fall apart at that point, apologizing profusely and blaming herself for everything that had befallen Gus and Jenny while they were out. "Calm down, Carmela. It's okay. You and your mom did the best that you could do under the circumstances. None of this is anyone's fault except the unscrupulous idiots behind it so don't blame yourself. I will get to Lindsay okay?"

"Okay but I don't know how much longer the surgery will take."

"Don't worry. We'll be there as soon as we can. In the meantime, you and your mom sit tight okay?"

"Okay," Carmela answered quietly before disconnecting the call.

Tucker pinched the bridge of his nose- a habit he'd inadvertently picked up from both Brian and Justin down through the years on separate occasions- and tried to calm himself down. The whole morning had been just one fucked up situation after another. First Craig and his bullshit, then finding out that Brian went off to play vigilante with Sarah and her team, the fucking visit from Dickhead Dixon and then the news about Gus and Jenny. Part of him wished they'd all just stayed in bed but that wasn't life. This was about preserving life.

He was tempted to throw his own cell phone when it started ringing within his pocket. But he remembered he was expecting an update from Jennifer and Molly at the hospital so he refrained. Looking at the caller id, he was almost tempted not to pick it up but somehow knew that it was important.
"Hey Carl. We just heard about Jenny and I'm on my way to Mel and Lindsay's to get them. Carmela said they're not answering their phone."

"Listen, Tuck I hate to put this all on you but it's not safe for any of you to be out of the house right now, especially the special guests staying there."

"What the hell has happened now? First Craig's accident then Dixon shows up and now we can't leave?" Tucker couldn't hide the irritation in his voice.

Carl exploded. "What about Dixon? Holy shit, this is so fucked up."

"He was here this morning looking for Justin. We kicked him out."

"Who's 'we'?" Carl asked. As far as he knew, Brian and Justin were at the hospital under lock and key."

"Justin's friend Julienne McKay arrived this morning just before Justin was told about Craig. Any word on that situation? Jennifer and Molly haven't called yet. Neither has Justin."

"Justin was put into a room with Brian. From what I've been told by the two of them, Justin had a bad panic attack after his meeting with Craig this morning. He still doesn't know that Gold is dead or that the fucking bastard Taylor survived but will never walk again."

"Good for the fucker," Tucker spat. "He deserves much more. But anyway, what's being done to track down Gus? Carmela told us that Daphne is operating on Jenny. Who the fuck has Gus, Carl?"

"We know who has him, Tuck, but getting him back won't be easy. They want Justin mostly but they also need Brian stabilized."

"Did you get the list from John?"

"Yeah I got it. That is a disturbing piece of business for so many reasons. But listen... what happened when Dixon came this morning?"
Tucker went on to explain all the details of Dixon's impromptu and unwelcomed visit. Based on the grunts coming from Carl, this was nowhere near to being solved. "I imagine that Dixon is on his way to a hospital, although I'm not sure which one. Julienne sliced his arm pretty deep."

"Another take-no-prisoners blonde, huh? I can see understand why she and Justin are such good friends." He chuckled but just as quickly sobered. "Okay... so here is what I want from you. You and only one other person can leave the house so choose your wingman wisely. The rest have to stay put. I would prefer if Emmett keeps hold of Britin. The one thing I know about Em is that he can transform himself into a total Butch if necessary and it most certainly may become necessary."

"Then I think it's best if I leave Drew here with him. But Ben said that he would be back today. He went back to his house to look for Michael. Debbie had been calling him every hour on the hour trying to see if he's heard from him."

"I know. My wife is at best, unmanageable when it comes to Michael. I don't have time to give you all of my thoughts on that situation but unfortunately he has to be notified along with Mel. Due to the fact that Jenny was shot near a main artery and they have to try and save her life with or without familial consent, it's allowing Daphne to operate on her. But either way, Melanie had best get her ass there pronto. In the meantime, call your wife and ask her and Molly to be on standby since Brian and Justin can't be."

"Will do Carl. I will head down to Lindsay's house as soon as I hang up with you. Colby should be there as well. In the meantime, I'll also get a call out to Ben."

After their goodbyes, Tucker got to work explaining everything to both Drew and Emmett. Per Carl's instructions, no one was to enter or leave the house for any reason. Emmett promised that he would do what he could to make sure everyone stayed safe and give them information on a need-to-know basis. "I actually think Leo and John might need to know a little more than everyone else. Probably Jason too," Emmett volunteered.

"Why?" Tucker was genuinely interested in what Em had to say. Although he could come off as a silly queen sometimes, Tucker knew that Emmett was not only an intelligent man but he also had a knack for intrigue.

"Not only are they clients and the ones with unlimited resources but they are Brian and Justin's friends. Their true friends like we are. If there is anything that they can do, they will. Also I think we should let them look at the list Gus, John and Peter came up with. I know that Peter is already on his way to the bank but if the three businessmen- one of which just happens to be a real estate agent- could shed some more light on that comprehensive list then it's worth a shot."
Tucker nodded. "What you're saying has real merit, Em. Plus it may just help cool their jets about being trapped inside the house for the duration of this. From what I know about architecture, whomever they send will have to plant the bomb inside the house. The outside structure will withstand any blast but the inside won't." Tucker narrowed his eyes in contemplation. "As soon as I clear the gates, close them immediately."

Emmett's eyes widened in understanding. He clapped his hands in excitement. "I'd forgotten that they took that particular precaution."

"What?" Drew said genuinely confused by the two men's crypticness.

Tucker smiled. "Brian and Justin are fucking geniuses."

"Well duh? We know that," Drew said chuckling. "But what does that have to do with this?"

Emmett answered his lover's question. "The security panel both inside and outside of the gate can only be accessed by a fingerprint within the database. If you notice anytime you come with me and the gates are closed, I have to press on that panel. The same thing happens with Jenn and Tucker. Molly's fingerprint is in the database. Daphne's, Ted's and Cynthia's fingerprints are all in the database as are Lindsay's, Gus' and Jenny's. Ben's fingerprint is in the database; they didn't trust Michael, and with good reason and it's the same with Carl and Deb. Horvath has his fingerprint registered whereas Debbie doesn't."

"That's a little surprising," Drew muttered.

"Not really. Deb and Michael suffer from the same disease called Barge-in-itis. Most of the time if there is some problem with Michael, Debbie has no qualms about darkening Brian's door. Michael has been known many, MANY times to happen up when Brian and Justin are fucking. Justin has even noted how Michael would seethe and watch them until Justin would lose his hard-on and Brian would be ready to commit murder."

"Ah, life with the Novotnys," Tucker mused aloud. There was just no end to the fuckery which could be laid at Michael's door. "Well I better get going. And remember, NO ONE gets in. I don't give a fuck if it's any member of the family, the Pope not even Christ himself, Emmett."

"I gotcha Tuck. In the meantime, I'll call everyone and tell them, especially John and Peter although I
don't expect them anytime soon. Anthony, Sheila, Julienne, Gareth, Celene and Julienne's husband headed out shortly after the confrontation with Dixon. I know they were going to follow-up with Sarah and her team. Also Jules said that if Colby should check in to tell him to call her."

"Fuck is there anyone that woman does NOT know?" Tuck exclaimed but he was laughing as well.

"Between her, little John and Colby, I think they will be able to track Gus down. Also Sarah said that her guy Frankie is damn good too. I just hope they find him soon. And before Brian and Justin find out what is going on would be preferable. Brian's going to go batshit crazy; Justin and Gus are not to be played with," Emmett said.

Tucker nodded. It was yet another problem with this whole thing. On a good day, Brian Kinney was unpredictable. Today is a very bad day. "Lock up tight, Em," he reiterated as he made determined strides towards the front door.

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The Assholeness of would be kidnappers

Ty was worried beyond measure about the little girl, same as his charge. While the others were gloating about Kip's bitch move, he was seething. Ty got a really good look at the young man across from him. He was his father's son not only in looks but his attitude as well. While the others were absorbed in their deviltry and planning their next move, the youngster sat there stoically, no doubt planning his escape.

Ty bit his lip. His main goal in this phase of the operation was to stay out of sight of Evangeline. She was the only one who knew that he wasn't what he said he was. To Kip and his cohorts, Ty was a down-on-his-luck musician who was on his last leg financially. He'd met Kip at Babylon of all places. He was amazed that the fucker was allowed in at all. He shook his head. Kinney probably wouldn't have expected Kip Thomas to have the balls to show up in his kingdom and honestly, Ty wouldn't have expected it either. But there was a half-million dollar payoff in this for the Adman and if he could also see the fall of his nemesis and the twink that almost ruined him, he would. It seemed everyone had an axe to grind against Brian Kinney and Justin Taylor merely because they had done what few others had-- they worked hard, played harder and loved each other the hardest.

Part of Ty's job was research for his team which included reconnaissance and computer hacking. A few days prior to arriving in Pittsburgh and in anticipation of the event he was now embroiled in, Ty hacked into Gus Kinney's school records. Although Gus was set to inherit his father's fortune and Kinnetik, Brian had encouraged the teen to take a sign language class since Gus had a friend who
was deaf when he was younger. Gus liked it well enough that he continued to take all subsequent classes even after his friend moved from Toronto some years before Gus did. Fortunately, as part of his training, Ty was also well-versed in sign. All he could do was hope like hell that Gus wouldn't ignore him since he'd recognized him instantly from the office meeting during the Taylor-Kinney weekend party. What a fucking quandary.

Hey Gus. He watched as Gus tried deliberately to ignore him, not that he could blame him at all. This situation in its entirety was beyond fucked up. To Gus, he must look like a traitor but he really needed the boy to trust him. And the only way to do that, was to keep trying to communicate with the boy. Gus...Please... I know you know what I am saying. I'm here to help you.

Bullshit. You betrayed us.

No Gus I didn't, I promise. I'm undercover but they don't know that. Kip hired me to do this job. I need to find out where they are taking you to alert the team. The phone they took, was that the only one you have?

Gus looked at him with skepticism written clearly across his face. Ty's heart went out to the boy. He didn't ask for any of this-- hell none of them did-- but he really needed Gus to trust him. He watched Gus chew on his thumbnail, no doubt a habit he picked up from Brian. It almost caused him to laugh out loud at how much the boy favored his father. It wasn't only in looks but in mannerisms. Ty saw the moment that Gus decided to trust him.

Raising his hands hesitantly, he Gus signed, Betray me this time and I'll make sure my father kicks the shit out of you. Gus pulled out his additional cell phone from his sock on the side of his instep. It never occurred to his kidnappers to search him thoroughly, relying on the fact that they had scared the kid into compliance. It was evident that Kip in all his arrogance at having captured the son of his enemy had forgotten that Gus was Brian Kinney's son which meant that he was cunning, resourceful and intelligent far beyond what a normal fifteen year old should be.

Fine, Gus. I'll accept that ass kicking although he'd have a helluva time following through with it. Now I need you to send a text quickly. Tell them that we are together and everything that you've heard so far. If you can leave out the vowels of every sentence; it will still be recognizable to whoever you send it to. It also means that you'll be able to get the message typed that much faster. I'll shield you. NOW HURRY!

He watched as Gus took a deep breath, his slightly shaking hands the only indicator of his nervousness at being in a moving van heading to an unknown destination. Gus typed quickly, his movements efficient, his eyes flying from left to right as he typed. Ty watched amazed as Gus went into the settings and switched on the GPS tracking unit within the phone. He didn't know how much good it would do but it was worth every shot they had. This was an assignment he and Gus would
definitely need backup for. Ty tuned into the conversation happening in the front of the van even as he continued to shield Gus who resented the message in case the phone's WIFI acted up the first time.

"I heard that the boss will actually be there sometime today," The largest of the goons said.

"Yeah. According to Gardner he has a meeting with Evangeline and then she is coming personally to chat with our 'special guest' back there. Personally if it were up to me, I would have shot the little fucker and left him with the bitch back at that strip mall. I owe Kinney for taking the one thing that was important from me when I needed it. Ryder was my ticket to becoming something. I could have really been somebody at that fucking company before Kinney and his fucking twink ruined my career."

"You're seriously not making any sense, Kip," the thinner of the goons said. Ty thought that his name was Calvin. "There has to be more to the story especially since Vance is your direct boss."

"First of all we are losing billions of dollars a year in revenue because our clients are jumping ship to go to Kinnetik. That's part of the reason Gardner wants Kinney eliminated. The second reason is that he wants Justin to work for him ONLY. My reason for wanting revenge against Justin Taylor goes a bit deeper than the doomed sexual harassment lawsuit.

Calvin looked at Kip closely as the other man shifted back and forth under his scrutiny. Calvin began to laugh out loud before saying, "You're fucking jealous. You're pissed that the blond gets to ride Brian Fucking Kinney every day and night while you don't."

"Fuck you," Kip sneered.

"Well at least somebody with a great dick is. I've been fucked by Kinney myself and he really is a great lay but you should have known better than to want more of that dick. You're lucky you got to experience it twice although I can't understand how you were able to pull that shit off. Usually as soon as he busted a nut in the condom encased in your ass, he FORGOT that he was in your ass in the first place. Justin's ass is truly memorable- well to look at in any rate. It makes both tops and bottoms salivate over the possibility of tasting it. He actually might let a guy rim him but no one but Brian Fucking Kinney is allowed inside. And by the way his cock is unforgettable too. Yeah, I've had that too on a separate occasion and in an orgy some years ago. He and Brian have raised tricking to much higher standards than they used to be. One of them at any time is memorable but together....they're FIRE! Too bad you'll never know that particular pleasure, Kip. You aren't even a blip on their radar if you ever were. I still don't understand how Kinney looked at you twice. You're not that hot and you're definitely NOT in the same caliber as Justin Taylor."
"You're an asshole and you're wrong about me being jealous of that fucking twink," Kip barked but the statement didn't ring true for anyone, including himself.

"Nope, I'm right. Not only does he have the man you want, he has the money and company that you will NEVER have. Just accept it as your lot in life and move on already dude. You're never going to fuck them and you're never going to be them. After this shit is over with, find a way to do something worthwhile with your life and stop chasing uninterested parties. For someone who claims to have a brilliant mind you really are a dumb fuck Kip. Buy a fucking clue already..."

While Ty listened to the men argue back-and-forth about Kip's mental capacity, he once again communicated with Gus. Don't worry man. We'll get the fuck out of this.

I hope so. Because if we don't come out of it alive, there won't be anything to stop my dad from killing Kip and the rest. And I really can't lose him. Not after just getting him back again.

Ty wasn't usually a praying man but suddenly he found himself sending up one for strength and wisdom. Evangeline was a ruthless bitch and would stop at nothing to enact a revenge. Yeah.. he knew the reason why she had targeted Brian and Justin although he wasn't sure that Sarah and the Higgins did. He'd learned a lot when he had infiltrated Tamara St. Giles' organization just before her arrest for trafficking and murder. He could only hope that while he was trapped in the back of the van with Gus Kinney, that the messages he'd sent reached Phoenix and the Captain. If not, he and Gus were in deep shit trouble with no hope of getting out of it alive.

The Final Goodbye

Melanie sat at the kitchen table still reeling from what the fuck she had just done. She couldn't just believe it herself. If anyone had ever told her that she would have taken that particular step-- that final irrevocable step-- into letting Lindsay go, she would have laughed and told the person to get the fuck out of her face. But she was there. And most of all, she had wanted it.

After a comfortable breakfast with Gus and his subsequent departure, Melanie had offered to clean up the breakfast dishes deciding that she needed some time alone to make plans and figure out her life. She thought of the last ten years since the move to Canada and how she and Lindz had struggled to maintain their relationship. Sure Lindsay had had an affair but it was just that... a one-time only short lived fuck that had no emotional baggage attached. It was just her way of scratching an itch that couldn't be quelled from a talented tongue and a strap-on. Melanie understood that now. Lindsay's Bisexuality had always been between them-- both refusing to acknowledge the possibility but also unable to ignore the consequences. It wasn't a question of love or even a question of wanting; it was about getting a need met. Melanie had dried her hands after putting the last of the pre-rinsed dishes in the dishwasher and with her newfound knowledge of their relationship, she decided that it was finally time to have that 'talk' with Lindsay.
Unfortunately or fortunately, depending on how one viewed the situation, Melanie walked in on a scene that disgusted her and intrigued her by turns. Lindsay was laid out on the bed, one leg raised and wrapped around Colby’s neck while her other long leg was draped elegantly around his hip. Her long blonde hair ebbed and flowed off the side of the huge four-poster bed reminding Melanie of a silk curtain waving in a strong breeze. Melanie could literally see the sheen of sweat covering Lindsay's body even as Colby kept fucking her. One of Lindsay's hands had disappeared into the vee between her legs while the other held and played with one of her breasts. Melanie watched reluctantly as the long fingers of Colby's hand toyed with the nipple of her other breast.

The moans emitting from Lindsay caused Melanie to quake from the inside- a siren's call that she herself knew all too well. Without thought, Melanie had moved closer to that sound. Before she had a chance to control the impulse to touch, Melanie's fingers were already entwining with Lindsay's, providing an extra stimulation to her already overly-sensitized body. Her surprised eyes connected first with the green eyes of the man enthusiastically plunging into her ex-wife and then panned down to behold the brown eyes of Lindsay. Red-faced and ashamed of having so little self-control, Melanie attempted to pull back but Lindsay held her firmly in place.

Melanie saw the question in Lindsay's eyes even before the soft demand was given. "Stay," Lindsay commanded breathlessly.

"I... I," Melanie stuttered through her answer. On one hand, she knew that she shouldn't have been there but on the other, she just couldn't stop herself from wanting Lindsay. She had never seen the blonde look more beautiful or sensual than in that moment.

Mel's eyes flicked over to Colby's silently asking for permission. He didn't say anything but nodded his head slightly, giving Melanie permission to make the decision for herself. He knew she was a bonafide lesbian and that not even participating in a threesome would change that. Melanie didn't like the idea of sharing but at the same time, she knew without a doubt that she had to know if there was anyway she could live in an arrangement where Lindsay had the best of both her worlds and Melanie could still have Lindsay.

With that thought in mind, Melanie undressed while Colby allowed the blond to switch positions to doggie style. Melanie jumped at the sound of the light smack and subsequent squeal she heard coming from the bed as Colby's large palm connected with Lindsay’s ass. It had been so long since she'd heard that little girlish giggle that Lindsay always had during the light BDSM activities they had occasionally indulged in over the years. Sliding her body beneath Lindsay's, Melanie ran her fingers through Lindsay's hair. It was still as soft as she remembered and she closed her eyes, lost momentarily in the scent of scent of gardenias. She would never again smell the flower and not think of her former lover.
Melanie pulled Lindsay's lips to hers, tentatively at first but then more forcefully, sealing their tongues inside the wet heat. She gasped as Lindsay's tongue swirled around hers, the change in the tenor of the kiss more than evident. She couldn't remember a time when Lindsay had felt so free to be the sexual creature Mel had known existed but had disappeared some years before. That creature had made an appearance at the end of the first LBD episode of their lives but hadn't surfaced since. Melanie couldn't stop the press of tears forming behind her eyelids even as the light movement of Lindsay's body on top of her aroused her to the point of madness. She swallowed Lindsay's moan as the rocking continued above her; felt the shimmy of Lindsay's body as Colby reentered the sexual fray. As much as she hated that a man was invading the time she had with Lindsay, she was also grateful to him for fucking Lindsay as he was. Her pleasure was being doubled because Lindsay's was being heightened at the same time.

Melanie felt Lindsay's body being dragged down her own. She wanted to protest the loss of the plush lips that continuously caressed hers but the impulse to do so died as she felt her former lover's wet tongue bathing her. Her nipples hardened as she was bit sharply and licked and she couldn't stop the moan which bubbled out of her. Before and after Leda had visited their bed and just prior to the Sam episode, Lindsay was such a WASP in bed-- a super-controlled dictator who sometimes was only able to achieve pleasure by directing Melanie's every action. But seeing Lindsay free to be who she was without fear of reprisal from her, was probably the biggest turn-on to Melanie.

"Fuck me," she heard Lindsay's voice ring out to the man behind her.

Melanie felt it the minute Colby changed his angle since it cause Lindsay's breathing to also change. Lindsay brought her head up from Melanie's skin just long enough to throw a seductive smile at Colby who returned it. Mel's eyes connected with his again and she began to understand the attraction between he and Lindsay. They were alike; she could see that now. There wasn't any jealousy or malice in him as he looked down on his new lover and her ex-wife. It was just a matter of getting off and meeting needs; sex in its purest form between the three occupants of the bed. It was then that Melanie decided to stop over-analyzing and just enjoy the moment.

When Lindsay's mouth latched onto her between her thighs, Mel thought that she would cum right then. No one, not even Marianne, excelled at cunnilingus like Lindsay did. Absolutely no one. Mel felt her body begin to shiver from the inside out as Lindsay flicked over her clit repeatedly, moaning against her center as Colby pounded into Lindz from behind.

"Please," Melanie barely recognized her own voice as it begged for release.

She looked down her body to see Lindsay smile. "What is it that you're asking for Mel?" Lindsay asked just before she lowered her head again, teasing Mel's labia but deliberately avoiding her vibrating nub.
Mel made a noise that sounded like a partial whine and grunt of frustration. "Make me cum, damnit! Lindsay, fucking please..." She couldn't finish her sentence as Lindsay had chosen that exact moment to introduce her fingers into the mix while still keeping her tongue in play.

Melanie's relief was short-lived as Lindsay decided to settle in for the long haul and make her suffer that much more. She pushed her fingers inside and then as soon as she would feel Mel's walls start to milk her digits, Lindsay would pull back and wait for Mel's pending orgasm to subside. Melanie was trying to decide if Lindsay was being sadistic or if she was honestly just trying to prolong their moment of closure. By the time Lindsay allowed Melanie one small orgasm, the brunette had decided that Lindsay was definitely punishing her even as Lindz started the process all over again.

For his part, Colby was on the brink of tears from laughing at the entire situation. Although he knew he had no reason to be jealous of Melanie, it didn't stop him from being a little apprehensive when he'd looked up to find her caressing Lindsay's tit. When he had looked down at the blonde and saw the desire in her eyes for both him and Melanie, he resigned himself to the threesome. Based on the morning's events, Colby knew that they both needed closure and if them fucking was going to get it, he was all for it so that they each could move forward in their lives.

He slowed his pelvis down to a snail's pace as he watched with fascination as Lindsay continuously tortured Melanie. He knew that part of his was about revenge but the other part of Lindsay's treatment of Melanie was so that neither woman would forget the other. This was their last time and all three of them knew it. Colby began to rev up the speed in which he entered Lindsay again shortly after she'd allowed Melanie a small release to take the edge off. Keeping a steady pace, he followed the moaning decrees made by both women. Lindsay would listen to what Melanie would say or more accurately stutter out and then Colby would listen to Lindsay's body. He had to admit that he was enjoying himself. He'd been with plenty of women but the two before him were two of the most incendiary females he'd ever met. A breath here and a lick there and both would combust. It was a fucking pleasure to watch and be a part of.

Colby reached down and wrapped his hands in Lindsay's hair, directing the pressure of her mouth against Mel's pussy. The brunette screamed while Lindsay moaned against her and Colby changed the angle to flow over the blonde's g-spot. His actions caused both women to increase their own writhing which in turn made him fuck Lindsay harder. It wasn't long before he heard the orgasmic proclamations from both women and finally felt free to pour himself into Lindsay.

As the three of them laid there to catch their breath from the intense fuck session, he noticed how quiet both Lindsay and Melanie had gotten. He lifted his head slightly off the pillow to watch the scene play out before him. Lindsay had reached over to touch Mel's face, while the brunette had turned into the caress. He realized that whatever had needed to be said physically between them had been, and that all that was left to do was to have the inevitable conversation. He removed himself from the bed, suggesting that they do the same and meet downstairs for coffee. He was going to go for a run.
As Mel stared into the snowy landscape, she remembered Colby's parting words as he'd left to give the two women some privacy.

"Say what needs to be said for both of your sakes. But leave it all on the table and then finally go on with your lives. Whether you and Marianne make it is anyone's guess, but I'm not letting go of Lindz," his brogue was the thickest she'd ever heard it.

"I know Colby. But hey listen... thanks."

He'd looked at her with those startling green eyes, at first suspiciously, but then softening as he realized the truth of her words. Mel was relieved. She really did like the Irishman and more than that, after the episode upstairs, she appreciated him even more. Melanie heard Lindsay before she spotted her by the stairs. Freshly showered she was still the most amazing and beautiful woman, Mel had ever laid eyes on. Once again, she regretted their hurtful actions in their past, things done to divide them and things which had ultimately resulted in the death of their marriage.

Melanie cleared her throat. "You know, Lindz, I wonder if we should have ever started up again after that whole Gui episode."

"What?" Lindsay had grabbed a cup of coffee and seated herself directly across from Mel.

"Gui... you remember the french guy you were going to marry when Gus was about six months old?"

Lindsay laughed lightly. "I remember him. I wonder what happened to him sometimes. But back to your statement, why would you feel that way, Mel?"

"It's just that so much of this pain could have been avoided Lindsay. We've hurt each other far more than should have been necessary for us to get the picture that we didn't belong together."

"But Mel, I choose not to think of it that way," Lindsay said as she reached across the table to hold the brunette's hand. "You and me... we've had some really great moments, Mel. We've had some victories in our lives that no one else but us could have appreciated. We've also had some battles that couldn't be fought without each other. If it weren't for you, I would technically still be stuck reliving the nightmares I had from the Babylon bombing. And I wouldn't have gotten the courage to stand up for myself in so many situations."
"Even if you were standing up to me," Melanie laughed.

Lindz smiled in return. "Well if you can't tell your lover what you think, who can you tell?"

"Lindz, Marianne..."

"You don't owe me an explanation Melanie. Marianne happened; we were falling apart. I know that and I'm okay with it."

"Really?"

"Yeah I am. After I stormed out of here this morning, Colby and I had a long talk about it. The truth is that I knew we were over before you even started seeing her. I wasn't happy Mel, and it had nothing to do with you or the kids. It was that I was denying everything about myself. Sure I'd have the occasional liaison with a man but it wouldn't mean anything; just a need to scratch an itch. By then though, I'd found that I needed to scratch the itch more and more and I was becoming discontent with my lot in life."

"Why didn't you say anything?" Mel genuinely wanted to know.

"Remember how angry you were about Sam? You reamed me out in the middle of that party for sleeping with him. Yet I know that you felt that you shared some of the blame because I was confused about what I wanted for my life. You kept thinking that you weren't enough which couldn't have been further from the truth. So no, I couldn't tell you this; couldn't add to your grief and worry about something you really had no control over. Besides we were in fucking Canada- no family, few friends and no one who had been around us from the beginning." 

"Did you tell Brian?"

Lindsay nodded but hurried to explain at Melanie's crestfallen look. "It wasn't like what you're thinking. Over the years I've only gone to him three times with this kind of issue. First there was my conflicting feelings about Leda's advent into our lives. Brian had told me in so many words that I had what it took to keep you happy. Then there was the issue of Sam. Brian told me that I had to decide what I wanted and needed. And then this time, I went to him with the realization that I am in fact Bi and that I don't view sex in the same way as straight people or gay people. He told me that it doesn't make me a bad person; just a human."
"I never thought I would say this but he gave you solid advice," Melanie reluctantly acknowledged.

Lindsey smiled in response. "He's not the asshole you always thought him to be, Mel. Honest to a fault; doesn't sugarcoat the truth to make it comfortable to digest, not even for himself. Brian has a way of cutting straight through the bullshit to see the truth of things... much like yourself."

Melanie thought about it. That was always a source of contention between her and Brian. She sighed. "So this is goodbye then?"

"Let's look at it like this, Mel. We'll say 'goodbye' as lovers but 'hello' as friends. I think that's a facet of our relationship that needed to be rekindled long ago and worth saving."

"Deal!" Melanie exclaimed as she rose from her seat to embrace Lindsay.

As they were finishing up their conversation, Colby stormed into the house with Tuck and Ben in tow. He didn't waste time on preliminaries. "Something has happened..."

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Hello Karma my old friend

The bright light coming from his right stung his eyes. Ordinarily, sunlight didn't bother Craig; in fact he loved it. It used to remind him of Jennifer and Justin- their hair and their smiles. Molly had her mother's smile but had inherited the strawberry in her blonde locks from his mother. His family was his pride and joy at one time. He'd pinned many hopes on his children to carry on his legacy, to build a family of their own which would carry on the Taylor name. But there was just one disappointment after the other beginning with his so-called eldest son. Justin. Never a more willful fucker had Craig encountered in his entire life. No matter how much Craig hurt him, Justin rose above it. No matter how much life tried to maim him, beat him and in some ways kill him, Justin soared. Even before Craig had been wheeled into surgery he had tried his best to reach Justin, to make him realize how worthless he was in spite of being rich and successful. What good was a man if he couldn't be useful to his family? But Justin had stood strong and stared him down even as Craig could see the hurt he was inflicting become hate in Justin's expressive eyes. Part of Craig had wished that Justin would have murdered him then the fucker would have been carted off to jail and thus bringing his life to an end. But his plan had once again backfired. Justin was somewhere living his life while Craig was headed off to jail. No doubt Justin ran straight to the police with all that he had revealed in his convalescent rage. The best that Craig could hope for was that he would be able to make a deal somehow to serve less time in prison. Sure he was culpable in every aspect of the fall of Brian Kinney and his former son but still there had to be something he could bargain with, right?
"Oh good, Mr. Taylor, you're awake."

"Who are you?" Craig asked the doctor standing by his bedside.

"Oh I'm sorry, you probably don't remember. I'm Doctor Troy Bradley. I actually operated on you this afternoon. You're in the recovery room until we can give you a room."

Craig nodded. "So what's the verdict, Doc? When will I be allowed to go home?"

Troy pulled up the chair bedside and took a seat. Usually he wasn't happy with the news he had to share but knowing that this man had caused such harm to his friends and to Daphne, he couldn't say that he was sorry to be the 'bearer of bad news' to this man before him. "How about I tell what we've done to save you life first and then I can answer all of your subsequent questions."

"Fine. Fine, get on with it," Craig snapped. He couldn't explain it but he felt that the doctor was taking a sort of perverse joy in delaying the answers to his most fervent questions. Craig had meeting with Stockwell, Hobbs and Vance in a little less than an hour. He needed to at least be on the phone since there was no fucking way he was leaving the hospital today.

Troy saw the man's impatience and although tempted to draw it out further, he was more than anxious to get the hell out of the same room with the asshole. "As you wish, Mr. Taylor. The bottom line is this. The level of injuries sustained when your car flipped over multiple times were rather life-threatening. The fact that you waited to have the surgery until your son arrived compounded the injury. You died on the table twice in which my team was able to revive you."

"Thank you," Craig said automatically.

Troy smiled sardonically. "You're welcome although... well Mr. Taylor there really isn't an easy way to say this so I'll just spit it out. Your spine was severed in three places. Unfortunately there was nothing we could do to mend it. Although your right leg-- as well as the left-- is technically dead, your femur which is where all of your blood cells are made, had a hairline fracture in it which we were able to take care of. We suspect the fracture happened while you were pressing the brake of your car as it rolled down into the ravine. The other internal injuries included fractured ribs, bruised kidneys and a dislocated testicle which were also taken care of during the surgery. The good news is that you're alive. The bad news is that you'll be confined to a wheelchair for the rest of your life."

Troy quieted allowing the man to absorb all of the information he'd just imparted. He saw the second it registered that Craig fully understood yet could help but ask the question.
"Are you saying that I am a quadriplegic?"

"Yes, Mr. Taylor, that is exactly what I am saying."

"FUCK!! I ought to sue you for not letting me die!"

Troy smirked. "That would have meant my job, Mr. Taylor. If there is one thing I don't play around with, it is my medical license. To intentionally allow you to expire on my table regardless of my feelings toward your cowardly, bigoted ass would have meant that I could no longer do what I love. In essence, it would have put me in the position that you are now."

"What the fuck are you talking about?"

Troy smiled wide then. "I'm talking about the fact that the FBI is just outside of this door. I'm sure they're going to come in here and Mirandize you but forgive me but I've always wanted to say this: You played with a supposed pussy-- two of them actually-- but it looks like you're the one who's getting fucked. I'll let Justin know that you're out of surgery and that you're also under arrest. I'm sure he won't spare you another thought." Troy opened the door even as the man behind him was trying to order him back. "Sarah, he's all yours. Have fun with him." He leaned down and kissed her cheek even as he took one more look back at Craig to make sure he was watching. He snickered and left her to her job.

Craig screeched seeing his nemesis approach his hospital bed. "WHAT THE FUCK ARE YOU DOING HERE, PHOENIX? Is this some kind of joke? SECURITY!!!!"

Sarah laughed loud and long at the bedridden man's dramatics. When he noticed that there was no more help coming to aid beyond the two subordinate agents behind her, he finally quieted. "Nice to see you again, Craig, under much better circumstances...well at least they're better for me."

"Fuck you!"

"Nah...nah, Craig. That was the other way around if I recall. Looks like you won't be able to take a dick up your ass again. But on second thought, you will have to be turned every two hours even in prison during the night as you sleep. Perhaps some lonely guard or prisoner will take pity on you and tickle your prostate then." She chuckled as Craig squinched his eyes shut. "Well you have the right to remain silent. Anything you say or do can and will be used against you in a court of law. You
have the right to an attorney. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be appointed to you. Do you understand these rights as they have been given to you?"

Craig grunted in response.

Sarah chuckled. "It's so nice that you aren't talkative like so many other of my detainees. I'm going to cuff you to the bed, not that I think you really need it but I'd rather not tempt fate where you're concerned. We'll see what we can do about finding you a wheelchair to suit your needs. In the meantime, lay back, relax and rest."

"Aren't you going to offer me a deal?" Craig pleaded.

Sarah smiled. "That's not my job but if there is something you want to tell me...oh let's say about the kidnapping of Gus Kinney or the shooting of Jenny Rebecca Peterson-Marcus, I may be willing to listen. You know what they say Craig, 'Confession is good for the soul.' It won't exonerate you of any wrongdoing but it may unburden your conscious if there is one. Gus is 15 and Jenny 13; they have nothing to do with your war on Brian and Justin and should never have been involved. If this were Molly and Justin at these ages, wouldn't you do whatever you could to help get them back? Or better yet, if these were your kids with...ummm what's her name?"

"Madison."

"Yes, with Madison, wouldn't you want someone to help you get your kids back?" Sarah could see the moment Craig’s resolve had broken.

"I'll tell you what you want to know."

"Good Craig. At least you can go to jail with a clear conscious and I'll try to put in a good word for you with the Warden." She wouldn't but he didn't need to know that. The Warden of the federal prison that Craig would most likely be assigned to is as big a dyke as Brian is gay. He'd have better luck wishing for the Pope to visit and issue him last rites.

Sarah opened her phone and pressed the record button as Craig sung like the proverbial canary, detailing every facet of the operation he was involved in culminating in the kidnapping of Gus Kinney to lure Brian and Justin-- Justin specifically-- to the compound. There he was to exchange himself for the teenager and be handed over, first to Sapperstein to fuck, and the to Gardner Vance for him to essentially save Vanguard from Kinnetik. As for Kinney, he was to be killed execution
"The boss' name is Evangeline and she holds Brian and Justin personally responsible for her having to kill someone she loved. Apparently my deviant son and his whorish lover fucked her fiance and he decided that he no longer liked pussy. This is her revenge," Craig finished quietly.

"Do you hate your son so much that you would allow this to happen to him?" Sarah was appalled at the scheme but most of all that a father would stand by willingly and watch this happen to his child no matter how old.

"I have no son."

"And now you have no life," Sarah answered forcefully. She stood up no longer able to look at the man without feeling anything but the need to put a bullet in his head. "Rodriguez and Neal, no one and I mean NO ONE gets into this room except Dr. Troy Bradley or Dr. Daphne Chanders who is assisting with this case and acts as his second. I doubt Molly and Jennifer will want to visit him at all and Justin certainly won't. If anyone and I mean ANYONE tries to force their way into THIS room, SHOOT THEM. Or I kill you, got it?"

"Yes Agent Morrissey," the men answered in unison.

"Hey what about my deal? Will you talk to the Attorney General for me?" Craig voice had taken on that of a small child.

Sarah looked back at him with fire in her eyes, although her voice was very controlled when she spoke. "Not on your fucking life... or what's left of it." She exited the room in search of the Taylors minus Justin.

The sight that greeted her as she entered the emergency waiting room would have been funny if she didn't know that Daphne Chanders.... Dr. Daphne Chanders could lose her medical license for throwing lightning-fast jabs at her target and showed no inclination to stop any time soon.

"What a fucking day," she sighed as she went in the direction of the melee to save a vixen from jail time.
LIKE A TAYLOR-KINNEY SCORNED Part II

Chapter Summary

Just a brief recap… Craig got what he deserved! Even if he could somehow have gotten off, he still can’t escape punishment. That works for me!! And it definitely worked for Sarah. Gus has found a tentative ally (although he’s still reserving judgment) in Ty. The text messages were sent, received and understood by Carl and crew. Mel and Lindsay have made peace and moved on! For those of you who had a little trouble with the Mel/ Lindz/ Colby scene, allow me to clarify: Colby respects the fact that Mel is a lesbian and wouldn’t violate her by touching her. This entire scenario was sort of Mel passing the torch (so to speak) to the man that Lindsay is clearly involved with. And yes, I think it gave Mel a clearer picture of the natural instinct that Lindz has been fighting against throughout the years. Which brings us to Daphne’s rumble in the ‘Mergency Room (YEP… she knocked the E clear off the word). Whose block she’s knocking off will be revealed in a little bit but first we have some other ‘unfinished business’ to reconvene on… Damn I love intrigue!

Ted greeted Peter as he walked into the bank. He had called Emmett to check on things at the house. As Emmett relayed all of the information about Jenny and Gus, Ted felt a burning anger that one would never think the mild-mannered accountant could have been known for. Theodore Schmidt had NEVER wished hurt, harm or danger on anyone in his life until now. But now, the only thing that would have been more gratifying to him was if he could get the chance to administer it himself. Ted sent a quick message to Brian updating him on everything. He knew that Sarah had instructed that he and Justin be kept pretty much under lock and key during the process of bringing everyone to justice. Since Brian and Justin were the primary targets of this entire operation, Ted knew that it was wise to do so, but that didn't mean that he agreed with the theory that his friends should be kept in the dark about efforts being made on their behalf. If he knew one thing about Brian Kinney, it was that he didn't like being told what to do and he didn't like being made to feel helpless. And if that was true-- which it was-- then it was even worse where Justin Taylor was concerned. Justin was even more reckless and fearless than Brian and when thwarted in any manner, just as ruthless. If time would have permitted, he might have chuckled at the irony that Brian had ended up with the most stubborn man of their groups’ acquaintance, especially since everyone bought into Justin's innocent, picture-perfect looks. But Ted had gotten to know Justin very well and, along with Emmett, had figured out that there was so much more than met the eye with that young man.

Turning his attention to the matter at hand, Ted hugged Peter briefly before asking, "Did you remember the list?"

"Got it right here. I think we'd better hurry. With Gus having been kidnapped and Jenny in surgery, there's no telling when Sarah will need it."

Ted nodded. "How did you guys compile this so fast?"
"Gus and Tucker. Although Gus is much younger, he has a fantastic memory and could remember bits and pieces of conversations that he'd heard over the years, especially when it came to the confrontations he wasn't supposed to hear, like those between Lindsay and his 'aunt.' Also, as you know, Tucker grew up WASP so he knows backround on every one of the people financing the fall of his Uncle Brian and Uncle Justin. Peter and I were able to add bits and pieces as well. I know that John Remson and Leo Brown might also have some insight for you, too. Julienne and Celene may also know things, which is amazing since they aren't from Pittsburgh, but they've had business dealings with a few of the people on the list. Celene is a black WASP- otherwise called a BAP which stands for Black American Princess and a Hornet because she's mixed race and is rolling in dough in her own right. Her insight and perspective into this situation is unique since she's has a background similar to Daphne's growing up in that environment. Her father owned CCK Architectural before it passed along to her. She is now the CEO of the company and runs it along with other business ventures she has with her husband Gareth- also a Hornet. However, Julienne is familiar with the organization from personal experience and having practically been born into the world of organized crime, at least up until the time she escaped. They shouldn't be far behind me coming here."

Ted was amazed at the information John and Peter had managed to accumulate on such a short amount of time. He could see that when this was all over, the boys would certainly make fine additions to the Kinnetik staff but first he needed to decipher the names on the list with covert motives and obvious money to make his friends' lives a living hell.

The List

Samuel Hobbs, Sr.- he's a homophobe and scared that Brian and Justin will use their money to negate any influence he and his family have within the WASP nest (Tucker confirmed)

Samuel Hobbs, Jr.- vendetta against Brian and Justin for ruining Chris' football career (Tucker confirmed)

Craig Taylor- vendetta against Brian for killing his dreams of a happy hetero home for Justin, a vendetta against Justin for embarrassing him by being gay and also pissed off that they're both a helluva lot richer and more respected than he is or will ever be. Vendetta against Justin also for refusing to die either during the bashing or the Babylon bombing so that Craig could collect the $$$ from the life insurance policy he had set up in Justin's name. (Gus and Tucker confirmed)

James (Jim) Stockwell- vendetta against Brian and Justin due to failed campaign and subsequent exposure of his part in the cover-up of the murder of Jason Kemp - who was killed by his former and now-deceased partner, Kenneth Reichert. Thanks to Brian's money and advertising expertise, as well
as Justin's Prop-Art tactics detailing many of Stockwell's campaign philosophies and comparing him to Hitler, Jim lost potential votes and eventually the election. He also holds them responsible for the vigilante justice-league-style ambush during a rally at the GLC, which pointed out the unsolved murders and cold cases ordered closed by Stockwell without investigation. Once indicted and sentenced, he lost his house, job, kids and the bulk of his supporters. (Tucker confirmed)

Kevin Dixon- vendetta against Justin Taylor, unable to find an adequate teaching job due to his involvement with Justin's bashing and has now lost his meal-ticket in Janice (Tucker and Gus confirmed)

Garth Racine-- most prominent A Gay afraid of losing his influence within the WASP nest, who generally overlooked the fact that he's gay because of his bank account. Brian and Justin are richer than he, is both individually and collectively. In his mind, if Brian and Justin demand to be let into the elite, Garth would no longer be the Top Gay Dog within the upper-class community. (Tucker confirmed)

Virginia Hammond- Schickle-- vendetta against Emmett Honeycutt, Ted Schmidt and Brian Kinney. Auntie Em's Elegant Creations took over her favorite catering company the day before a major party at her home. As a result of Emmett refusing to service Virginia Hammond, not only was the party ruined but she was humiliated in front of 600 guests. Brian and Ted made the sale and subsequent take over possible by loaning Emmett the start-up capital. (Tucker confirmed)

Marty Rider- Brian's ex-boss who was making a tenth on every contract brought in by Brian Kinney during his time with Vanguard Advertising. With Brian starting Kinnetik, Marty has had to give up his home in Bermuda and move into a two-bedroom apartment back in the U.S. His wife left him for John Remson which is one of Brian's clients and a good friend to both Brian and Justin. (Tucker confirmed)

Gardner Vance- lost business due to firing Brian Kinney and the opening of Kinnetik; also wants Justin to come and work for him for free. He feels that if Brian were removed from Justin's realm, the young man would be a sitting duck and easy to force into doing whatever Gardner wants especially if his family is threatened. Having an affair with Claire Townsend (Peter and John confirmed).

Gary Sapperstein- scorned would-be-lover to both Brian Kinney and Justin Taylor (Gus confirmed)

Sean Sapperstein- scorned would-be-lover to Justin Taylor, both envies and hates Brian Kinney (Gus confirmed)

Joan Kinney- pious, bigoted mother of Brian Kinney. Would rather see him dead than gay (Peter,
Claire Kinney-Townsend - jealous and bigoted sister of Brian Kinney who feels that all of Brian's success should be hers or if not, that he should automatically take care of her and Joan without any stipulations attached. She feels that paying their mortgage is not enough when compared to what Brian makes in a year. As far as she's concerned, if Brian was dead then all of his money would go to her and Joan as his next of kin. The boytoy and the bastard son of the lesbians didn't matter. She and Joan would fight to have Brian's Will nullified if they have to. Vance had promised to help her get the correct lawyer and a judge that would rule in her favor if she joined the group and helped him get rid of Brian. (Peter, John and Gus confirmed)

Michael Novotny - vendetta against Justin Taylor for stealing Brian and refusing to accept the offer from Brett and Connor to make Rage into a movie. Justin's refusal to do what Michael wanted/ordered when Michael had ALREADY said Justin would do it, caused Michael to lose valuable contacts he'd made because of Justin. Michael's comic book store is in foreclosure and because there hasn't been any substantial revenue from 'Rage' since Michael ordered Justin to kill himself off, Michael holds Justin responsible. Especially since Justin refused to keep drawing it afterward. Also pissed off that Brian told him he wouldn't bail him out again for any reason. Michael feels that it's all because of Justin. Feels that if Brian could pay for Justin to attend PIFA then he should have not had a problem supporting Michael too. (Emmett confirmed)

Marvin Telson - scorned would-be-lover of Brian Kinney and a closet case. Also Brian turned down his account for Kinnetik (Gus confirmed)

Mitchell Perkins - former Headmaster of St. James Academy. Vendetta against Justin Taylor since he was fired for willful negligence during the time Justin attended, which resulted in the bashing. Forced into 'early retirement' with half his pension and has not been able to find work since. (Tucker confirmed)

Thelma Murray-Gold - ex-wife of Ethan Gold, vendetta against Justin Taylor for preventing her from gaining Ethan's undying love and affection. Also jealous of Justin's success, whereas Ethan's career was short-lived. The violinist divorced her (without having to pay alimony) when it became evident that his career was over. She's stuck working at the Big Q, making just enough to rent a room within a house and buy food. In her mind, if Justin had just stayed with Ethan even though he was married to her, she would have been taken care of in the manner in which she had grown up in. When it was decided that she was going to marry Ethan, her parents disowned her completely since they didn't like Ethan and she called off her engagement to a prominent man within their community only three weeks before the nuptials were to take place. (Tucker confirmed)

Harris Grant - owner of the Ironmen-- vendetta against Brian Kinney for costing him millions when Drew Boyd sued him for discrimination. He reasons that if Drew had not been around Brian Kinney, his affair with Emmett Honeycutt (a close friend of Kinney's) would have remained a secret and he
would still have been married to his daughter Sierra (Tucker confirmed)

Howard Bellweather- jealous of Brian Kinney for his sex appeal. Also has a vendetta against Justin Taylor for costing him hundreds of thousands of dollars in book sales with the rise of Justin's career and Brian's success despite his predictions that Brian would drag Justin down. Due to his biased opinion, and because he had been exposed when a Bare Backer who just happened to be friends with both Brian and Justin wrote a tell all book about him, his book 'The Gay Gauntlet' tanked. Later Kinnetik took on the advertising for the expose against Bellweather and it subsequently became a bestseller. Bellweather no longer has a career and blames Brian Kinney and Justin Taylor equally. (Gus confirmed)

Tannis Brent- a member of the A Gays, who feels that Brian and Justin's lifestyle negates all she and the GLC board are trying to do for the Gay community (Tucker and Gus confirmed)

Nancy Petersen- blames Brian for corrupting her daughter, Lindsay, into the gay lifestyle and thwarting her plans to marry Lindsay off to her husband's business partner. Also blames Brian that Lindsay would not agree to sign over the parental rights to one Gus Kinney so that the child would be raised in a stable home and by her sister Lynette, who is unable to have children. (Gus confirmed)

Lynette Petersen-Brandt- Still harbors feelings for Brian Kinney who once advised her that there would never be anything between the two of them. Dates back to when Lindsay first brought Brian to meet her parents as 'a friend' and Lynette tried to seduce him. She hates Brian for giving Lindsay the one thing that she could never have-- Gus-- and for fucking Lindsay when they were drunk and high as she looked on. (Gus confirmed)

Judge Roy Russo- Denied State Supreme Court Justice position due to evidence of misapplying the law in 146 cases beginning with the trial of Christopher Marc Hobbs. Upon further investigation, Russo was indicted by a Federal Grand Jury and served five years for accepting bribes and perjury. Originally, he tried to cover up the bribery charge by stating that the money was owed to him and the people he lent it to finally decided to pay it back. When it was discovered that every single one of the 'loan payments' came from the families of people on trial in his court, the paper trails- which included checks electronically deposited into the banking system- uncovered the real reason for the money transfers. Also, through the investigation, it was discovered that the former judge liked mail-order brides. His latest, Svetlana, was only 17 and sold against her will by her parents. She was given asylum, promptly divorced the judge, who had abused her both physically and sexually, and now lives in an unknown somewhere in the U.S. He holds Justin Taylor responsible for the beginning of his downfall since the first bribe he took was from Samuel Hobbs, Sr. to issue community service as the maximum penalty for the bashing.

Ted's eyes grew wide as he listened to Peter and viewed the names on the list. The most notables of the Who's Who in Pittsburgh were there, as well as people with the most to gain if Brian and Justin were dead... Claire and Joan! And if that wasn't bad enough, Michael's name appeared there too. Ted
knew that Michael was jealous of Justin but to be so mean and spiteful as to want to make Justin, and therefore Brian, suffer like that... well that was just plain unbelievable. He wanted to chalk it up to Michael just having a lapse in judgement; to the fact that he really didn't know or understand what it was that he was really signing up for. But all of the excuses that Ted tried his best to come up with to justify Michael's plan of revenge didn't ring true. In fact, Ted couldn't have been more angry with the man he now considered his 'former' friend.

"Let's get this matter taken care of, Peter. These financial records have to be researched and compiled and forwarded to Sarah and her team immediately. Every fucking person on THIS list has to pay."

"Even Michael?" Peter asked, shocked at Ted's evident vehemence. "But I thought he was your friend."

"That's just it, Peter. He WAS my friend, but not any longer. MY friends would never do this awful thing to each other, no matter how much we piss each other off. Michael Novotny just keeps proving that he is no friend at all. If he would do this to Brian, who he called his 'best friend,' for more years than I could count, then what would it take for him to do this to any of the rest of us?"

Peter couldn't help but feel a little sad for Michael, even if he did agree with Ted's take on the matter. The man was about to get the rudest awakening of his life. And, by default, so were Brian and Justin. It was a sad situation all around but he would certainly help protect the two men who had taken him in and given him and his brother a safe place to hide until this whole mess was over. It was the very least that he could do for the men who ultimately saved his life.

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Home is Where the Heart Is...

Michael reluctantly stepped out of the SUV in front of his mother's house. Looking up at the only home he'd really ever known until his marriage to Ben, a wave of nostalgia washed over him. His time with David helped put things in perspective, but there was still nothing like the feeling of being there in the Pitts within easy reach of the only woman who'd really ever loved him. Too many times she had been willing to overlook his faults and defend him any way she could. If ever there was a lioness who protected her cubs, surely Debbie was it. Sort of like how Mystique protected Magneto for a time in the X-Men series. Debbie handed out love with one hand while meting out discipline with the other. David seemed to think that she handed out that discipline to everyone BUT Michael. And he supposed David was right in a way.

Michael grabbed his hastily packed duffel bag and headed up the stairs to the red painted door. ‘Fucking Red' was what Debbie called it. He smiled gently when he remembered asking her why she chose that color. She responded, "Because it's the color of passion and love, both of which are
found in equal measure at Debbie's Place." He thought back to that statement and realized that it was true. His mother had a big heart and never hesitated to show it to those in need-- those who had come and gone from Liberty Avenue over the years, taking what wisdom and love she had to offer and then disappearing as if just passing through. Michael would often feel jealous of the attention she lavished on those people whose names even now escaped him, as well as on people whose names he wished would escape him. She had taken in Brian and Justin many years apart, but their stories were so similar.

Michael would never admit it, but as much as he loved the fact that Brian was his best friend and the Stud of Liberty Avenue, he also hated that Brian had garnered Debbie's attention away from him. Sure, Jack beat the shit out of him and Joan was no better with her indifference, which was only relieved when she chose to heap condemnation upon Brian's head. No doubt that Brian needed the love that Debbie gave him but Michael couldn't see that. And just as he was jealous of Brian, he was also jealous of his mother because Brian loved her back the way she wanted him to. It was a hard lesson that Michael had learned early on, one that would always haunt his psyche; that Debbie had what Michael never would. She had Brian's heart.

And then there was Justin. Justin Taylor had endured his own special brand of abuse and, like Brian, Justin had fought back in his own unique way. Instead of going away quietly or enduring the abuse, Justin had stood up for himself-- something Michael had never done and could never do. Justin didn't look for people to fight his battles for him; he did that himself and would often come out victorious. Sure he had battle scars but instead of making the younger man ashamed, he wore them proudly and Michael wasn't just thinking of the ever-present reminder of Justin's near-death experience from the prom so many years ago. Justin had emotional baggage, but whereas Brian would drink and drug to forget, Justin would remember, and fight his way to move beyond them. Michael, on the other hand, would always look for someone to rescue him from the messes he created. He could acknowledge that now as he still stood looking at that fucking red door wondering if he should even bother to go in.

The revelations of the past few days were not easy to face but Michael couldn't hide from them. David wouldn't let him. He had been forced to acknowledge that his jealousy and pettiness had dug him a hole so deep that he wasn't sure he could climb out of it. He couldn't even expect to be forgiven this time as he had in the past. The wounds of his latest folly were too deep to even begin to know what to do. Debbie had been the ONLY one trying to call him-- not Brian and not Ben. No one else but his mother seemed to be concerned that HE was missing, even if he really wasn't. David asked him if he thought he deserved another chance since he had been abusing his friends and family for as long as he'd known each of them. Michael's first response was 'Hell Yeah! He deserved their forgiveness.' But then David asked Michael the one question he really didn't want to face.

"Michael, how would you feel if someone who you THOUGHT was your friend ruined the most important day of your life out of spite and petty jealousy?"

Michael had sat still for a moment and thought seriously about what David was asking him. It took a moment to process that David really understood what Brian was feeling in that moment when
Michael had so thoroughly betrayed his trust by bringing Ethan Gold into THEIR home. He didn't just violate Justin, which had been his intention; he violated Brian. And Brian's trust was very fragile. Michael immediately began to regret that he would NEVER have it again. "Look, I know I fucked up David, but I've fucked up before and he never ditched me. He's always forgiven me; he could do it again."

"Sure he could forgive you, Michael. But the question you need answered is if he'll WANT to. I have to tell you honestly that, if I was in Brian Kinney's place, it would be a long time before I ever even thought about letting you back into my life. But you know Brian...once you're out, you're OUT. I wouldn't hold out much hope if I were you. Instead, I would concentrate on what I could do to fix what is supposed to be the most important relationship of your own life."

"What?"

David rolled his eyes. "Your marriage, Michael. You have to go back to Pittsburgh if for no other reason than to seek closure, if that's what you want. Otherwise, you still have to go back to salvage whatever is left of the mess you made of your relationship with Ben. I would imagine that he is probably still angry and disappointed in you, but at the same time, he loves you, flaws and all. You owe it to yourself-- to both of you-- to at least face the music and talk to him. If you don't, neither of you will be able to move on with your lives."

And that was why Michael had gotten into the car and drove back all night without stopping. The car was running on fumes but he needed to get to the only place that he'd ever felt completely safe in order to be himself. If he was going to have that much-needed conversation with Ben, Michael figured that he'd better stock up and bask in the constant glow of his mother's love. Because he was sure as hell going to need it.

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Evangeline sat listening to Gardner Vance spout off about all the reasons why they should just cut their losses and move on. abandoning this revenge plot of theirs. She really wanted to shoot the man in the head, but for the moment he was still needed. He was the only one within the organization that really had an inside track where Brian's business was concerned. Sure they were competitors in the Advertising business, but if anyone could get answers about Brian's latest moves and the accounts vying for a chance to become Kinnetik's latest clients, it was Gardner Vance. Using his connections through Vanguard was how Evangeline was able to approach most of the prominent people in Pittsburgh with the offer to ‘get even' with some of the world's most wealthiest queers. The fact that each person on that list had felt powerless to stop Brian Kinney and Justin Taylor in their own right was just the kind of leverage she needed in order to coerce them into doing her bidding. Through Gardner, she had made the offer to use her position as a Federal Agent to make Brian and Justin pay
for all slights done to each of them, while the group as a whole would escape punishment. But as she continued to listen to the elegant accent of Gardner's voice as he negated every argument of why they should continue, she wanted nothing more than to shut him up...permanently.

"And furthermore, now they have involved YOUR colleagues, Evangeline. You said so yourself that once Agent Morrissey got started on a case, she wouldn't leave a single stone unturned until she had her man or, in this case, woman. This is all the more reason why I say we fold up shop here in Pittsburgh and rebuild our network in another city. If we stay here, we're fucking sitting ducks. Brian and Justin are being protected better than Fort Knox ever was. There's no way that-- even with all of our money-- we can compete against that," Gardner continued to pace as he finished speaking.

"Have you forgotten that we now have his precious son? I doubt very much that there isn't anything Brian Kinney wouldn't do for his boy."

"You're right that there isn't anything he wouldn't do," Gardner agreed. "He also wouldn't hesitate to make our lives living hells in the process. Brian is NOT a man to go quietly or to take a slight lightly. He will enact his revenge and will succeed. Just ask Stockwell and Sapperstein," Gardner said. His conviction to stop going after Brian and Justin was in the forefront of his mind. No one knew, but Gardner had been given an ultimatum by the Feds that very morning, which he was seriously considering. If he could stop Evangeline in her folly, he would be given a reduced sentence in exchange for turning state's evidence. If he wasn't, he would be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law, which included not only jail time for the embezzlement charges he incurred for cheating his own company but also the accessory to kidnapping charges and even charges for committing hate crimes since the organization was specifically formed because Brian and Justin were gay. In short, Gardner would become the very thing he was trying to avoid being.... Somebody's bitch.

"Vance, you have more than made your position on the matter clear. I don't need a reminder of what those fucking punks did to me," Stockwell's stern voice rang out. "I have lost everything because of the two of them. My life, my job, my wife and kids....everything. I want to make them pay for it!"

"Yes but at what cost, Jim? Do you really want to go back to prison, especially so soon after getting out? You've already done time in the Federal pen. If you continue with this, I promise you that you'll be going back, and this time there will be no hope of getting out. You must have really valued your one-hour of yard time per day to want to go back to that existence. As for me, I value my freedom much more."

Stockwell looked hard at the man as Gardner uttered that last comment. There were so many reasons why Vance was right to want to walk away from this whole thing. It seemed that they were the only ones assuming the bulk of the risk while the Black Widow, Evangeline, constantly weaved these elaborate webs that they all dangled from. The fact that she had leverage over all of them while they had nothing on her, didn't help to ease his mind any more than it did the others. But if they could pull it off, the rewards of seeing the fall of Kinney and his boy toy were endless. Making his decision and
looking toward Evangeline, Jim asked, "What's the next step?"

Evangeline gave Stockwell a full-on smile. She knew that out of all of them, Jim Stockwell would side with her in her revenge. He was the one with nothing more to lose and everything to gain.
"Well, my sources tell me that Brian and Justin arrived at Allegheny General several hours ago but no one has seen hide or hair of them since that time. I heard that from Dixon, who has been admitted into the emergency room of the Washington County Medical Center. Apparently, he ran into that fucking wildcat Julienne McKay and she cut him pretty deeply. He said that they were going to take him into surgery to try and save his hand. Useless prick! He was sent there to gain entry and get Justin Taylor to trust him, not to start a fucking war with that bitch."

Hobbs laughed. "Well, you know Dixon. He could never be satisfied that what was supposed to be his had escaped him. Although she would have been working for Gardner, she would have been forced to fuck him. He'd made a deal with Tamara's lover to share her favors between them. It would have rankled that she was still walking around free and, from what I've heard, she's married with a child of her own now. Dixon wouldn't have been able to leave her alone since his would-have been-toy was not under him where she belonged."

"I will deal with Julienne when this is all over. She may have escaped that fate for the interim but her marriage means nothing. She will still belong to the organization at a time of my choosing. In the meantime, I need the three of you to find Brian and Justin. They must still be at the hospital since no one has seen them depart the building. I don't give a fuck what you have to do, but I want Justin Taylor secured and Brian Kinney dead as soon as fucking possible. This is NOT to be a repeat of the Julienne debacle or, so help me God, I will castrate every fucking one of you. Once I have my property-- meaning Justin-- I will release young Gus so that he can mourn his father's untimely death. After that, he will no longer be of use." Before she could finish her speech, her cell phone rung. "What?" She answered tersely.

"We have a problem," Mark answered her just as curt. "The gates to the property are closed and there is no way to scale that huge fucking wrought iron fence."

"What about blowing out the gate?" She could feel a migraine coming on and worked hard to disguise the pain beginning to knock behind her light brown eyes. Brian Kinney was one smart and
paranoid sonofabitch. Whereas, usually that would work to her advantage, this time it was proving to
be the bane of her existence. Mark's sardonic laughter on the other end of the phone wasn't helping
matters.

"What do you think?" he asked humorlessly. "I just said that even if I was able to disarm one alarm
system, the other would kick in. Do you really think that he would be idiotic enough NOT to arm the
fences as well?"

"Fine!" Evangeline yelled, thoroughly annoyed with her employee's opinion. "Take care of the
Liberty Diner and that moronic detective, Horvath, and his wife's home. I want to see it on the
fucking evening news. If I don't..."

Mark swallowed hard on the other end. Evangeline was the ONLY woman he'd ever feared other
than Tamara St. Giles herself. Both of those bitches were as ruthless as any man he'd ever met. And
if the rumors about Evangeline's partner were to be believed, he would have even more to worry
about if that volatile FBI agent caught up with him. It was time to fucking skip town again, but first
he would do what Evangeline Charles demanded. After this job, though, Mark was getting out of
this game. He didn't want to be looking over his shoulder for the rest of his life wondering when this
bitch would find him. "I'll call you when the shit is done." He hung up the phone, not waiting for a
response and not realizing that he had been spotted on the security cameras of the Britin estate by
Emmett Honeycutt who promptly picked up his phone and dialed Sarah. Mark was about to meet the
Phoenix firsthand... and it would be a meeting that he remembered and haunted him for years to
come.

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Check Mate

Daphne was exhausted as she went back into the waiting room of Allegheny General. Debbie had
promised to keep trying Melanie and Lindsay's phones while she worked on Jenny to save her life.
The young girl had been hit in her left arm right above the brachial artery. It was touch and go for
awhile but Daphne and her surgical team had managed not only to stop the bleeding but to save the
young girl's arm entirely. Jenny was resting comfortably but would still be listed in critical condition
since the next twenty-four hours were crucial. The extreme loss of blood was another factor that they
would have to watch closely since the artery carried blood in and out of the heart by turns. They
needed to watch for clots to prevent a heart attack and a stroke in their young patient. Daphne related
all of this information to Debbie and again to Lindsey, Melanie Tuck and Drew upon arrival.
Needless to say that it was an emotional time for the party as Daphne endured many thank yous and
questions.

"Dr. Daphne Chanders," a familiar voice sneered behind her.
Turning around to look at who was speaking to her, she viewed the last person she would have ever expected to see. "Stephen." Drew moved forward but she stayed him with a gentle hand on his chest before turning back to see him. "What the fuck are you doing here?"

"We have unfinished business, you and I."

"We have NOTHING to talk about business or otherwise. Go back to your family, Stephen." She moved to turn away from him but he gripped her arm.

"I can't do that. Ciara left me because of YOU," the irate man yelled.

Daphne jerked away. "Take your fucking hands off of me! What you and YOUR wife do is none of my business. LEAVE!"

"Is there a problem here, Daphne?" Troy asked coming up upon the ensemble. He had been at the front desk writing his report on Craig when he heard the beginning of a commotion. He was surprised to see another man with his hand gripping her arm to turn her towards him. Judging by the looks on the faces riveted on the scene, Troy had a pretty good idea who the man was.

"Everything is fine, Troy."

"Like fuck it is. I want to talk to you now," Stephen interjected.

"And I said that we have nothing to fucking talk about," Daphne said through gritted teeth.

Everyone around them could tell that she was becoming angry. Drew stepped back to give the young woman room, already anticipating what was coming. He pulled Tucker with him even as the ladies followed suit although they didn't know why.

Troy looked closely at Daphne. He had seen her angry but never THIS angry. He did the only thing he knew to do to bring her back into focus and give her the strength she needed to deal with the odious man. Grabbing her around the waist, he turned her to face him. Without pause, he gripped her tightly as he sealed their lips together. She gasped through the kiss, allowing his tongue to gain the entry it sought. Troy had never been as masterful or as forceful as he was in that moment. He knew
that he should pull back before the kiss went beyond his control but he was having the damndest
time disengaging from her full lips. He wanted nothing more than to savor the sweet morsel in his
arms. The catcalls and sputtering brought him back into focus and he released the sweet lips that he'd
held captive a short moment ago. He looked down into her face smiling at the dazed expression he'd
found there but their moment of sensual delight was short-lived.

"Just like the fucking whore you are, you found another doctor to spread your legs for."

"Better a whore to a better man than a slut to your tiny-dick. And for the record Stephen, there's no
question as to who the better doctor ever was. Take your sorry ass away from me before you actually
NEED a doctor."

"Whorebitch!" Stephen exclaimed slapping Daphne.

Before any man had a chance to step in and defend her, Daphne threw a two-punch combo landing
Stephen in the jaw. As the man bent to recover, Daphne took off her lab coat and stethoscope which
she tossed to Troy. Without a second thought, Daphne punched the fucker again, not letting up even
as Stephen fell to the ground. She climbed on top of him, throwing jab after jab at his face, yelling
and resisting those who had tried to pull her off of her victim. That was the scene that greeted Sarah
as she re-entered the emergency room.

She couldn't help the small chuckle that escaped her seeing the diminutive woman atop a man clearly
over six feet tall, banging his head with her fists repeatedly. Sarah couldn't help but admire the doctor
as she watched the angry woman constantly hissing and spitting epithets at her victim. Sarah knew
she had to put an end to it but she certainly was reluctant to do so. It was in that moment that she
understood Brian and Justin's kinship with the woman that would always be more than just their
friend.

Making her way over to the scene, Sarah nodded to Drew to assist her in pulling up the fierce young
woman. With great effort they had managed to pry Daphne's legs loose and drag her up. But they
couldn't stop her feet as they repeatedly kicked the man in the ribs or the sneaker-clad foot that
stepped ruthlessly on the man's cock.

"Daph...you have to stop otherwise I'll have to handcuff you. I might have to do so anyway but at
least give yourself a fighting chance here," Sarah tried to reason with the struggling and surprisingly
strong young woman.

"I'll happily do my fucking time in jail if you let me finish the fucker off. He hit me!"
Sarah looked around for confirmation, noting that everyone within the room was nodding. She had never seen so many shocked faces in one place in all of her career although she could understand why they would be. Daphne Chanders was a doctor who took her oath to do no harm very seriously. The fact that ordinarily compassionate and conscientious doctor was now in the midst of a personal altercation was indeed offensive but none within earshot could blame her. Stephen had crossed a boundary- one that he was not prepared for- and had reaped what he had sown.

"Daphne, you have to stop now. I'll have the local law enforcement arrest him for battery but you'll have to give a statement and possibly testify that it was self-defense. Understand? I need you to calm down and remember that you ARE the professional here. This is YOUR place of business. Do not allow the motherfucker to win by having your medical license revoked in favor of a vendetta," Sarah spoke low into her ear so that no one else other than those closest to them could hear, Sarah breathed a sigh of relief knowing that Daphne had taken what she had said into consideration.

"You are right. My job is to save lives, not to take them no matter how tempting." She turned to her lover. "Troy hun, can you get me some surg tape for my hand and take me off the rotation schedule until I've had a chance to ice it?" she asked sweetly.

Everyone around them chuckled but he answered her. "Sure Tyson. Should I find you an ear to bite while I'm at it?"

Daphne smiled back at the man. "Only if it's yours Holyfield."

"I want that bitch arrested for assault and battery," Stephen yelled from his place on the floor.

All eyes turned to him but it was Sarah who addressed him. "Actually, thanks to a room full of witnesses, it is you who will be arrested for that charge. Had you left and not put your hands on the victim when she asked you not to, you wouldn't now look like you've been beaten by several men." She turned to one of the officers that she had signaled. "After he receives medical care, take him to the Pittsburgh P.D. and book him on formal charges."

"You can't do THAT. And I'm a fucking doctor so I'm perfectly capable of treating myself."

"Even fucking better," Sarah mumbled. "Just as an attorney who represents himself has a fool for a client, a doctor who treats himself when he has several broken bones has an ASSHOLE for a patient. But the choice is yours. Are you officially waiving your right to receive emergency medical care at this establishment?" Sarah asked innocently.
Stephen looked around at the irate faces of Daphne's coworkers. He knew that they would have to treat him without bias but based on what they had witnessed between he and Daphne, he couldn't bring himself to trust them to do so. "Yes I am."

"Good. Officer Imes, please take this idiot directly to the precinct."

"What? What about another hospital?"

"We are in a perfectly good hospital and yet you denied your right to be treated so NO there will not be any other stops along the way taking you to jail. Get this vermin out of my sight."

The order was immediately carried out as the officers cuffed the perpetrator none-too-gently. Daphne sat demurely allowing Troy to tend to her bruised knuckles. She was too embarrassed that her personal life had become fodder for the gossip mill around the hospital but Troy told her not to worry about it. Overhearing the conversation, Debbie, Melanie and Lindsey stepped forth to console the young woman who had become so dear to each of them.

Debbie said, "Listen sweetheart. We all have someone from our past that we would rather stay buried or get buried." Everyone laughed at the statement which Debbie followed by a nonchalant shrug of her shoulders. "That doesn't make you any less of a person in the eyes of anyone here. You hold your head up high, Daphne, you hear me? I know for a fact that Brian and Sunshine would be damn fucking proud of you. And so am I."

Daphne turned tear-filled eyes to her and looked at each of the faces she considered family. Her eyes rested on Drew. "I'm... I'm sorry Drew," she said but he held up his hand.

"No need to apologize Daphne. If you hadn't creamed the smug-face fucker, I would have. I'm glad that Ciara left him and took their kid with her. She deserved better and so do you."

Looking at the man still dressing her hands, she nodded. "I think I've already found him," she whispered. No one could miss the dreamy-eyed looks that passed between the two doctors. And they all couldn't be happier.

Josiah Higgins entered the Emergency room just then seeking out his number one. "Hey, any word on Taylor?"
Sarah laughed. "He's already been Mirandized, Boss. Besides he's not going anywhere." At his puzzled look she continued, "Let's just say that Karma is a real BITCH and she severed his spine in three places."

Everyone heard and although they were cheering inwardly, they winced outwardly.

"Well I came to bring you some news."

"And a phone call wouldn't have done the trick?"

"Not in this case, Morrissey. We've busted everyone except..."

Sarah raised her hand. "Except?"

"Evangeline, Mark and Novotny."

A collective gasps was heard but one voice rung out. "Michael? What has my son got to do with this?"

Josiah and Sarah exchanged a look. After much silent debate, Sarah decided that she had a right to know. "Mrs. Horvath...Debbie... I hate to tell you this but it appears that Michael was involved with the people trying to destroy Brian and Justin."

"No! There has to be some kind of mistake! Michael would never do anything to hurt Brian. He's hurting right now because his fucking best friend cut him off."

"Debbie, I know that this is going to be a little hard for you to digest but I need to ask you a very big question." Still in shock, Debbie nodded her consent. "Did you recently re-mortgage your house and give the money to Michael?"

"Yes I did. He said that he needed money to keep his store open. Usually it was Brian that would have helped him but the asshole told Michael that he wouldn't give him any more money; that he should off-load the store and live on the proceeds."

"How much money did you give him?" Josiah asked.

"A hundred thousand dollars."

"What the fuck? Debbie why would you give him that much money? Michael can barely handle twenty dollars," Melanie said.

"He said he needed it for the store. I couldn't watch his dream go down the drain. You remember what happened the last time he had no direction in his life right after David and before he opened Red Cape Comics. I couldn't see him go back to that."

Josiah handed the confused woman a piece of paper. "Mrs. Horvath, your house had been signed over to Gardner Vance at the beginning of the year. Michael's comic book shop has been paid off for the last five years. The document you are reading shows that the one-hundred thousand dollar payment which your son signed over was to the Organization that is trying to kill the Taylor-Kinneys."
"I....I....why would he do something like this?" Debbie asked as tears began to flow down her face.

Lindsey spoke then. "Isn't it obvious? He would have done anything to be rid of Justin and this was a way to do it without his name being officially attached to the deed. Only it didn't work out for him the way he planned."

"No it didn't," Josiah confirmed.

"What did they promise him?" Debbie asked at the two FBI agents.

"For Justin to be taken away from Brian. And for Brian to be his."

"His? What the fuck would make him think that it would ever happen?"

"What Michael didn't know and probably still doesn't is that if Evangeline and her camp had their way, Justin would be theirs and Brian would be...."

"Dead," Brian said from behind Josiah.

"How the fuck did you get out?" Sarah asked.

Brian and Justin chuckled. "Funny thing about Sunshine here. He can pick a lock with just about anything including the smallest paper clip that we found while we were showering."

Sarah shook her head amazed at the two men. She had never met a more evenly-matched pair in her entire life. "How much did you hear?"

"How much was intended for us to hear?" Justin countered. "And why is Debbie crying and my best friend sitting there with her hands in bandages?" The anger was clear in his voice.

Before anyone had a chance to answer, Josiah's phone rung in his jacket pocket. "Detective Horvath, any news."

"...uh-huh..."

"But didn't...."

"No... I don't want you to...."

"Okay.... Keep me informed," Josiah said as he disconnected the call.

"What's happened?" Sarah asked.

"Do you want the good news or bad news first?"

"I'd prefer it straight no chaser, Boss. Now what the fuck was that all about?"

"The Kinney boy is safe as is Ty."

"What? How?"

"Apparently, that fucking bumbling idiot Kip rammed into the car which had Vance, Stockwell and Hobbs in it. One of our men was tailing the latter three and so saw the accident happen. Carl and Frankie were following the lead for Gus' back-up phone. That's one smart and gutsy kid. With the help of Ty, they caused the van to swerve hitting the car as they were passing the Wiltshire Hotel. Apparently, while Kip was trying to prove his intelligence to the others, he'd mentioned that his
uncle was meeting with the Boss along with Hobbs and Stockwell. They knew that they couldn't let the opportunity go by without trying to free Gus so both Ty and Gus took a man. According to Horvath, none of the occupants, save for Gus and Ty, were unharmed. Kip is in especially bad shape. Gus had taken offense to some comments made about his sister and dads. Ty and Carl had to pull the young man off of him. He also might need hair plugs for men.

Brian and Justin couldn't help but snicker at the last comment. "Looks like he takes after his father," Justin teased as he squeezed into Brian's arm a little tighter.

"No more than he does after you Justin. You've broken quite a few noses in your day too." The two shared a kiss before getting back to the business at hand. "I take it that the Bitch is still at large?"

Josiah sighed. "Yeah, Evangeline is still out there as is Mark..."

"Who else?" Brian asked, reading the situation correctly. "Who is it that you aren't saying?"

Brian and Justin looked around noticing that no one would meet their eyes. Always astute, Justin figured out the answer to two of his questions. "Well at least I know why Debbie is crying. Why are you trying to catch Michael?"

"Michael?" Brian asked, his voice incredulous. "What the fuck does he have to do with anything?"

Sarah closed her eyes. The last thing she wanted to do was to hurt these men who were fast becoming part of her extended family just as much as Celene, Julienne, Sheila and their husbands were. This piece of business was going to destroy Brian and Justin would be left to pick up the pieces when all was said and done. Carefully and not leaving out any details, Sarah relayed all of the information they had gathered so far about the list that Peter and John had compiled. She detailed how each person on that document was called into the bank, including Joan and Claire Kinney. Brian and Justin remained stoic as she detailed how the trap was laid and the end results. She then explained to them Michael's part in list, what his goals were and ended in finally telling them what he had done to his own mother in his quest to be by Brian's side.

"Debbie, I'll take care of the mortgage," Brian said, voice devoid of any feeling. It was evident to anyone who knew him that in that moment, he felt nothing for Michael Novotny.

"I can't let you do that Brian," Debbie protested but Justin cut her off.

"You're not letting us do anything, Deb. We'll take care of it. But you had better pray that the police find that chicken-hearted, jealous, manipulative, idiotic, backstabbing bastard son of yours before I do because this time I WILL KILL HIM!"

He then turned and left the hospital with Brian hot on his heels.

End Notes:

Although this story was originally archived at MW, it is now archived in its entirety at www.kinnetikdreams.com

Hope your enjoying my insanity.... MORE SOON!!
Chapter 44: FEAST OF THE GOLDEN GEESE Part 1

Chapter Summary

Yes, yes YES! I know that it has been forever since I posted on this. But it wasn't intentional. Originally, I thought to give you a full novel-length conclusion to this wonderful and incredibly frustrating story BUT I wasn't happy with what was written. So I erased the entire chapter as written to begin again. This has happened quite a bit-five to be exact (stop shaking your head, laughing, pointing and cussing at me. You know how meticulous and particular I am about my babies.) and was about to become a sixth time. So now what I have decided to do, is release part of what I have so that I can stop the impulse and continue writing from there. I hope it was worth the wait!

Looking forward to your thoughts/ reviews!

Happy Reading and HUGS,

~Nichelle

CHAPTER 44- FEAST OF THE GOLDEN GEESE Part 1

Brian hopped into the car as Justin was about to put it in gear. “What are you doing?”

“What the fuck does it look like I’m doing Brian?” Justin’s controlled tone of voice was laced with venom. Picking up his cell phone, he dialed and waited for the ring on the other end to begin before turning to Brian and saying, “You know. You really don’t have to come with me. You should go wait with Debbie. I’m sure Carl is going to bring Gus to be thoroughly checked out. Brian glared at Justin while he continued to hold the phone up to his ear. “You’re seriously delusional if you think for one moment that I’m going to let you out of my sight.”

“Brian--”

“No Justin. I’m not going to leave you in this by yourself to face a madwoman and…” Brian’s voice failed as he almost said the name of his former best friend.

Justin snickered but there was no humor in it. “You can’t say it, can you? You can’t even speak Michael’s name.”

“Justin…”

“What Brian? He wasn’t paying for someone to kill YOU. In fact, you were the prize in all this, like one to be found in an extremely full Cracker-Jack box. So NO, I don’t need you to go with me; I don’t need you to try and talk me out what I am going to do...I DON’T NEED YOU!” By the look on Brian’s face, he realized that he may have taken it too far but Justin meant what he said. Michael Novotny had always been allowed to get away with too much shit but this time he’d taken it too fucking far. Justin didn’t need Brian to witness the clash that was about to happen between his lover and his best friend.

“You really mean that Justin? You don’t need me?”
Justin softened his tone. “I just don’t want you to be put in the middle of this Brian. Throughout most of my problems with Michael, I have tried to keep you out of it.”

“I know that, but the difference now Justin is that I’m exactly where I should be, which is by your side. I can’t say that I’ve always been, but this is different; we are different.”

Justin exhaled harshly, running a hand through his long locks in frustration. He looked into the eyes that regarded him from the passenger seat, reading the love and determination in them. Brian wouldn’t budge no matter how much Justin tried to talk him out of it. He licked his lips before speaking. “I meant what I said Brian. I’m going to kill him if I find him before the cops do.”

“And I’m going to stop you. If you want a new set of handcuffs, we’ll stop at the toy store on the way home tonight. I much prefer the fur-lined or silk ones around your wrists rather than the cheap state-issued variety.”

Justin couldn’t help the small laugh which escaped him. Leave it to Brian inject not only humor, but sexual connotation into a serious conversation. It was something Justin always appreciated about the man sitting in the passenger seat. Very few people really knew or understood Brian. It had taken Justin a long time to figure that out; time that he would always somehow regret losing but was no less grateful for. If asked, Michael and Lindsay- maybe even Debbie- would say that they knew the man behind the myth. But Justin had learned over the time that he- and maybe even Gus- were the only ones with that privilege.

Justin started the car then, trying to decide on the first place to look for Michael. He backed the car out of the parking space, carefully still avoiding Brian’s gaze for the moment as he thought about what Brian was doing. He was putting him- putting them- first. As soon as he cleared the parking lot of the hospital and had taken the right to head back towards Liberty Avenue, he felt the larger hand of his partner engulf the hand holding the gear shift between them. Justin released the breath that he wasn’t aware that he was holding, finally acknowledging to himself that Brian really was in this with him. They had come a long way from the day that had met, and through all the fights, arguments, push-and-pull and doubts of their relationship, Justin realized in that moment, that he wouldn’t have traded a moment of it, not even within the turmoil their lives had recently become. It was humbling.

Turning onto Debbie’s street, the first thing Brian noticed was how abnormally quiet it was for that time of day. It wasn’t that Deb’s street was a hubbub of activity the way the main street of Liberty Avenue was. However, normally there were always children playing in the middle of the street. Today it reminded Brian a little of a ghost town, the kind that he had seen in the many westerns he watched as a kid. Justin pulled into an empty parking space at the corner, instead of taking spot located directly in front of Deb’s red front door.

Both of them stepped out of the car and onto the eerily quiet street. Brian’s unease kept telling him that something was very fucking wrong, even as Justin squeezed his hand a little tighter. He knew in that moment that he was not alone in the sudden fear which gripped him. He nearly jumped out of his skin when his cell phone buzzed in his pocket. At Justin’s questioning look, Brian answered the phone, swallowing hard before speaking.

“Get the fuck out of there,” Sarah screamed into the receiver. “Get the fuck out of there right now, Brian! You and Justin get your asses back in the fucking car and get the fuck out of there!”

“Where the fuck are you?”

“Brian just get you fucking ass back in the car. Mark has a fucking gun trained at the back of Justin’s head.” No sooner than she said that, did Brian hear the distinct sound of a gun being cocked in the distance.
Without thought, he gripped his phone even tighter, pushing Justin away from him in the last possible second before the bullet hit the telephone pole that Justin had been standing in front of a moment before. His eyes widened momentarily before grabbing Justin’s hand again, this time dragging him along like a wayward child. Fumbling with his own set of keys, Brian pressed the button to automatically unlock the passenger car door and shoved Justin inside without a word of explanation. Hearing a second cock of the gun, Brian ducked and yelled for Justin to lower his head as well. Brian glimpsed in horror as the bullet shattered the back window of the corvette before exiting through the front window, barely missing Justin’s blond head. Staying low to the ground, Brian finally made his way to the driver’s side of the car, climbing in shakily but knowing that he only had a few moments before he would hear that fucking firearm cock again, intent on ending their lives.

Brian handed the phone to Justin, after hearing Sarah still yelling into the receiver. He told Justin to talk to her while he tried to get them the fuck out of there. Although he knew that Justin was fucking petrified, he was proud that the young blond’s voice had remained steady to give Sarah the information that she desperately needed. Brian heard a three gunshots from a different type of firearm ring out, as he put the car in reverse, preparing to make a hasty escape. The same weapon was shot again as he was pulling out of the parking space, hitting the edge of his sideview mirror. Brian floored the gas, silently acknowledging that the bullet was much too close for comfort.

Justin put the phone on speaker so that both he and Sarah would hear the same thing. “What the fuck, Sarah? Who the fuck was shooting at us?”

“Mark was there lying in wait for you. At first, we thought that he was after Michael Novotny, but apparently he let the little fucker go. After the news that you received at the hospital, I put in a call to Ty to find out how close they were to the hospital with Gus and asked if there was any word on Evangeline. She was at the hospital Brian. She knew where you two were headed. Her plans have evidently changed in regard to Justin and now she just wants both of you dead.”

“No,” Justin said. “If Mark is who you say, then he would have wanted me dead too.” Justin looked at Brian then before lowering his head. “He’s Samuel Hobbs’ bastard get, and on his father’s orders, there’s no way he would have left me alive. Chris has disappeared so he couldn’t order his chicken-hearted son to hit me with a fucking bat this time. Mark was shooting to kill.”

Brian reached over and grabbed Justin’s hand, squeezing it a little in a show of comfort. He knew what Justin was saying had to be true even if that wasn’t the way the plan started out. “What about the second shooter? I imagine that was Evangeline herself.”

“I wouldn’t doubt it,” Sarah confirmed. “At this stage, with her organization crashing down about her ears, she would have wanted to make sure that whatever orders she issued are going to be followed to the letter and that starts with Mark. The fact that he was shooting at Justin messes with her income and as deadly as the bitch is, she’s also greedy. Mark’s orders were to kill you Brian, and nab Justin while he was trying to save your life.”

“Fucking hell, that bitch has to fucking die,” Justin exploded, hearing what was intended for him.

“Don’t worry Justin, she will. In the meantime, I need you two to get to the bank now. Ted is waiting for you and if you’re intent on finding Michael, ninety-to-one, that’s where he is.”

“Why do you think that?” Justin was genuinely curious.

She laughed. “Michael sold the internet business while he was away and the money was deposited into his checking account. I had John scramble the system to buy us all some time to get there. There’s twenty-five grand in that account that he will try to withdraw.”
“Jesus...” Brian asked.

“Yeah Brian, He’s the one to call. Anyway, John can only keep the system scrambled for long. There are some more people trying to withdraw large sums of money as well.”

“Let me guess...Joan and Claire.”

“How did you know?”

“There are about six messages on my phone from the both of them. Apparently, the devil has come due for them and they expected me to bail them out. My best guess is that they have my old man’s secondary insurance policy in hand and are trying to cash in on it since it was drawn on that bank. The problem with that, is that they won’t be able to cash it without me. I asked Aurora Kelly to put it in a trust account, in which if anything were to happen to me, Justin would execute it. Thank fuck for Myrna. If she wasn’t Justin’s attorney and advised me to do that when she did, this would have blown up in my face.”

“Well now that Joan and Claire are at the bank as well as Michael, I’ll be heading there as soon as I clear up that other matter from this morning.”

“What happened this morning?” Justin asked, frowning and searching his brain for something he may have missed. All he really remembered before Daphne coming in was that Brian wasn’t in the house when he’d come downstairs for breakfast.

“Let’s just say that the Sappersteins have not escaped unscathed,” Brian answered.

“Brian? Brian what the fuck did you do?”

“Calm down Sunshine. What I did, I did with the FBI’s- or more specifically Sarah’s- blessing. Gary and Sean fucked with the wrong man when they came after you.”

A shiver went through Justin’s body at Brian’s tone. He had never heard Brian more deadly serious than he did in that moment and whereas it alarmed him, the danger that radiated off of Brian had never been more alluring. Justin placed his hand on Brian’s thigh and squeezed hard, letting his lover know exactly what his tone was doing to his insides. Sarah interrupted his horny thoughts.

“I need you both to stay in control when you get there. Justin, that means you specifically.”

“I meant what I said Sarah. I’m going to kill him.”

“No you aren’t. No matter what he does or says, you are NOT to touch Michael Novotny. The last thing we need is for any of the guilty parties to get off scot-free on a technicality or because we didn’t protect him by arresting you for attempted murder. Wouldn’t you rather Michael pay daily and over a lot of time?”

Justin huffed. “You don’t understand Sarah. Michael has never ever taken responsibility for any wrong thing he’s ever done. He will put on an innocent boy-next-door act with the melting brown eyes and whining voice so that anyone within hearing distance will really believe he is a victim of circumstance and that he really didn’t know what he was getting himself into. No one plays the dewy-eyed innocent better than Michael.”

Brian chuckled. “I remember telling him that years ago.”

“I remember. The night you went to Ben and Michael’s house because I’d left, I heard and it has always stuck with me. As I sat there reflecting through all the shit he’d put me through in the five years that I had been with you, I realized that you were right. All of the mean-spirited and spiteful
things he’d said and did to me, while in front of everyone else he’d do his best to look wholesome and pure, came rushing back. Each of my thoughts, and your accusations launched at Michael were confirmed time and again while I was in New York.” Justin swallowed hard at the thought of how many times Michael had put himself in the middle of their relationship. Redirecting his comments to Sarah he said, “Michael is a master at manipulation. You would do well to remember that.”

“I get it Justin; I really do. But although I walk a fine line between criminal and law enforcer, I still manage to stay on the right side. Please don’t make me have to choose between you and my badge.”

Justin closed his eyes at that analogy. He knew that what Sarah was asking was for him to do the right thing and let her take care of Michael, but it was so fucking hard to do. That fucker had paid someone to try to kill him! And there was always the possibility that Michael would once again go unpunished. “Fine Sarah… fucking fine, I won’t make you choose. Who else is at the bank? I’ll go sit with them while you guys take care of the asshole.”

“Ted, Myrna, Aurora, John, and Colby are all there already. Jason, Jennifer, Tuck, Julianne, and Celine should on their way. Gareth, Anthony, and Jules’ husband Benny will be with me.”

“Fine, I’ll stay with them and let you and Brian deal with the rest of this shit. But mark my words Sarah, if he starts some shit with me directly, I’m fucking ending it, and prison time be damned.” Justin was pissed off and they both knew it.

“Unfortunately you and Jules have a bigger fish to fry. With both of you at the bank at the same time, I wouldn’t doubt that Evangeline or a few of her cronies that you don’t know, will try to corner you both there. I need you two to stay out in the open somewhat, but still hidden enough that you don’t draw undue attention to yourselves. Now that Hobbs, Jr. has been arrested, I don’t doubt that Senior or his vile wife will come into the bank. Since you know these people on sight, I need you to keep a lookout for them while I deal with the known entities already present,” Sarah informed him, hoping that he was calmed down enough to see reason now. She couldn’t blame him for wanting to put a period to Michael’s existence, but this was so much bigger than that one weasel. They had a whole slew of them to catch and put away.

“You know, this is probably the only time in my life that I really wish I wasn’t such a fucking gentleman,” Justin muttered darkly, which made Sarah and Brian chuckle.

“I’ve known Evangeline for many years, and I can honestly say that she would inspire both Jesus and Martin Luther King, Jr. to commit violent acts against her. But what I’m going to ask is that you leave her to me.”

Brian and Justin parked the car, making a pact to stick together as much as possible. Entering the bank they were surprised to see the line almost impeding their entrance. The first sound that assaulted Brian’s ears was of a sanctimonious tone and a high-pitched whine that he was very familiar with. Moving through the sea of humanity, he was shocked to hear the iron-haired lady’s statement.

“I don’t care what you think you know about this document. My son is dead, or will be soon at any rate. Therefore I expect you to honor mine and my daughter’s claim to the insurance money listed on this document, young woman.”

“And as I said madam, unless the beneficiary is here to sign the document, you nor your daughter have any claim to the monetary value. If you’d like I can get the branch manager, who is in the office today, to explain the policy to you as I have already done several times, but the result will be the same. You have no claim! Now kindly step aside so that I can help the other customers behind you.”

“Look here Lucinda,” Claire sneered, “I don’t give a shit what your policy says, we are entitled to
that money. We need it, my brother doesn’t, it’s ours! End of story!”

Brian was saved from having to say anything because Aurora was already taking care of it. She had come upon the two women, and was silently waiting for them to finish their diatribe. The two uniformed officers accompanying her cringed as Claire finished speaking.

Aurora cleared her throat. “Lucinda, thank you for keeping your patience with Mrs. and Miss Kinney. I’m sure that it was an exercise just from what little I’ve heard myself.”

“And who the hell are you to say something like that?” Claire screeched.

“Interestingly enough, I am the person that Lucinda offered to get for you.”

“What? You’re the bank manager?” Joan spat. “Well good, then you can tell this woman that since my son is neither here nor will he be in the future, the funds on the policy that my late husband left need to be released immediately.”

“What do you mean that your son isn’t here nor will be in the future?”

“We have it on good authority that he is dying as we speak,” Claire said, as if that fact has already happened.

“I had not heard that Brian was dying. I’m so sorry to hear that. What hospital is he in?” Aurora stated, putting her hand to her lips for Brian and Justin to remain silent while she talked to the women.

“He isn’t in a hospital. Some of our creditors have said they would take care of him.”

“Oh, so that means this cash-in of the policy is for him? Then why didn’t he sign it beforehand? I mean if it would save his life and all…”

“Who said anything about saving his worthless life??” Claire screeched again. “If anything, his selfish ass should have gone to meet his maker years ago.”

“Besides, he’s a homosexual who is already doomed to eternal damnation. No, this money is to keep us from being homeless and I don’t appreciate you withholding what my husband intended to be rightfully mine.”

“May I see the document?” Aurora asked. Looking it over, Aurora’s eyes lit on the real reason that the bank teller did not automatically cash out the policy. “Lucinda, can you pull up a copy of Mr. Kinney’s signature please.”

Lucinda smirked as she did so. Once the screen was up, she and Aurora studied the document once again, noting the immediate differences. Smiling, Lucinda printed out the screen at Aurora’s request, just as a third person joined the teller at the counter.

“Lucinda, I have Kinnetik’s… Joan and Claire Kinney? What are you two doing here?”

Aurora laughed at the shocked looks upon their faces. “I’m sure both of you know Ted Schmidt, Brian’s personal and business accountant.” Turning back to Ted, she said, “It appears that they are trying to cash out Brian’s deceased father’s secondary policy but are unable to because Brian’s not here.” She winked at him, telling him to keep silent even as he saw the man in question standing off a little to the side and behind the larger of the police officers flanking Aurora.
“Did he sign it?”

“He did but…”

“Let me see the document?” Ted asked, and Aurora handed it to him without hesitation. “Oh, now this is interesting.”

“What? What is so interesting, young man?” Joan demanded, hands clutching her bible as she tapped her foot impatiently.

Ted smiled at the old woman. Brian had always told him that if his death was assumed, the vultures known as the Kinney women would circle. Ted could see that Brian was not wrong, which made him take pleasure in the sentence he was going to utter. “Well you see Mrs. Kinney, Brian is not a lefty, so the slant of this signature that is supposed to look like his, is all wrong.”

“What? What the hell are you talking about? No one forged Brian’s signature,” Claire stated.

“Claire, I’ve been Brian’s personal accountant since the days we were both pretty fresh out of grad school. I think I would know Brian’s signature a whole lot better than you two would. I can say beyond a doubt that this is not Brian’s signature, but I would bet my last dollar that it belongs to one of the two of you.”

Aurora chuckled. “Well there is one way to test that theory. Would you both give me permission to pull up each of your accounts. The signatures are all in the system electronically so there isn’t a way to mistake them. Also whenever Brian signs something, there is a little something extra that he puts on the back of that signature which lets us know that it’s authentic. Do either of you know what it is? Because I can tell you right now, that the document is missing that very thing.”

Claire caught on to the implications immediately. “Come on Mother. We’ll go get Brian to sign the documents and then come back to cash out the policy.” She began trying to turn her mother away from the teller, Ted, and Aurora, only to be confronted with her worse nightmare.

“Now, now, sister dear, no need to go and find me, since I’m right here, now is there?”

“Brian? Well good. Now that you’re here you can cash out the policy immediately,” Joan ordered, expecting to be instantly obeyed.

“Hello to you too, Joanie. As for cashing out the policy, the answer is no. But since I’m sure that Claire forged my signature, I will happily step aside and let the Pittsburgh P.D. do what they do best, which is arrest the two of you for insurance fraud, among other things. Who knows? They may actually have a priest or two behind bars with you so you could be the good Catholics you are and unburden your souls, since with any luck you will die in prison.”

“I can’t believe you are so selfish! I don’t know why God chose to give me such an ungrateful ingrate for offspring.”

“Well you don’t have to worry about me now Joanie. I think the title of ungrateful ingrate is more suited to Claire, since she’s been draining you dry for years, which is why you’re always coming to me for money. Well we won’t have to worry about that any longer, will we? You’re going to a place with three hots and a cot. Enjoy your stay in Club Fed. Officers, I would like to have these women arrested and yes, I will be down to the station a little later to officially press charges.”

“Brian? Brian?! You would do this to your family! Your own mother and sister?!?” Claire screamed. “I should have arranged to have you murdered years ago, instead of now!”
Brian’s jaw clenched hearing her admission. He felt his heart had been ripped out of his chest all over again; felt the pain of living with their abuse verbally, physically, and emotionally as if it was freshly inflicted. In that moment, all he wanted to do was shut himself off and find himself in the bottom of a bottle of Beam and never climb out. As the self-destructive thoughts continued to form a revolving loop in his mind, he felt the lifeline clinging to him, once again saving him from them... and himself.

“Brian, you have two choices. You can kiss me and forget about them or you can let them win again,” Justin said, his voice soft enough for only Brian to hear. “I know it hurts, just like Craig’s wishing me dead hurt me earlier. But you are not the sum of what insignificant people say about you. We’re Taylor-Kinneys- lions among sheep, remember? So fuck them! You belong to me, while they will belong to Bruising Betty and Big Bertha in a little bit. Although I think whichever person gets your mom for a cellmate will kill her or themselves within the first twenty-four hours.”

Brian snickered at the mention of what awaited Joan and Claire behind bars. Turning to them, his voice was steady when he addressed them. “Thanks Claire.”

“What the fuck are you thanking me for?” she asked, venom lacing her shrill voice.

“Admitting in front of a room full of witnesses, including the police, what you and mother have been up to. This will make the officers’ jobs that much easier. Enjoy your one-hour a day free for the rest of your miserable lives.”

Brian then grabbed Justin and planted his lips firmly over the plump pink ones of his husband. He only let Justin up for air to witness Joan and Claire being read their Miranda rights. He couldn’t help laughing at the outraged diatribes of both the women as they were shepherded out the doors of the bank, none too gently. Apparently, their derogatory comments of gays were especially offensive to Officers Martinez and Llewellyn- two of the lesbians on the Pittsburgh Police Force.

“In Claire’s case, she’s probably jealous that no one, male nor female, wants her. I still can’t believe the same DNA created you two. She reminds me of dirty dishwater, while you make me think of white sand beaches somewhere far, far away.” Justin whispered to him, raising his eyes to the hazel ones he’d come to know so well. He searched them for any sign of distress after watching his biological nightmares being carted off to jail.

“Well that’s two down and from the looks of it, about thirty more to go,” Aurora whispered to them.

“How far away is Sarah and company? Have you heard from them yet?” Justin asked as he looked around at the faces frowning back at the couple. He really didn’t give a fuck what they thought. He was only concerned about one patron, who looked like he was toiling between keeping his place in line or coming over to confront Brian and Justin. “Fuck, he just can’t stay away, can he?” Justin asked rhetorically, seeing the minute the indecision in the coward’s eyes ended.

“Brian? Look Brian… I know you said you didn’t want to see or hear from me…”

“And yet, here you are,” Justin sneered, unwilling and unable to keep from addressing the idiot standing in front of him.

“I wasn’t talking to you,” Michael said through gritted teeth. “I was talking to my best friend.”

“Oh really? Where is he? He’s here? No, I didn’t think so, unless of course it’s that imaginary best friend you had as a child. But then again, since you never grew up…”

“Fuck you Justin! If you had just stayed dead, died or stayed in New York…” Michael flinched as
Justin almost grabbed ahold of him. If not for the quick actions of Brian and Ted, Michael surely would have received several blows for every word he uttered. And Michael knew it too.

“Justin, what did we agree to?” Brian’s voice was stern as he looked into the blazing blue eyes of his partner. He felt as murderous as Justin did in that moment, but he had to believe that Sarah would take care of the man he used to think of as a friend, better and more efficiently than either of them could. Whereas the ass whipping would have short-term gratifying results, it could also land them in jail and apart for years. Brian was realistic enough to know that he and Justin wouldn’t be in jail for a year or two, but would be doing ten-to-twenty hard time if they didn’t keep themselves under control. “Ted, can you take Justin to Jules, who has just arrived. I know that they have something to go over.”

“Brian, I’m not…” Justin began to protest, only to be cut off.

“A child. I know. But right now I have to deal with the overgrown child standing in front of us. You have already proven that any time spent in his presence will have you going off the rails. Let me handle this, okay?”

He could see when he’d broken through the belligerence that was emblazoned within Justin’s eyes. Taking a deep breath and releasing it, Justin nodded. “Okay Brian, I’ll let you deal with him. In the meantime, I’ll give Ted, Aurora, and Quinn whatever information that Jules and I can. Just don’t be long. I don’t like being without you by my side for too long.”

As Justin moved away with Ted, Brian heard Michael’s sneering whine. “So you’re his guard dog now? Has his mouth finally gotten him into trouble and he needs you to get him out?”

Brian narrowed his eyes at the man. How dare he make assumptions about the nature of Justin’s comments when he was a primary cause of them? “I would think that you of all people would know Justin can handle himself more than adequately Michael, if that fading black-eye marring your face is anything to go by. In any event, I’m surprised to see you here at the bank. I would have thought the first thing you would have done was seek out Debbie. She’s been worried sick about you.”

“What for, when she has you and Sunshine?” he sneered.

“Maybe because you’re her son and regardless of the shitty way you act, she loves you.”

“And you? Do you love me?”

Brian closed his eyes. Of course Michael would never think about what he does to anyone else except Brian. He really had a one-track mind, in which Brian featured heavily. “I have nothing to do with you skipping out on Debbie, Michael.”

“Of course you do! I couldn’t stay here without you speaking to me. Do you have any idea how hard it would be to see you and not speak to you? Do you? I love you Brian. I always have; always will.”

“Michael, you don’t love anyone, not even yourself. If you did, you would want me to be happy with Justin. If you did, you would want Ben, a man who has bent over backwards to please you. He would still be your husband. Instead, every one of your actions have screamed hate. Every one of them, but especially the fact that you stole from your own mother and for what? Joining some sick organization to get rid of Justin so that I would want you? Get this through your concrete-encased head, once and for all, Michael. I. WOULD. NEVER. WANT. YOU! Justin is a man, whereas you are a boy playing dress-up. He’s faced much more adversity in his life than you ever have because we all protected you. He didn’t run away or hide behind others; didn’t make excuses or place blame. He faced shit like a man and came out a victor instead of a victim. You’ve thrown everything you
could at him and look what he’s gained... My respect, my love, and my admiration. What have you gained? Nothing, Michael, except my contempt. I hope that whatever business you have at the bank today will bring you happiness, because as a person, you’re a miserable and pathetic asshole destined to die alone.”

Brian turned his back just as Sarah came through the door of the bank along with several police officers. Looking at the roundup, Brian was sad to see Michael among them, but he had to deal with the weight of his own decisions, for once. It was past time that Michael did. Sarah came to speak to him as the police matched pictures to the people they were arresting. A paddywagon waited at the curb to take all of those within the bank that were on the list to the precinct for their official booking. Just then Ted, Aurora, Quinn, and Peter came out of the back office, stacks of papers in each of their arms.

“Here is all of the financial evidence we could gather. It’s a good thing we were able to get that subpoena earlier this morning. I think Remson and Brown had something to do with that, along with Myrna. I didn’t know that Mrs. Brown’s brother-in-law was a federal judge here in Pennsylvania,” Ted said, as he handed his stack over to Sarah.

She nodded. “It made it easier than having to send all the way to Washington, although I don’t doubt Josiah would have been able to get it.”

“Great. So now we can all get to the station so I can file additional charges on my fucked up bio family,” Brian stated, looking around for Justin and Jules.

“Martinez filled me in on her way to the station with…” her phone rang, and seeing the number, she answered immediately. “Shelia, what is it?”

“Fucking bitch has Jules and Justin! She’s with two other goons. I’m following behind the van now.”

“Fucking Hell!!”
FIRST NATIONAL BANK of PITTSBURGH- Take 2

“Fucking Hell! Look Shelia, stay with them but do not, I repeat DO NOT play fucking heroine, ya got me? I’ll be en route in a few minutes, and be sure to keep your goddamn phone plugged up!” Sarah disconnected the call, looking upon the concerned faces surrounding her but landing on one.

“She has him, doesn’t she?” Brian asked, anger and brokenness clear in his tone.

“Yeah she does. Shelia is tailing them but Evangeline has two guys with her. I know she’s going to have her hands full with the two of them but…”

“The bitch won’t hesitate to put a bullet in Justin. He’ll challenge her to do it.”

“For what it’s worth, I don’t think she will. Justin has too much monetary value. Out of the two, I think she’s more apt to shoot Julienne. She’s caused this kind of trouble for Evangeline and her business partner, who is behind bars, before.”

“So the two of them together…”

“As I’ve said, Evangeline has her hands full and she doesn’t even realize it.”

“It doesn’t help that Justin is angry right now though. He becomes reckless when he’s angry.” Brian tells her.

“Well then, we’d better shake a tailfeather Brian. If what you say is true, Justin is about to raise Hell in ways I don’t think even he’s prepared for.” She turned to the group. “I need you guys to take these to the station and put them into Detective Horvath’s hand. Tell him to lock them up. In the meantime, I have to call Higgins and request backup.”
“What about Sapperstein? He would know where the bitch is taking Jules and Justin.” Brian said.

“We already tried to get the information of where Evangeline had planned to take Justin from him. He said he would rather take his chances with a trial, rather than cross her.”

“No surprises there. He always was a coward.”

“Listen Brian, although I’m letting you come with me for Justin’s sake, don’t try any of that cowboy shit from this morning. This bitch is beyond dangerous, and whereas we already know that Justin is going to act recklessly, I need you to be able to keep a cool head. If you can’t do that, tell me now and I’ll take you directly to the station to deal with Joan and Claire.”

“I can’t not be there Sarah. Justin has faced too much alone, but past that, he and I- we’re eternal. Where he goes, I go. I can’t sit in safety while knowing he’s in danger.”

She looked at the worry lines creasing Brian’s forehead as he spoke. If he was anything like Benny, Anthony, and Gareth, there was no way he was going to sit idle. The others hadn’t, so she couldn’t expect Brian to. Besides she would rather have him working with her than acting independently and possibly fucking everything up in the process. She already knew there was going to be bloodshed; having Kinney with her would lessen the body count. At least she hoped so.

Brian pulled out his cell phone, sending a quick text to Justin’s secondary phone in the hopes that it would reach him. When moments later a response text was received and the signal to the phone turned on, allowing Brian to see exactly which direction they were heading, Brian let out a huge relieved breath. “I know which direction they’re headed.”

“How?” Sarah asked, but then shook her head in rueful amusement. “The secondary phone. Justin has one too, I take it?”

“Yeah. Ever since the days of the bashing when Justin would forget to charge his primary phone a lot, especially when he was working on a painting. He rarely uses it, but we still decided to keep it on for emergencies. It was also the way he and I kept in touch while he…”

“Was with Ethan?” Ted supplied.

“Yeah. I found out just how possessive that fucker was one night when I had texted Justin to tell him
that his mother was trying to reach him. Thankfully, I had the forethought to use the secondary when I didn’t hear from him within minutes after the first text. No matter what, Justin and I would always be in contact, even when we were broken up. I told him that I had sent the message to his primary cell phone first when he asked why I was reaching out on the secondary. He told me to just use that one from then on. Once Justin left him, we sort of just forgot about it, even though he still kept it with him. Then when cancer came knocking, we were back to using it often. So always in emergency situations, it’s up and running. Since he came back to the Pitts, there hasn’t been a day that’s gone by that it hasn’t been with him.”

“Good thing too,” Sarah interjected. “I have Frankie tracking it by the satellites, in case they go into some area where the basic signal gets scrambled.”

“Smart move Agent Morrissey. Pittsburgh is a steel town and has plenty of places to build a compound or some underground hideaway without people thinking twice about it. I’ll bet that’s the part of town she’s heading for,” Quinn stated.

“The old steel mill? I know that area well. Jack Kinney spent his life in that place,” Brian sneered in remembrance of the man with whom he shared DNA. “I remember they had plenty of underground tunnels leading out to the river. Fuck! That’s exactly where they are headed!”

“What makes you say that?” Sarah asked.

“Although she probably has a compound there to keep Justin and Julienne contained, it also borders one of the only waterways in Pittsburgh. She would never think to build some place at the Golden Triangle. That would be too risky. But people never really register that all the waters where the three rivers meet has to originate from somewhere. They are always so focused on that one spot that they never pay attention to the other nooks and crannies along the river shores. The riverbank at the old steel mill has been deserted for years. It’s the most likely place the bitch will try to hide.”

“I hope you’re right.”

“I know I am, Sarah. I feel it.”

“Brian’s instincts are only wrong once every decade or so Sarah, but when it comes to his JTHD, trust him,” Ted assured her.

“JTHD?” She lifted her eyebrow in question, causing Ted to snicker a bit. He had thought Brian and
Sarah alike before, but that action confirmed it for him.

“Justin Taylor Homing Device. It also works as a bullshit detector. Justin also has one for Brian. He considers it part of the Brian Kinney Operating Manual. They both keep rewriting and updating the editions at will.” Ted said with a smile. It was always one of the things that amazed him about Brian and Justin.

“Fuck you Theodore... But thank you too.” Brian tilted his head in acknowledgement of all Ted said. He’d never realized how closely Ted regarded him and Justin before now. It was a relief to know that he did.

“Okay, so let’s get these files to the station, I’ll call Em and have Leo, Remson, and their wives meet us there.” Ted plowed into action before he became teary-eyed. Gratitude from Brian was rare, and never given lightly. He would put off thinking about it until they had Justin back safe and sound.

“In the meantime, I’ll call Drew, Ben, and Colby, and tell them to meet me at the old steel mill. Ted, have Cynthia meet you at the station. She’ll be able to access even more than what you have compiled into those records.”

“Right away Boss.”

“Ted, can it with that Boss shit, will ya or you’re fired.”

“Canning...canning.” he chuckled, as did Brian, which was much needed.

*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~TUVII

PITTSBURGH 54TH PRECINCT- Liberty Avenue District

Josiah Higgins and team were astounded at the influx people being escorted in handcuffs into the building. Some were loudly protesting while others remained mute, but with malicious and haughty expressions. Josiah ordered one of his underlings to retrieve the incoming fax from the machine as well as the folder near it.
“I take it Morrissey strikes again,” Brandon says, chuckling as he made his way through the throng. “I’ve heard the rumors but to see the evidence of how she works…”

“Save it Greene. You know she’d be too much for you.” Josiah answered the chuckle with one of his own.

“She would be… but only IF she was my type. I prefer my men a bit more docile. Now if Sarah had a dick, I could make an exception. Lord, knows she has a pair of big balls to round up this crew.”

“How much do you know about them?”

“Enough that working here undercover as an attorney has been extremely lucrative. Their consultations alone were very informative. And they were all aware they were being recorded in the event I decided to take the case for them so they wouldn’t have to repeat the issue. This is one time their impatience will costs them much.”

“Nice work. Are you sure you want to blow your cover?”

Brandon bit his lip. He’d asked himself that same questions so many times since he dropped off Hobbs and his lover. “Yeah Josiah, I think it’s time. I’ve been in this business so many years past what I intended. I’ve found my parents murderers, seen them punished within the scope of the law, and by way of good old street justice. I want to enjoy my massive inheritance while I’m still able. Twelve years of doing this has taught me that life is too short not to enjoy it. But I won’t lie to you, the pull to continue this line of work is strong.”

“Well son, it’s been a pleasure working with you. Let’s finish up your last case with a bang.”

Brandon and Josiah moved across the lobby to meet with Detective Horvath. He was looking in amazement at the amount of people now inside of the relatively small precinct. In all his years on the force, he’d never seen the building this full to bursting. He wondered if, even with the rarely used unground cells, there would be enough room to house them all. Bringing himself out of his thoughts, he turned to address Josiah.

“I just heard from Sarah. Your rogue agent has grabbed Justin and Julienne. From the information Brian gave her, they’re headed in the direction of the old steel mills.”
“Why? What’s down there?” Brandon asked.

Josiah thought back to when his father used to work there many years ago. He remembered when they were closed. But there was something about them, tugging at the outskirts of his memory. His eyes lit in realization of just what that something was. “Fuck! The waterways!”

“Yeah,” Carl confirmed. “We have to go. If Evangeline is on her way there, I doubt we have long before Justin and Jules becomes unreachable unless it involves the Coast Guard. Brian called in the troops from Britin, but with this amount of arrests, there is only so much backup Larry will be able to spare.”

“Let me get changed, and I’ll be ready to rock and roll.” Brandon grabbed his duffle and started for the men’s restrooms to the left of the lobby.

“Brandon, you should probably stay…” Josiah begun to protest only to be cut off.

“No Josiah. If this is to be my last assignment, let me have it end the way I want it to.”

Both men stood there, reading each other’s thoughts. After a few seconds, Josiah nodded once to let Brandon know that he understood. “Don’t get dead. You hear me son, don’t.” It was what he always told his agents when going into the field. All of them had seen too much death together over the years, losing a few members of their core group along the way. Josiah didn’t think he could handle it again, especially if death came for Sarah, Brandon, Ty, or Frankie. They were more like his children, instead of his colleagues.

“Don’t worry Captain. I won’t. There’s too much to see and do before I turn up my toes. In the meantime, I plan on setting this world on fire!” Brandon turned and hurried towards the men’s room, looking forward to this one last assignment. After all of the trials to come, he would truly be free and clear, but this was his last field expedition and he couldn’t wait!

“What do you mean, ‘his last assignment?’ I thought he was an attorney,” Carl said to Josiah after watching the young man disappear behind the door.

Brandon holds a law degree, so he is an attorney. But he is also an FBI agent, and has been since his parent’s death twelve years ago. Much like Julienne McKay-Tanner, who is being held hostage with Justin, his parents had some dealings in the underworld. It wasn’t much, but his mother was an attorney. So when the head of the organization she worked for was murdered, the faction who ordered the hit decided to clean house from top to bottom. Unfortunately- or perhaps fortunately in Brandon’s case- that included his parents. Ironically they didn’t know about Brandon. His parents had done an amazing job keeping his existence a secret even from the people she worked for. It
wasn’t until the reading of their wills that Brandon found out what his parents were really involved in. He came to us with a video they had left for him to look at and told us he wanted in.”

“Did they ever catch the people who wiped out his family?” Carl asked fascinated at the young man’s story.

“Yes. Brandon infiltrated the organization, going deep undercover. That was how he’d met Julienne McKay and Sarah. Tamara St. Giles was the person who ordered the hit, so that she could take over her father’s organization. Unlike her, Charles St. Giles was an honorable man, which is a contradiction considering he was a leader in organized crime. Brandon’s the one who first found out about Evangeline’s duplicity. He got out of there when She-bitch St. Giles was arrested and before Evangeline could identify that he was one of us.”

“Fuck me with yesterday’s dick… and I’m not even gay!”

Josiah laughed. “From what I’ve heard of your wife, it sounds like you’ve picked up a few of her sayings. But yeah, that young man is not only sneaky and scarily smart, he’s a fucking survivor. It’s going to be sad to lose him, but I know if I ever need him, he’ll come back for me… for all of us.”

Brandon emerged from the bathroom then and strode over to the others. He reminded Carl of Brian, with his choice of attire and panther-like grace. He wondered if Brian knew of Brandon’s history. Probably not, but it was evident just how similar both men really were. White t-shirt, a pair of 501’s with holes in the knees, Prada motorcycle boots and a leather jacket, Carl could just about imagine Brian would have dressed the same way if it had been him standing in Brandon’s place. The only difference is Brandon’s blond shoulder-length hair was pulled back neatly in a ponytail, whereas Brian’s would look freshly-fucked. If the men of Liberty Avenue could see him looking like that, Carl knew pandemonium would break out. He was secure enough in his manhood to admit that.

“So are you staying or going Carl?” Brandon asked him, a dangerous and mischievous twinkle in his eye. The smirk on his lips was as charismatic as his brunet counterpart.

“Definitely going!”

“Let me just let Larry know. There better not be one fuck-up while we’re gone, or I’ll have his badge.” Josiah muttered darkly. He hadn’t been in the field in many years but this was one time he wouldn’t miss. Evangeline was going the fuck down TODAY!  

TUVII

BRITIN…
Emmett pressed the end call button, never wishing more in his life that he had a receiver to slam down. He’d just received the call from Brian, telling him that Jules and Justin were now in the hands of Evangeline. How does that bitch keep escaping. And now that she had Baby, he was feeling particularly murderous. Turning to the group at large who were awaiting news, he took a few calming breaths before speaking.

“Okay people so here’s what we know so far. The hired gun is dead. Apparently, Evangeline had a bitch-fit and offed him for shooting at Justin. A number of people from that fucked up list were at the bank at the same time as Brian and Justin. Joan and Claire Kinney, as well as Michael, have been arrested as have several notables from the Who’s Who of Pittsburgh. During the mayhem, Jules and Justin were taken. I’ve been asked via Brian to have Jen, Tucker, The Browns, Mr. Remson and the Avlossa faction meet them all down at the Liberty Avenue precinct so that you all will be protected. As for Ben, Colby, and Drew, Brian asked that you meet him down by the old steel mills. He thinks that’s where she’s headed.”

“How long will it take to get there?” Jason asked, his eyes narrowed.

“To the police station? Probably no more than a half an hour,” Emmett answered.

“I’m not talking about the fucking police station!” Jason yelled, surprising the assembled party. Squeezing his eyes shut, he exhaled a cleansing breath. “I’m talking about the steel mills. How long will it take to get there?”

“Oh no! You’re not going!”

“The fuck I’m not! If Kinney had been protecting Justin…”

“FUCK YOU! You will NOT stand in Brian’s house and accuse him of not protecting the man he loves,” Emmett exploded. “For the record, he had just finished dealing with his mother and sister and then his former best friend. So no, Brian wasn’t standing idly by watching as Justin was taken!”

Both men stared angrily at each other. The most surprising thing was that Emmett, who was usually the peacemaker, with a Southern charm that wouldn’t quit, was in fact ready to pounce on Jason, who stood belligerently staring back.

“Calm down both of you,” Drew said, coming to stand by Emmett. “Killing each other is not going
to help the situation, especially because of unfounded accusations and assumptions. Now, Jason, I
know you want to go but…”

“No buts. Justin is my friend and will always be. I could never forgive myself if he was in trouble
and I did nothing to help him,” he interrupted quietly.

“Em…”

“No Drew. Where you go, I go. And I feel like Jason does. I owe Brian and Justin more than you
can ever imagine. I won’t sit safely behind walls while one or both of them is in danger. You know
me better than that.”

Drew sighed but nodded. “Well it looks like we’ll need two separate cars- one headed to the precinct
and the other headed to the steel mills. Who’s staying behind to mind the house for when the others
come back from the hospital.”

Anita spoke up then. “My staff and I will make all the preparations. You just go and bring Mr. Justin
home safely. Don’t worry about anything here. I got this!”

He smiled at the feisty woman with her hands on her ample hips. He always did like her, but with
her commanding, motherly presence just then, he loved her. He walked over to her and hugged her.
“I have every faith that you’ll rule this place with an iron fist. We’ll be back soon.”

“Just bring them home,” she whispered, and he could hear the worry in her voice.

“Don’t worry Anita. We will! Let’s go people!”

*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*~*TUVII

SOMEBWHERE IN PITTSBURGH…

“Do you know where we are?” Jules asked Justin quietly so that the three people in the front didn’t
hear them. The window separating the front cab from small compartment in the back was slightly
open. They could hear everything being said in the front seat.
“By the smell of the air, I would say down by one of the three rivers. Plus the road is a lot bumpier here.” As if to give credence to Justin’s claim, the truck hit a particularly large pothole in the road. They could hear Evangeline screeching in the front seat.

“Careful you bumbling idiot! Don’t damage the merchandise! I intend to get full price for the sales. The clients have waited long enough; I don’t want to have to put them off any longer because of your clumsy ass driving.”

“Sorry Boss. It couldn’t be helped. You would think that this road, being near the business district, would have been fixed too.” The driver said.

“I didn’t ask for a running commentary on how the Pittsburgh Highway Department do their jobs. I only give a shit about getting those fucking troublemakers out to sea as soon as possible. Jordan, is there an ETA on when the boat will be here?”

A higher pitched voice from the passenger seat answered. “Johnny said they should be entering Pittsburgh waterways within the next two hours. Apparently, there was a big shipment of merchandise heading out and it’s held up the rate that boats can enter.”

“Again, who gives a fuck about the commerce in this town? All I asked was for the arrival time, NOT excuses as to why fucking people can’t be on time. If I know Sarah, they will be looking for those two by now. I’m not losing my fucking money again because of the whore back there.”

“Which one?”

The smack that occurred from Evangeline’s hand resounded within the medium sized vehicle. “Watch your fucking mouth. There is only one whore back there and it’s Julienne. It’s what she was born to do and would have been doing if Tamara had toyed around with her so long.”

“Well I certainly wouldn’t mind taking the other one for a test drive. He’s a pretty motherfucker. Did you get a glimpse of his mouth?”

“Try it and you’ll be eating your balls before I slit your throat,” Evangeline gritted out.
“We have to get out of this somehow Justin. I can’t… I’ve worked too hard to escape that life! I wouldn’t have even been in this shit if my parents weren’t fucking addicts who owed some very powerful people money. I’ve escaped this type of shit twice now, changed my name and everything, but I don’t know if the third time thwarting Tamara and Evangeline will be the fucking charm.”

“Listen to me Jules… we WILL get out of this. I have come too far, and Brian and I have faced too much for us to end this way. We’ll think of something. There has to be something, but neither of us can afford to panic, alright?”

She sighed deeply. “So first things first…” But her thought was stopped when the van jerked to a halt.

They couldn’t see where they were but the breeze coming through the open windows from the front, was cold. Justin knew he was right, that they were down by the waterways. They heard Evangeline giving orders, not to open the back of the van until she gave the signal. Justin rose up on his knees as best he could within the tight space, signaling for Julienne to do the same. He almost laughed aloud remembering the first time they sparred in a gym when he visited her in Florida. Julienne was a revelation; he was hoping she would be again.

Justin sent another quick text to Brian from his secondary, relaying all the information they were able to hear on the way to their destination. Brian sent a text back stating that they were on the way and to try to stall for time. He leaned the phone over towards Jules for her to read it and she nodded in response. As Justin put the phone back in the zippered pocket of his cargo pants, they could hear the back door being unlocked.

“Ready?” Justin whispered, adjusting his stance the tiniest bit to give himself more sure footing for what he was about to do.
Chapter 46: FEAST of the GOLDEN GEESE Part 3

Chapter Summary

Special THANK YOUs go out to Lorie, Saje and the LLLC from talking me down off the writing 'SLASHER' ledge this afternoon!

Lots of action and angst this chapter...ENJOY!!!

CHAPTER 46: FEAST OF THE GOLDEN GEESE Part 3

Jules smiled that enigmatic smile of hers that let Justin know she was in fighting mode. They heard an argument happening just outside of the doors, which made Julienne’s smile widen. Justin couldn’t tell what was happening, but apparently she knew everything that was being said. Before Justin had a chance to question her, the doors were flung open.

“You two get the fuck out of the van and help me with these two,” Shelia demanded.

Justin looked at the driver and passenger, who had accompanied Evangeline to kidnap them. Both were knocked out, but there wasn’t a visible mark upon their bodies. “How the fuck?”

Shelia smiled, but it was Julienne who answered, “You finally learned how to do it, have you?”

“What?” Justin asked, amazed and genuinely confused.

“Cut off their air supply without leaving a mark. How the fuck did you get here, Shelia?” Julienne asked.

“I was parking the car when that bitch came out of the bank with you two in tow. I called and let Sarah know that she had you both. So I followed you. We can’t stay here though, even if I’m flummoxed about how to get the fuck out of here now. The car is hidden in the brush over there, but to move it now would draw too much attention.”

They looked in the direction of her gaze to see Evangeline emerge from what looked like an old factory, with several men behind her.
“There aren’t too many places to hide out here, unless it’s inside the factory. That was one of the big draws to having the steel mills here. And the tide will be rising soon, so the tunnels and quays are out of the question. Fuck! We’ll have to split up.” Justin informed them.

“Are you out of your mind? There is no way we can do that! If one of us… that boat is en route to take us to whatever fresh hell that bitch has planned for us. If we split up, there’s a more likely chance that they will find and capture both of us before any of the others get here.” Jules protests.

“Well we can’t take all of them at the same time. There’s like thirty of them!”

“Fuck that! We’re not running. We’ll do as many as we can before they get here,” Shelia said.
“Jules, do you still remember how to hotwire a car?”

“Fuck yeah I do! You, Benny, and Gareth drilled me on that after those idiots almost got me on that plane, remember? We had to get the fuck out of there fast. Too bad we don’t have a fire extinguisher right now.”

“I know, but you get the van started while Justin and I take on as many of these fuckers as we can. You’re sure he’s good?”

“He’s one of the best I’ve sparred with Shelia. Don’t worry about him. You take care of yourself and when I can, I’ll run interference with this.”

“Make sure you close and lock the inside window Jules. The assholes in the back are bound to wake up at any time. Is it locked?” Justin asked. Shelia held up the key, a big mischievous grin on her face.
“Great. Let’s get this shit started then.”

Justin and Shelia followed Jules over to the driver’s side of the truck, waiting until over half the line of Evangeline’s followers passed them. Creeping around towards the front, Justin kicked out at the man nearest him, causing the resounding crunch of a breaking bone as the man yelped in pain and crumbled in a heap, clutching his knee. Justin stomped on the appendage again for good measure, incapacitating the man permanently. For Shelia’s part, she effected the same move on the man behind the one Justin attacked, with the same results.

“Two down… only twenty eight more to go plus the big bitch.” Shelia giggled, before she and Justin split up.
All out mayhem ensued as Jules worked on the van while Justin and Shelia continued to fend off their assailants, sometimes five and six people at a time. Evangeline’s voice could be heard screeching, as she too dove into the fray. The sirens in close proximity added to the noise level among moans, groans, and loud cursing during the fight.

Sarah noticed what resembled a dust storm up ahead. Paying extra close attention, she recognized the wild, whirling woman swinging a belt, buckle first, and nearly laughed aloud. If there was one thing Shelia was adept at, it was delivering first-rate, homestyle ass whippings courtesy of a leather belt. It was how she had punished Celene’s ex-husband, James, a few short years ago. It was comforting to see Shelia hadn’t lost her touch.

“Can you see Justin anywhere?” Brian’s strong yet nervous voice asked her.

“Not yet, but don’t worry, Brian. All that dust kicking up isn’t just from Shelia or that van driving around. I’m pretty sure your hellraiser is somewhere in that fracas as well.” As soon as she said it, they each caught a flash of blond hair jumping off the back of the van to fell three men. The blond delivered three stomps to his assailants groins in quick succession before climbing back into the passing van again. “See? Hellraiser, thy name is Justin! Nice move!” She shouted as Justin once again hopped off the back of the truck, scissor-kicking one guy under the chin and immediately dropping down to trip and stomp the nuts of another, before climbing on again.

“What the fuck?! Where the hell did he learn to be a stunt man?!” Brian was gobsmacked, eyes wide as saucers...

“From what Julienne told me, your Justin learned a lot about surviving when he was living in New York. Let’s face it... he’s a pretty little fucker, and if the Sappersteins are anything to go by, some men- gay, straight, or confused as fuck- have a problem with the word ‘no.’ It’s the conquering gene most of you have; it causes most of you to take what you want, instead of accepting that everything ain’t for you. Well Justin had no problem teaching them the difference between him being coy and him meaning what he said several times.”

Brian nodded in acknowledgement of what Sarah was trying to tell him. He’d always known that Justin could hold his own, but he’d never wanted him to have to. Today, however, Brian realized that he had to let Justin fight his own battles, even as he helped him. He couldn’t fight the battle for Justin, no matter how much he longed to. The car stopped, just as Justin hopped back onto the truck.

“Let’s Rock and Roll people!” Sarah called into her walkie-talkie.

Brian was the first one out of the car, the vehicle barely stopping before the man alighted. Running
right into the fray, Brian landed his first punch to the man trying to grab onto Justin’s outstretched foot. As he stood over the man, landing a well-aimed kick to the ribs, he felt the presence of another assailant at his back. Timing his approach just right, Brian crouched down, causing the man to miscalculate his balance as he swung his fist to connect with the back of Brian’s head. Quickly rising to his full-height, Brian took advantage of the man’s misjudgement, flipping him to land on the already-felled man. The sound of a SNAP had Brian turning to his left just before he heard the man he’d just taken care of groan. Shelia stood there with a look of maliciousness in her eyes, the likes of which he’d never seen, as she raised her belt to deliver two more blows to the man’s midsection, buckle first.

“Good God woman, remind me never to piss you off!” Brian exclaimed, before grabbing her by the waist to pull her away from the man she was beating into near-unconsciousness.

“He was old enough to know better, but I’ll hold you to that!” She replied, just before another blood-curdling scream rent the air.

They looked in the direction of the sound, one with admiration in their eyes, the other with a look of begrudging respect and horror on his face as Justin and Jules were back-to-back, fighting in hand-to-hand combat with more men than Brian could count. “I guess we’d better get the fuck over there.” He said, already in moving in that direction.

“Right behind you,” Shelia called before turning back to aim her belt buckle, hitting the man she had already beaten like he stole something, in the genitals. Leaning down she whispered into his ear, “You were a lousy fuck, Darius. Consider this my duty to women everywhere that you’ll never use your dick again for anything other than pissing. Gotta go!”

She ran across the yard at top speed, belt swinging, to join in the fray. Lining herself up with the three already fighting in such a way that would protect the others, Shelia got busy. Meanwhile on the other side of the yard, Sarah had just punched another assailant in the throat. Before the man could hit the ground, she latched onto him, using him as a shield to block another who was trying to hit her with a fire extinguisher.

“Phoenix,” Brandon called, causing her to turn just in time to move slightly to the left.

The object coming at her was so close that she actually heard the knife Brandon threw slice through the air to land deep into her attacker’s skull. Using her booted foot to hold the head in place, she wrenched the weapon from the man’s head, using it to defend herself against the others. It was an all out war for survival as they all thought to attack her at once. Sarah crouched down in the middle of the circle, using the knife to stab and slash wherever she could. Knees, genitals, ass, feet, femoral arteries… no place was safe as she continued to defend herself. The cacophony of screams of pain was almost deafening as man and woman alike screamed in agony at Sarah’s unseen attack. Sarah
was so driven by bloodlust that she didn’t realize when the last of them fell beside her until she felt a familiar hand on her shoulder.

“Nice job, Phoenix. Now stop being lazy and playing with corpses. It’s time to go find that bitch!” Brandon smiled down at her.

As she was about to answer with a snide remark, the ground at her and Brandon’s feet gave a pfft of a sound, causing both of them to jump back. “Fucking sniper! Where the hell...?!” Two more landed at their feet sending them in opposite directions in the hunt for the person shooting.

As Brandon ran in the direction of the Pittsburgh Police Department RV to let them know they had a rogue sniper to deal with, Sarah joined Brian, Justin, Jules, and Shelia to inform them. “Keep fucking moving and when able, crouch low!”

“Any idea where Evangeline is?” Brian asked, as he threw yet another punch, quickly dispatching his intended target.

“Not yet, but she can’t be that far away from the bitchass doing the sneaky shooting. That’s just like her!” Sarah answered. “Jules, catch me!”

She launched herself at the other woman, who seemed to know just what to do. Sarah then kicked her legs out, while Jules spun her around. Brian grabbed Justin and moved him out of the way, each still fighting the other attackers. “Brian, duck down!” Justin called and as he did, he felt the weight of his partner’s body roll over him, scissor kicking the two men who were aiming guns at Brian’s head.

“Fucking hell! Someday you will teach me that move!”

“Count on it, Big Guy.” Justin said with a smile in his voice, even while kicking two more people trying to get at him.

While the fight on the ground was in full swing, Carl and Manny were in the RV, diligently trying to find the trajectory of the sniper’s bullets being aimed directly at the brawl. Looking simultaneously at four screens, Carl yelled out, “THERE! That’s where the bitch is hiding!”

On the very top of the compound, what would ordinarily be considered a blind spot from the ground or a peaked roof from far away, Carl noticed what appeared to be a little hole. Within that little
orifice, was the outline of a silencer. Speaking quickly into his walkie-talkie, Carl gave instructions to his men while Manny alerted Ty, who was already on the inside. Ty quickly sent the files he had on his phone of the layout of the inside of the compound. The two men scanned the information quickly, noting that there was only one point of entry in and out of the building at ground level, but there were several underground tunnels, which led to the center of the building on the inside. As for the inside itself, it was shaped like a hexagon, in which taking the wrong hallway would lead away from the sniper’s lair, instead of directly to it. Making copies, Carl alighted from the RV to find the Director of the FBI and the SWAT Team.

“Jacobs, what do you make of this map?” Carl asked the twenty-year SWAT veteran. Five years into his career, Martin Jacobs was handpicked for the team to train and was chosen carefully by his predecessor to take over the team ten years later. As far as Carl was concerned, if there was one man who could point them in the right direction without all the hoopla of wasting time, Martin Jacobs was it.

The SWAT captain looked through the pictures carefully, analyzing its setup, noting the distance between each of the hallways and their staircases. Finally he looked up from the stack of papers and smiled. “You’re not going to find the point of entry within the hexagon, Carl.”

“What do you mean? And why are you smiling like that?!”

“Because the bitch behind the bullets is smart,” Josiah said, as he analyzed the stack of papers himself.

“You’re fucking right, she is. Carl, in answer to your question, the reason you aren’t going to find the point of entry in there is because she put a direct route underwater.”

“You’re shitting me, right?” Carl asked in shock.

“No, I’m not. Fortunately my guys and gals are trained aquatically. It’s the one thing she wouldn’t expect in this backwater town.” Turning to Josiah he asked, “Who do you have on the inside?”

“Ty Mason, but all of our agents are trained in water search and rescue, too. I made it a requirement to be on my team. You just never know… Anyway, I’ll put in a call to Ty and get him geared up to accompany your guys.”

“Fine, but I want him to work with the person who I put in charge. Ordinarily, I wouldn’t share
power, but if it’s as I suspect with this broad, it’s the only way all of them will come out alive, including her.”

Josiah and Carl nodded, both acknowledging that Evangeline Charles wasn’t only a criminal, but a cop as well. That made her even more dangerous. True to his word, Josiah began to rattle off fast and furious instructions, while the SWAT Director did the same. Both were coordinating their efforts, discussing the pros and cons of each decision. Finally, with a plan in hand, they each met with their teams. As the water mission was getting underway, Carl’s cellphone rang.

“Horvath.”

“Carl, oh thank God! Michael’s been arrested!” Debbie screeched into the receiver.

“Yes, I’m well aware that he has. Deb, I can’t talk now. I have to go.”

“Don’t you dare hang up on me Carl Horvath! What are we going to do about Michael?”

“Nothing! We are going to let him sleep in the bed he’s made for himself. It’s the least he can do for all the drama and trauma he’s caused. I can’t believe you! Even after you’ve been told more than you should have about Michael’s involvement in all of this, you’re still looking to rescue him?”

“But Carl…”

“NO! No, Debbie! And there is no point in arguing with me either. Now, I have to go!” He hung up the phone before she could say one more word. He was surprised to see the sympathetic eyes of Manny regarding him.

“You can’t help who you love,” he said, shaking his head.

“No you can’t, but you can control what you allow them to do to you. I think after all of this is over, I have to decide…”

“Decide what?”
Carl shook his head sadly. “I love Red, God knows I do, but I just may be deciding to live my life without her.”

Back at the Precinct…

Debbie was in shock. Carl had never hung up on her before! She was tempted to get him back on the line, but she had to deal with Michael first. Marching over to the booking desk, she waited while Detective Miles finished with the people in front of her. She was fuming as the people in front of her were trying to talk to the man about some missing dog. Before she could make another move, she was physically wrenched out of the line.

“What the…”

“Debbie, what the hell are you doing?” Jennifer asked, frowning into her eyes.

“Jenn, now isn’t the time.”

“You’re right, now isn’t the time. It’s not the time for you to, yet again, rescue your ignorant son from all he has done!”

“Deb, for once, you have to accept the truth of things,” Mel told her, eyes puffy from all the mother had endured that morning.

“I don’t believe any of it! My Michael wouldn’t be mixed up in all of this!”

“Well that’s the point isn’t it?! He is! And because of him, my daughter is lying in a hospital bed while you’re standing here trying to justify his actions. There is no reason or excuse he could possibly give for why he chose to get mixed up with the fucking people trying to kill Brian and Justin!”

“There is a reason, but I won’t get it while he’s locked up in here! He told me that when he called as I was sitting in the waiting room at the hospital,” Deb defended herself.
“And you believed him?” Jennifer laughed bitterly. “Let me tell you something, Deb. Your son is playing you again. There is no way that once he gets released, even if he could get out of here, that he will admit to his part in any of this. He can’t! Michael has never been held accountable for his own actions, nor has anything ever been his fucking fault. He’s playing you and you’re letting him! AGAIN!”

Debbie opened and closed her mouth several times, not knowing what to say as Jenn stood there continually berating her for her part in this whole mess. Jenn told her that she was just as guilty as Michael, for allowing him to constantly pawn off his mistakes and poor decisions on Brian. While he got to maintain his squeaky-clean, boy-next-door image. Debbie felt bothered by every single comment the blonde woman made. “What the fuck, Jenn?! You act like your son is so fucking perfect. I know for a fact that Justin isn’t!”

“No, he’s not! But I’ve held him responsible when he was, not letting him misplace blame or blaming his indecisions on someone other than himself, from the age of twelve. Would it have killed you to grow a fucking spine and do the same for your son?! Now, because of your insecure, inferior offspring, mine is once again fighting for his life!”

“That’s enough, both of you!” Mel yelled at them. She was trying all she knew to do at this moment to hold it together, and here they were, about to tear each other apart. She couldn’t deal with that right now. “Let me tell both of you something… Michael is not getting out of this.” When Debbie went to interject, Mel held up her hand. “No Deb, he’s not. I’ve seen the paperwork and there is a money trail leading back to him as long as a city block in New York. And even if by some miracle he was to beat the charges against him, he still wouldn’t get out of this unharmed. I know that the man who shot Jenny was in contact with the bastard, and that Michael had texted Jenny this morning before she went out with Gus. Because of Michael, Kip Thomas knew where to find my children. So you better pray to God with all your might that the law takes care of Michael, because if they don’t, I WILL!”

“Jennifer, Debbie, and Mel, with me now,” Tuck had come upon them while the three women were talking. Dragging them back into the office where John and Peter were, he sat them down while Leo Brown was explaining a series of emails he’d just received from his secretary.

“I don’t know how much this will help, but Marcie just sent these documents to me. They contain the latest bank transfers that would’ve been posted this afternoon,” Leo tells them.

“How did you get them?” Tuck asked.

“It pays to know someone within the government. In this case, it happens to be Roy Russo’s ex-wife. She divorced him right after she found out what happened with the Justin Taylor case. Margaret Russo was also the one who helped his most recent mail-order bride Svetlana escape from him,
although Russo didn’t know that. Between the two of them, they were able to obtain all of his old financial records before his incarceration and subsequent release. They were waiting for the perfect time to expose him. But while they were waiting, they were also keeping an eye on the major players in this crap. And because they are turning State’s evidence, they aren’t being charged with Withholding Critical Information from Law Enforcement. Because of Margaret’s place and title in government, she has already gone to the ambassadors in international countries of the men also involved in the Human Trafficking ring, leaving their justice in the various ambassador’s hands. All of the men involved had Diplomatic Immunity due to their own positions in government or business travel. As we thought, obtaining Justin and Julienne were the keys to all of this,” Leo finished, his head reeling at all the implications in this.

“So what happens now?” Debbie asked. “And how does this affect Michael?”

“Are you serious? Why are you so fucking hung up on Michael?” Jenn exploded.

“Because he’s my son!”

“Who paid to put my son in danger and ultimately end up enslaved!”

“I’m sure he didn’t mean…”

“YES. HE. DID!” All the occupants of the room yelled.

“Debbie, when are you going to accept that Michael is not an angel?” Caroline Brown asked. She had been sitting silently as her husband explained the information he received. “Look, I know it’s hard, but honey, the evidence of his guilt is irrefutable. You have to accept this, not for our sakes, but for your own.”

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Back at the Compound…

Drew, Emmett, and Jason were awaiting the arrival of the boat to take Justin and Julienne away. They had decided, with Carl’s blessing, that this was the wisest course of action. Each of them had rationalized that someone on the boat had to know all of the particulars of the transaction which was supposed to take place. As they watched the boat approach the shore, Jason turned to Emmett.
“You’re sure about this?” The man was skeptical that Emmett’s plan would work.

“Honey, if I didn’t make it as a caterer, I could have been Lana Turner- Drag Queen edition,” Emmett flipped the long tresses of his wig away from his shoulders, delivering a sultry look reminiscent of the decades-spanning starlet.

“Be that as it may, it’s not me you have to convince. Did either of you manage to glean who’s supposed to be in charge on the ship?”

“A man by the name of Steven Brandt. At least that’s who the boat is registered under according to Manny,” Drew answered.

“Oh for the love of fuck! Do you know who that is?” Emmett asked, shaking his head.

“No. Should we?” Jason replied. Something about this was feeling off to him. He watched as Emmett pulled out his cellphone and quickly dialed.

Having placed the call, he quickly put it on speaker and turned down the volume so that only the three of them could hear the responses. Once the phone connected, Emmett jumped right in. “Lindsay, I need to know the name of your brother-in-law. I know you told me he was in shipping. What’s his name?”

“Steven Brandt. Why?”

Emmett’s eyes grew wide as Lindsay confirmed what he already knew. “Do you know where he is?”

“Sure. He’s still in critical condition and as of a month ago, he slipped into a coma. Again, why are you asking this now, Em?”

“Who’s running the company while he’s incapacitated?” Jason asked her, already dialing his phone.

“As far as I know, Lynette was the one running the company, in conjunction with his business partner, Oscar Miles. Has there been any word on Justin’s whereabouts yet?”
“Yes and no, but Lindz, how did he end up in the hospital?”

“Emmett, what has this got to do with anything?!”

“Please Lindz, it’s important. I promise to fill you in later.”

“Fine, but I’m going to hold you to it. From what I understand, he and Lynette were in the middle of an argument and when he went head-first down a short flight of stairs. Ordinarily, it could have just made a person have to recover from a headache, but it turns out he was having a stroke while he hit his head.”

“So she couldn’t be held responsible for his accident?”

“I don’t know if they ever had a reason to suspect her. But why are you asking me this?”

“Because apparently the boat that Justin was supposed to be placed on is from her husband’s company. Lindsay, she’s on the list along with your mother.”

“Oh fucking hell! Em, I have to go. Let me call my father. Maybe he can put a stop to this now!”

“I don’t know how much good it will do, Lindz.” He said as he watched a silver-haired gentleman alight from the boat’s lower deck. “But whatever you do, hurry up!” He disconnected the call as the man along with two others, whom he assumed were bodyguards, came towards him.

“Justin Taylor, I presume,” the deep voice called out.

“Well I don’t know, but who’s asking?” Emmett said, as the man stopped in front of him.

He chuckled. “Looks like we have ourselves a live one, boys. We’ll be sure to teach him how to mind his manners once he’s aboard. To answer your question though, my name is Oscar Miles. I’ll be escorting you to your new home in just a bit. We’re just waiting for one other person.”
“If you mean Evangeline, with luck you’ll be waiting a long time. I know for a fact she’s otherwise engaged at the moment.”

“No. I’m talking about your little playmate, Julienne McKay. Kevin, you did say that she should be along any minute now, didn’t you?”

It was then that each of the men noticed the fourth man coming upon them. Emmett ducked his head as did Drew, but Jason looked at the man approaching them with narrowed eyes. Looked like although Julienne had taught the fucker with hand-trouble a lesson that morning, he still hadn’t learned. “Yeah, the bitch should be on her way by now. I owe her a good turn for the shit she pulled on me this morning… and I’ll make sure she gets it.”

“Excellent! So while I’ll spend my time with Taylor here, you’ll be educating your own whore… well at least until we deliver them to their rightful owners. It’s going to be a fun trip!”

Emmett cringed at the maniacal laughter of the two men. No way in hell were they going to get their hands on Baby, he thought as the laughter continued. With a nod both to Drew and Jason, Emmett raised his head. By the time, Dickhead Dixon realized what was happening, Oscar was flat on his back, a combat boot repeatedly kicking him in the stomach. He looked to the right and left of him to find the other men engaged with the two men who were flanking Justin Taylor. But that…

“That’s right! I’m not Justin, and you’ll never get your hands on him or Jules.” Emmett didn’t waste time or words, as he commenced to beating the hell out of Dixon. Even after the man was unconscious, Emmett sat on his midsection, delivering punch after punch to the man who had bullied Justin for so many years. As far as he was concerned, Dixon didn’t deserve to inhale another fucking breath.

“Emmett! NO! No Son, don’t kill him!” Carl’s voice rang out.

Emmett kept punching, tears streaming down his face. Even though he’d heard Carl, he couldn’t stop his fists from punishing the unconscious man. He remembered all the times Justin had come from school to the Diner with black eyes, bruises, or busted lips, but most of all, Emmett remembered the bashing that this bastard had fomented. As he continued to punch, he felt hands gripping him. He fought them off in his determination to make the man pay for what he’d done to his friends, both Brian and Justin. Because of Dickhead Dixon, Brian held himself responsible for what happened to Justin for years. Because of Dickhead Dixon, Justin had to struggle to regain use of his extremities and himself. Because of Dickhead Dixon, Justin lived in fear for most of his adult life. He had to pay! And he had to pay NOW!
Finally the hands that were gripping him found their purchase and managed to pull the still-struggling Emmett to his feet. The tall queen fought hard against the person holding him back, continuing to use his arms and legs to lash out. “Emmett, you have to stop NOW!” Drew roared as Em’s flailing elbows connected with his solar plexus on each side.

That bellow was finally what had gotten through to Emmett. The fight left his body as he reached up to snatch the blond wig off his head. Turning around, he found himself caught up in Drew’s arms as he broke down into gut-wrenching sobs. Drew stroked his hair, letting the man he’d come to love cry, both in anger and despair. Knowing his Emmett, there were so many feelings about Justin’s situation he’d held in over the years, in an effort to always remain positive and hopeful. He couldn’t imagine what they all had gone through as a result of senseless violence and hatred. And now undeserved greed and revenge could be added to the mixture. It was grossly unfair.

“I came to tell you guys that it’s over. Evangeline Charles has been apprehended.”

“That’s great! That means Jules and Justin are safe.” Emmett grinned, but was met with silence. “What? It does mean they’re safe, right?”

“They are, but not without some issues, Em,” Carl said quietly.

“Wh-wh- what issues, Carl? Please tell me!”

Inhaling a deep breath, Carl answered. “Both Brian and Justin have been shot. They’re on the way to AG now. Before we were able to get her out of her sniper nest, Evangeline offloaded two bullets. One hit Justin in the back, while the other hit Brian in the femoral artery within his thigh.”

“Sarge, we have to go. There’s another situation, this time between Phoenix and Evangeline.”

“Carl, we’re going to head on to the hospital,” Drew said, holding onto Emmett’s trembling form. Have any of the others been informed yet?”

“I don’t know. Josiah may have put in a call, but I… I just don’t know,” Carl’s voice cracked.

“Go on, Carl. We’ll take care of Emmett and meet you there,” Jason said with surety, seeing Drew and Carl both frozen in shock. There was some kind of silent communication going on between the two men that he wasn’t sure about, but time was of the essence.
Grabbing the car keys from inside the ex-football player’s pocket, he ushered them to the car. Not bothering to wait for directions, Jason punched the key in his phone for the nearest hospital. Listening to the list, he pressed the selection for Allegany General and prayed like hell that this was the right AG they had mentioned. Taking off like the hounds of hell were behind them, he drove like a madman until twenty minutes later, he was pulling up into the Emergency Room parking lot. Entering the Emergency Room, it was to hear the raised voice of Detective Horvath.

“You listen to me, I don’t give a flying fuck what the rules are. They have each others POAs. Until they are out of surgery and able to make their own decisions- or decisions for each other- I’m assuming the roles for them. Now you do whatever you have to to get them back up and running, you hear?”

Jason left Drew and a distraught Emmett to head over to Carl, who was clearly breaking down. He looked at the charge nurse, standing belligerently with her hands on her hips. “Listen, Nurse Jones, Detective Horvath is more than the officer in charge, he’s basically a father to Brian and Justin Taylor-Kinney. Whereas we all know that you can’t give out certain information, surely you can certainly understand our position in this. They are our family. Others will be on their way here in the near future, and if you don’t want outright pandemonium on your hands, you’ll do as he says. I know that Doctor Chanders is on duty, so have her work on Brian and Troy to work on Justin. They are the lead surgeons in this hospital and we demand the best to deal with this. Get on it!”

“Mr. Whomever-you-are, as I told Detective Horvath, they are up in surgery right now. We cannot just take the surgeons who are in the process of saving their lives off the job.”

Jason raised himself up to his full height, staring the obstinate woman down. “You can and you will, or if anything happens to either of those men, not only will the hospital be sued, but so will you personally. Are you prepared to take that chance?”

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Back at the Precinct…

Jennifer’s cell phone with an unknown number blinking on the display. She was tempted not to answer it. They were still trying to reason with Debbie, for all the good it was doing them. In her mind, she was only doing this for Michael so that she could get direct answers. However, Jennifer and all that were assembled knew what Michael’s game was. Debbie would once again move heaven and hell to rescue him and he’d repay her by disappearing, instead of simply ignoring her as he was wont to do when he’d gotten his way. It was not to be borne! She ignored the call thinking that it was probably Craig ordering her to help him out of the mess of his own making. Well he could rot in hell for all she cared! So with a push of a button, she sent the call to voicemail.
By the fourth time the phone rang, she had lost patience with whomever it was trying to get her attention. “What?”

“Jen-Jennifer… it’s Carl.”

“Carl? Why are you calling me? Are you looking for Deb? If so, your wife is here at the precinct with me trying to bail her son out on the promise that he would tell her what’s going on. We’ve all told her that he’s lying but as always, she refuses to believe that Michael’s incapable of telling her the truth. Can you…”

“It- it’s about Justin…”

“Justin? What about him? Is everything alright? Did you find him? And why do you sound like that?” She fired questions off at him in quick succession, her heart speeding up with every question that went unanswered.

She heard the deep breath inhaled on the other end of the phone before Carl spoke again. “Jenn, I need you to listen to me. Justin... and Brian... are in surgery right now. Justin was shot in the back, the bullet just missing his spine by a couple of centimeters. Brian was also shot in his femoral artery. The perp has been apprehended, but not before she offloaded the two shots.”

“Oh my GOD! Carl, I’m… where the fuck are you?!”

“At Allegheny. They’ve been in there now coming up on two hours.”

“And you’re just calling me NOW?! What the…”

“Hold it, Missy Ma’am! If you are about to accuse me of not doing my job, think again! I have been here fighting for Daphne and Troy to perform the surgeries. So don’t you dare think that I have been twiddling my fucking thumbs and forgetting to call you!” Carl roared.

Jenn took several deep breaths, trying to get her emotions under control. She was their mother- and yes, she thought of Brian as her son, too- but Carl was as much a father to them as Craig and Jack were not. She knew she had to honor that. “I’m sorry, Carl. It’s just…”
“I know, Jenn. I know. Look, get here as soon as you can, okay. Emmett, Drew, and Jason are here with me now.”

“And the others? Where are they?”

“On the way there with the bitch who’s behind all of this. Josiah Higgins and Sarah Morrissey are the people in charge of the case. So if you have questions, ask them. But get here, okay? And tell Deb to leave Michael’s rotten ass right there!”

“We’re trying but you know her. In the meantime, I’m on my way!” She disconnected the call, grabbing her purse and heading out the door.

“Where the fuck are you going? We have to discuss this!” Deb demanded and grabbing Jennifer’s arm, only to be slapped for her tone and efforts.

“I’m going to the hospital. That bitch shot my sons and they are in surgery. Still think your fucked-up offspring is innocent, do you? Well fuck you, Deb!”

“Jennifer, wait! I’m going with you!” Mel called out, bypassing the woman still holding her face in the palm of her hand. “Deb, I think it’s best that you don’t come if you’re still going to be an asshole about Michael’s culpability in all of this. Jenn, and the rest of us, don’t need to hear you sing his innocent praises when he’s just as responsible as the rest of them who have tried to keep Brian and Justin apart. Even if his part was small, every little action had an impact that led to this. Think about that!”

By the time Melanie reached the lobby of the precinct, all hell was breaking loose… again! This time it involved the well-mannered, always-elegant Jennifer Taylor being restrained by six officers while the perpetrator of untold crimes, Evangeline Charles, was doubled over in pain.

“What the fuck happened?” Mel asked.

“We had just entered the building when Jennifer, lady extraordinaire, noticed me,” Sarah told her. “Before I could stop her, Jenn began screaming, punching and kicking, and the bitch doubled over. I guess Horvath must have called her?”

“Yeah, we’re on our way to the hospital now. You need to have the officers let her go.”
“Hey look lady, guilty or not, this woman can’t go around hitting people!” One of the officers said. “She’s going to be arrested and charged with assault.”

“Like fuck she will,” Mel answered. “That woman- as you call her- just received word that Ms. Charles fired two bullets which hit her sons, who are now in surgery. As her attorney I will warn you that if she isn’t released immediately, she and I will sue the fuck out of this place where the only job you’ll ever be eligible to get is at the local Dunkin’ Donuts. Am I making myself clear?”

“You heard her, Tubby,” Sarah backed Mel up. “Let Mrs. Taylor go. It’s clear that she’s emotionally distraught and there are mitigating circumstances. I think you know what will happen if you persist in this…” she narrowed her eyes at the mouthpiece for the cops still holding onto the distraught woman. “Come on, Man. It’s already a madhouse in here. What is it gonna cost to show this woman a little compassion and let her go scot free to deal with her sons?”

“Let her go, Kowoski. I have children myself, so I know what I would do if this chick had shot mine,” another officer said as he unhanded Jennifer. When the others did the same, only then did Officer Kowoski follow suit.

“Fine. But I can’t be held responsible or called as a witness if the perp decides to file a civil suit,” he said adamantly.

“Don’t worry about it, Tubby. I doubt that Ms. Charles is going to have time to assuage her bruised ego with a civil suit against Ms. Taylor. No. She’ll be too busy fending off all the people she’s put in jail throughout her career while being a prisoner herself. Now that’s justice, right Evangeline?” Sarah gloated.

“Fuck you! And yes, I will be filing a civil suit! I hope your son and his lover DIE!! It’s long overdue!” Evangeline yelled, her voice carrying through the entire ground floor of the building. Many of her minions agreed with her, as did the people waiting to find out if their family members would be released.

“Well, I guess we can surely add Hate Crime and Attempting to Incite a Riot to your long list of charges as well. Let’s go!” Sarah said, as she grabbed Evangeline’s arm and began to shuffle her through the crowd.

As they passed by a gaggle of officers, trying to control the crowd, Evangeline launched herself at one of them and reached down. While it looked as if she had tripped, Sarah knew better. Without
missing a beat, Sarah seized her gun from the inside of her boot. Taking aim just as the other woman stood, brandishing the weapon, she fired two shots: one hitting Evangeline in the pelvis, the other in the shoulder, inches away from the carotid artery. Josiah caught Evangeline before she could hit the ground, checking for her pulse, while the other police officers removed the crowd from the inside of the lobby area. The desk sergeant was already on the phone to the EMTs, ordering for them to hurry. He screamed into the receiver ‘Officer Down’ causing Sarah to wonder just how he knew that. It wasn’t as if they had told anyone within the Pittsburgh P.D., other than those working the case directly, just who Evangeline Charles was. It was then that she’d realized where she’d seen him before.

“Officer Imes, please arrest Desk Sergeant Maloney, on the grounds of accessory to murder, conspiracy, and aiding and abetting to start,” she called out to the young officer that had helped her earlier at the hospital.

“What?! What is the meaning of this?!” Officer Maloney paled, looking at the still supine figure of Evangeline Charles.

“I think you know the meaning all too well, Maloney. You were at the hospital earlier when Jenny Rebecca Marcus-Peterson was brought into the Emergency room with a gunshot wound.”

“Yeah, so what of it?”

“Although you looked to be following the car which was driving her there, you were already on your way there, weren’t you? Manny, check the phone records for Officer Maloney and make it quick.”

Manny did as he was bid, checking phone the records. He was about to call out that there was nothing amiss when he ran across a number that didn’t follow the previous patterns of incoming and outgoing calls. Writing down the number and handing the sheet of paper to Sarah, she smiled. Dialing the number, they were all surprised to hear the ringing going on inside an evidence bag within Josiah’s hand.

“Well, that sheds a whole new light on things, doesn’t it?” the FBI Captain said. “How did you put that together, Morrissey?”

“We never told anyone other than the people working this case that Evangeline was a cop. Maloney wasn’t part of the team, but I did recognize him from the hospital. He was there to try and find Brian and Justin Taylor-Kinney, who we had hidden away in there after the latter dealt with the business of his sperm donor and ex-lover’s accident. The only way Maloney here could’ve known that she was an agent was from the bitch’s mouth herself.”
“I want to speak to my attorney,” Maloney demanded.

“Sure thing, after you’re Mirandized. We’re not playing the Acquittal by Technicality game. Imes, read him his rights please and quickly.” Sarah said smugly, even as the ambulance arrived to take Evangeline to the hospital.
Four hours had passed since Brian and Justin were brought into the Emergency Room at Allegheny General Hospital. It took some doing, but with the blessing of the Hospital Administration, Daphne and Troy were allowed to take over the surgeries for both of the prominent businessmen. Admittedly, upon hearing the news, Daphne shook and cried while being held by Troy. It took several minutes to regain her composure, but once she did, it was game on. She was determined that Brian would live through this even as she made Troy promise that he would do all in his power to save the man whom she viewed as her brother. She absolutely refused to accept a life without Justin Taylor-Kinney as a major part of it.

They methodically went through the motions of scrubbing up to remove any trace of bacteria from their skin, keeping conversation to the barest minimum. For his part, Troy knew that Daphne was trying to hold herself together; to treat this case as business as usual for her own sanity. In all honesty, he wasn’t far from feeling the same. From their first meeting while he was treating Daphne for the miscarriages, he had liked the two men. They’re bond with her was the stuff of legends; a friendship he could only ever dream about, let alone bear witness to. But it was when Daphne regaled him of the tales and traumas during their tumultuous relationship, that Troy began to respect and admire the Taylor-Kinneys. Not only that, but as he’d begun to know them for himself, he’d come to love them as his brothers as well. It made the success of these surgeries even more paramount, since he also understood that the two men played an integral role in keeping their makeshift family together. With all of the bullshit the men had endured thus far, it made no sense to him that they should die at the hands and behest of their enemies. NO! Brian and Justin were destined to live long, lucrative, and robust lives. He would do everything within his power to see that happen. Getting into the groove of how he meant to go on, Troy ushered Daphne out of the scrub area.

“No matter what greets you in there, keep your cool Dr. Chanders. Remember that you are more than capable of doing this, but more importantly, remember that you have never let Brian down before. You won’t do so now,” he said to her gently.

“I will. And remember your promise to me that you will take care of Justin. Whatever it takes, Dr. Bradley, bring him through this.” She looked into his eyes beseechingly, before turning to enter the OR to the left of where Justin was laying.

When each of them arrived in their respective rooms, each was met with obstinance at first. Troy actually had to pull rank and threaten to demote Dr. Bertier, who was still gunning for Troy’s position within the hospital, as the Chief of Surgery. As for Daphne, she simply threatened to surgically remove the balls of Dr. Murphy if he didn’t get the fuck out of her way. When he went to complain to the Administration, after a brief standoff in which Daphne would not be placated nor ordered to play second fiddle within the OR, he was told the reasons she and Troy were given these particular surgeries to perform. Fortunately, to forestall any other arguments, a new trauma case, in
which both surgeons were going to be needed, came in with the arrival of Evangeline Charles.

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Brian was dreaming. It seemed that while he laid there unconscious, his brain decided to replay every moment he’d ever had with Justin. During the really low points, the moments when he felt that his heart was breaking, Brian flatlined. Daphne worked her ass off to bring him back. After being stabilized, he fought like hell to remain that way.

“That’s right Brian, fight for him… fuck! Fight for me,” she crooned softly as she kept repairing the artery, which was the most important one in the body. There wasn’t a doubt that Brian had lost a lot of blood, but the way the vein was shot through, made it even more difficult because as fast as Brian’s body was producing the life-sustaining cells, was as fast as he was losing them all over again. In addition, she had to make sure that there weren’t any other areas where internal bleeding was occurring which would drop his fluctuating blood pressure even lower. It was a tricky surgery, but the help of the oxygen machines, she was winning this battle to save the life of one of the most important people to her.

As she worked, she spoke to him as if he was conscious, adamant that he would know that he wasn’t alone, and that Justin needed him to pull through. She knew if nothing else, after all of the hard-won battles between the two men, that now that they have finally gotten their shit together, he wouldn’t give Justin up that easily. She was banking on that fact, even as she began the process of closing him up. After another hour and all the repairs had been done, Brian was on his way to post-op, and finally Daphne allowed herself to break down.

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Troy arrived in the OR, and taking a look at what the previous surgeon had done, he was relieved that they had called him in. There were several fragments left within the area that would have left Justin paralyzed had they drifted towards the spine. What was worse was that it appeared that the arrogant, self-serving son of a bitch, Bertier, was going to leave them in there, thinking that Justin alive and breathing would have been enough for the vivacious artist. It was only through conscious effort and thought that Troy stayed where he was and didn’t march up to the office to kick the shit out of the man. He would certainly be making the board aware of what would have been a most egregious act. If he had his way, Dr. Thaddeus Bertier would lose his medical license behind this, since it was a clear act of both negligence and malpractice. It would also work in his favor because the asshole was also a known homophobe.

So Troy went about the business of doing the entire surgery all over again, bagging not only the bullet, which was lying to the side of Justin’s body instead of in the sterile bowl as it was supposed to be, but a total of eighteen fragments. Closing Justin up, he spoke for the first time since his discovery.

“There, Little Brother, you should be able to fully recover now.”
He made a last few adjustments and issued orders to the orderly about how Justin was supposed to be situated once he reached post-op. He also asked that the orderly see the Nurse in charge, to make sure that Brian and Justin Taylor-Kinney occupied the same room, both in post-op and when returning to the main floor. He wasn’t sure how long that would be for Brian, but the least he could do was to make sure it was ready when he was well enough. He had no doubt that Daphne had done well during the surgery; the rest would be up to Brian.

The staff exited the operating room, taking care of their ablutions before he turned to them again for a detailed accounting of what had transpired before his arrival. After listening carefully to the staff of Surgical Nurses and Technicians, all of whom advised of various contretemps from the time the first incision was made, he said, “I need you all to make your statements. What Dr. Bertier did was not only heinous, but life-threatening in the extreme. Had I not removed the fragments surrounding the entry and exit wounds, Justin Taylor-Kinney’s quality of life would have been severely affected.”

“He threatened us,” Patty, one of the newer OR nurses, answered him. “Monica, the lead Surg Tech on this, told him that he wasn’t following proper procedure in reference to bullet wounds. It was her job to know what should enter and exit the body so that everything would be accounted for post-op, especially the bullet and fragments. He told her that if she knew what was good for her, she would shut the hell up and just count the fucking gauze. As for the rest of us, he said that if we valued our jobs, we wouldn’t mention anything that happened during the surgery to anyone beyond the operating room.”

Troy nodded, thinking that based on what he’d witnessed when he first arrived, it was exactly what had happened. “Don’t worry about it, especially since I will be filing my own grievance against him when I have finished notifying the family and seeing to my patient and his partner. I’m not sure how familiar you are with this particular patient…”

“I’m very familiar with Justin Taylor, which is why I asked to be in here,” Monica spoke up. “I took care of him the night he was bashed at his prom some years ago. He’s the reason I went back for my Masters degree in nursing, which allows me to be in the OR. I never thought I would encounter him within the hospital walls this way again.” She dropped her tear-filled eyes.

Troy placed a hand on her shoulder before speaking. “Look, I don’t want any of you to worry. My report alone would get him investigated, but in conjunction to yours, Dr. Bertier and those like him won’t be able to get away with giving half-assed care to our patients. Our oath to do no harm was just violated.”

Troy left them murmuring and agreeing with his assessment of the situation, as he went in search of Daphne. He knew that this situation had taken its toll upon her, probably much more than the rest of the family waiting to receive word. He found her just coming out of the post-op room assigned to
Brian and Justin. Across the hall, laid the woman responsible for all of this. Troy grabbed her around the waist quickly before the firebrand made her way there.

“Let go of me!”

“No, Daph. I won’t let you blow your license on revenge against that bitch. Fate will take care of her far better and more efficiently than you can. Let it go. Besides, we have to go to the waiting room to inform the family.”

She sighed deeply, releasing some of her pent up anger. “What happened with Justin? It seems that Murphy was intentionally trying to fuck up the surgery. Had it not been for Carl and Jason’s insistence that we be in there, the results would have been dire. I did lose Brian a few times while starting the fucking procedure from scratch, but he’s back and I think he’s going to pull through it… at least, I pray so. He lost so much blood; it’s a miracle he’s even lying there instead of in the morgue.”

“I know, but hey… he’ll pull through. Just think of all the gratitude he’s going to bestow on you when this is all over.” He pinched her side, hoping to bring a little levity and comfort to the situation. “He might even come out of this a het.”

She snickered. “Yeah, like that will ever happen. Brian Taylor-Kinney is the most ho-ho-Homo in the entire world… well, next to Emmett. And my best friend would NEVER forgive me if his soul mate traded teams.” They shared a genuine laugh then.

“Come on, Dr. Chanders. Let’s go tell the family and put a smile on their faces to rival Justin’s.”

She nodded and they started down the hall, both cautiously optimistic that everything would be alright for their brothers-in-love. Passing the orderly who had taken Justin to post-op, Dr. Bradley nodded and smiled as the man made sure to tell him that the nurses said his orders would be followed to the letter. Troy grinned and brought Daphne up to speed on what had taken place with Bertier, equally happy and relieved that Daphne had requested the same of the staff in her OR. In their glee and victory, neither noticed that the hulking figure of the orderly- or the man known in certain circles as the personal eraser of FBI agent Phoenix, Bruno Joshsam, - disappear into Evangeline Charles’ room.

By the time, Daphne and Troy finished delivering the news, cheers could be heard all the way to the top floor of the hospital where Doctors Bertier and Murphy were awaiting the results of an emergency meeting of Allegheny General Hospital’s Administration.
Chapter 48: EPILOGUE

DEB’S POV

Well, the trials are officially over. Michael was sentenced to thirty years in prison, like most of the conspirators involved the Organization. He said that he’s going to appeal, but really, I don’t think there is a way he can. Although Carl and I have divorced, we are still friends in a sense. He’s already told me that as each trial was going forward, everything was already reviewed by the Judiciary board for the Supreme Court, primarily to make sure no one’s civil rights to a fair trial was violated. It’s absolutely heartbreaking to know and acknowledge that the boy I raised really did, not only pay all that money to destroy Justin, but knowingly provided huge amounts of information for the sole purpose of having Brian to himself. And if that wasn’t enough, I found out just where Michael had hidden himself right after the commitment ceremony a couple of years ago. Imagine my surprise when they dug up that information and called David Cameron to testify against my son. The revelations that came out of that testimony was indeed the nail in Michael’s proverbial coffin.

As for my personal relationships with everyone… well, there isn’t one anymore. Sure I receive cards for birthdays and holidays; see them all occasionally and they are cordial, but I’m no longer an integral part of their lives. Even my granddaughter doesn’t want to have anything to do with me because of what Michael did to her, placing her in harm’s way. I suppose I only have myself to blame for that, since I kept preaching to her that Michael didn’t mean what he did, or that he deserved her forgiveness for her being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Mel was only too happy to serve me with a restraining order to stay away from Jenny, until such time as the young girl wanted them lifted. So as a result, I watch my family- or what used to be my family- live their lives from afar.

I could try to lay all of this at Brian and Justin’s feet, or even pull a Michael and blame Michael for all this, but I won’t. They all warned me repeatedly about what would happen if I sided with Michael in all of this. I can’t blame them for making good on their promises, when apparently, I haven’t kept even one. Maybe someday I’ll be welcomed back into their collective fold, but until then, I send up a prayer for each of them every chance I get and hope that their lives will not only get back to normal, but that they will be better than ever.

DAPHNE’S POV

These past two years have been… a whirlwind; a tsunami; a catastrophe; and renewal all at the same time. Yeah, I guess one could say that. I returned to Pittsburgh a very broken woman, but through faith, family, and friends, I’ve been able to move on. It’s still hard to believe that it’s been a little
more than a couple of years since I found out I was pregnant with that cheating sack of shit’s kids. I would have loved them no matter what, but just the idea that I was the other woman, still rankles sometimes. For the most part I’ve let that go, but every now and again the thoughts still rear their ugly heads. Amazingly, making amends and being friends with Ciara has helped. I guess it’s the shared trauma of being involved with Steve Marshall.

On the bright side though, I now understand what Justin meant by having the love of a good man be a soothing balm to a wounded soul. Troy Bradley is everything I could have ever hoped for and more. He constantly proves to me just how small my dreams were. Between us, our careers are blooming in ways we never expected from the day we met. He’s now the Director of Medicine, while I am now Chief of Surgery. The two nimrods who tried to fuck Brian and Justin over on the operating tables...well, I hear the only dissecting either of them will ever be doing again is at Pennsylvania State Correctional Facility with whatever the meal of the day is. Not only aren’t they allowed to have anything to do with medicine again, but their names were found on the vendetta list against Brian and Justin. Little did anyone know that they had put their life-savings into backing Stockwell when he ran for Mayor. Because of the work Brian and Justin did, they never saw a financial return for their abject stupidity.

But more importantly than anything I’ve just mentioned, I’m now Dr. Daphne Chanders-Bradley and it’s a title I wouldn’t trade for anything in this world. Troy proposed at Brian and Justin’s welcome-home party, after they were released from the hospital. He didn’t even have a ring to present me with. If you were to ask him, he’d tell you that it was spur of the moment and that seeing Brian and Justin as together as they’d ever been is what made him ask himself what he was waiting for. See? Ever the romantic, right? Anyway, my answer wasn’t as spontaneous as he nor I would have liked. Oh, I knew beyond a shadow of doubt that I loved him, but I was still in a place where fear ruled my life. However, it was his patience and understanding of me that won me over… well that and Brian threatening to play the psycho boyfriend, since Troy was too much of a gentleman to do it himself. After all, he reasoned, it’s how Justin got him to do whatever he wanted.

So after a long engagement, we finally made it to Tahiti where I am currently sitting on the beach sipping my tropical, liquor-laden beverage. And I can’t think of a single, better place to be.

EMMETT’S POV
There is something to be said for the Taylor-Kinney magic, as I have taken to calling that thing which makes them, and those of us around them, resilient. For the past two years, it has been nonstop go time for me since I did their wedding. Ironically, or not so much, as I found out later, I did the Brown-Jordan wedding in Chicago for Leo’s daughter Charlotte. It was a small, intimate affair of three-hundred of their closest family, friends, and business associates. Leo went all out and spared no expense, since he had been convinced that she would never actually tie the knot the first time, let alone doing it again. If there was anyone in the world as commitment-phobic as Brian Kinney, it must have been Charlotte. Anyway, from that day to this one, HoneyGrass Elegant Creations has taken off and become one of the premiere entertainment and catering companies across the globe. Not bad for having begun simply by putting together a commitment ceremony to rival any high society wedding, for my closet friends.
After the trial, it’s been hard, so having a constant stream of work has been a blessing and a curse. Of course, Drewsie and I have times when we don’t see each other as much, especially during the winter, but we’re still going strong. So it wasn’t even a question when Daphne decided that she wanted her wedding on a beach in a land far away from Pittsburgh. I think we all needed to be away from there just now, for obvious reasons.

TED’S POV
Some centuries ago, Shakespeare wrote a play called All’s Well That Ends Well, and as I sit here on this beautiful beach, I suppose that’s true. We, as a family, have had many ups and downs over the years. Justin’s bashing; mine and Blake’s addictions and subsequent co-dependency; Brian and Justin’s on again, off again relationship; Mel and Lindsay’s move to Canada and return to the Pitts; the Stockwell Era… all of it has served a purpose to make us stronger in some form or another. But some of us weren’t so lucky. There were casualties- the breakups and breakdowns of relationships- that even right this minute continue to take their toll on us, both individually and collectively. I think the biggest loss we all still feel to some degree is Deb’s. Like it or not, she was a mother to us all. I look over at Carl, sitting at the bar, and know that he still feels her loss as keenly as Brian, although probably a little bit more since she was his wife. But she made him choose between her son and his morals one too many times, and in the end, he chose himself.

As for me, I’m happy… I have Blake and I have a career that still continues to thrive, especially since Justin’s return. But most of all, I have Peter Townsend. Who would have thought that the young man would become almost like a son to me. I’ve spent many hours with him, tutoring him and getting to know him, have shared many of my past experiences with him, and it’s been a joy. If I take anything away from all of this, it’s that love- no matter what kind- can reach you in the most unlikely places, and someone is always going to need your brand of it. In Peter’s case, he needed someone who wasn’t going to judge him based on what happened. Because of my own gang rape while I was high on Meth, I understood exactly how he felt, even if John saved him just in time. Now that I’m older, wiser, and a lot more settled in the skin I’m in, I understand exactly what I went through during that era in my life. Someone once told me that you don’t go through the hard times for yourself, but to help someone else along the way. I truly believe that now.

LINDSAY’S POV
Well, where to start? I guess the most life-altering thing these past couple of years has been Gus going off to college. Sure, he’s only at Carnegie Mellon, but he’s no longer living with Brian nor I. After his freshman year, he and Carmella decided to get a place together. What’s strange is that I really believe they are going to make it, but no matter. They drive and push each other to be better, to become better, and in the end, that’s what really matters, right? I think that’s where Mel and I went wrong so many times. So at the very least, I have the assurance that’s he’s learned from my mistakes of being complacent. He’s like his father in that way and in so many others.

He, like the rest of us, attended Michael’s trial and that of the Kinney women. That was hard. First, was finding out just how deeply Michael hated Justin. Even now, I shake my head at the lengths he’d gone to be rid of him. Even more strange was that the prosecution was able to use the comic book as evidence to a large extent. When Justin took the stand and was asked why or how he could draw something that gruesome about himself, he responded that he would have done just about
anything to sever all communication with Michael once and for all. I know that I’d always had a problem with that edition for that very reason, but to hear Justin say it… well there was just no controlling the involuntary reactions that statement engendered.

Then there were the trials of Kip Thomas and his cohorts to get through. That was when Gus started to unravel a little bit. I can’t blame him for that. Seeing Jenny shot in front of him had given him nightmares and for a time, we all thought he was past that. But Justin reminded us of what it was like for him every year when the anniversary of the prom came around, or hearing a sound that would remind him of the bat, or the bomb at Babylon, or even the whisper-whirring similar to the sound of a bullet shot through a silencer. It helped us all to understand that whereas Gus would learn to cope, he would never fully forget or be healed from it. I was surprised to learn that it was the same thing for Brian as well.

Brian… both my blessing and my curse. We still have our battles from time-to-time, as do he and Mel, but without Debbie here, it’s a lot more manageable than it was before. Now that’s not to say that we don’t miss her interference, because at times we do. But without certain things being drilled repeatedly into Brian’s head, it wasn’t hard for him to let go of her expectations and began living up to his own. As a result, things have been better between all of us in terms of how we take care of both Gus and Jenny. He’s pretty much taken on the role of father, along with Ben, and provides her with everything that Michael- even if he was free- wouldn’t have been bothered with. It makes me incredibly happy that in spite of everything, my children are becoming well-rounded, well-adjusted adults. Ah, if only we could talk Jenny into going to college next year here instead of in New York, where she wants to go. And of course, Brian is no help!

As for my personal life, well… Colby and I are still together. Who knew that I could be so satisfied with a man after living so many years with a woman. I think Mel said it best, that she was the love of my youth, while Colby is the love of my old age. Her saying that helped me to stop feeling guilty about what happened between she and I. But the one great thing came out of all the drama which resulted with us being back in Pittsburgh is that Mel and I have become best friends again, like we were before we ever started dating. Also a plus is that Daphne and I continue to be each other’s confidant as well. Between the three of us- four if you include Mel’s lover- we manage to inject enough estrogen into the family where the overabundance of testosterone still bows to us occasionally. On a spur of the moment, I clink glasses with Mel while smiling at Daphne and know that my girls got the silent message.

MEL’S POV

I smile back at Lindsay, knowing exactly where her thoughts took her just now. You know, when we broke up, I never thought we would ever reach this place of love and acceptance again. We were much too angry with and hurt by each other to see the other’s point of view. But with the help of talking, and dare I say it, Colby, we have managed to co-parent and become the friends we once were. I think it hilarious that when she and Colby have their arguments, he comes to me for advice, or at the bare minimum, some understanding. I suppose it seems fair since Leda goes to Lindsay. Now that’s weird!
Leda and I came back into contact about a year after Lindsay left. Marianne and I just weren’t going to make it. Even though she and I were pretty much career dykes, she still had a problem that I had children who needed me. It was a constant source of contention since she wanted all my attention and I was dedicated to making amends with my family, which now included Lindsay and Colby. So when she and I parted ways, I took the time to really work on me and figure out what I wanted. It wasn’t easy to do, especially considering everyone else around me was paired up.

At first, it was a lonely life I was living, but focusing on work and then the trials- and on how Jenny and Gus were processing everything- helped tremendously. It also gave me limited patience to accept Deb’s judgment of me for siding with Jenny instead of forcing her to see or talk to Michael. I nearly jumped for fucking joy when Jenny asked me to keep her grandmother away from her. Don’t get me wrong, I love Deb, but we all know how she can be when something is not going her way. It wasn’t hard to see where Michael got his dog-with-a-bone mentality from. Jenny asked me to do it before she ended up decking Deb, so as any good mother would, I opted to keep my child out of juvie. Needless to say I was called all sorts of bitches, but it didn’t matter because Jenny was happy. And that was all that mattered to me at the time.

I worked untold hours to pay Brian back the money I took from Gus’ college fund. Instead of thanking me for doing the right thing, he called his attorney, and between the two of us, we sued Michael for back child support to recoup the money that was the cause of me taking the money in the first place. Because of the amount left in his bank account, even after his attorney fees, I was able to pad Jenny’s college fund considerably and still have enough to pay all of her expenses beyond that. It was a great thing not to have to worry about money after so many years of having to do so. Meanwhile, the relationship between Brian and I steadily changed. I know now that I was seeing ghosts where there weren’t any for most of the time I’d known him. Everyone tried to tell me that, but you know that person who just has to always be right? Yeah, I tend to share that in common with Deb and Michael- not a trait that I’m proud of, but I’m working on it.

BEN’S POV
Life after Michael Novotny is GOOD! It took me a while, but I’m finally in a place of peace and contentment. It helps that the man who I’m seeing now was looking to put down roots that have nothing to do with Brian and Justin. Brandon gives me so much more than I ever thought I deserved. He accepts me for everything I am, not despite HIV, the way Michael did. Sometimes I still have doubts when he looks at other men, but he reminds me of very key thing. He’s with me, but he’s certainly not dead, and neither am I. As long as we window shop and don’t buy anything, then there really isn’t any harm done. I laughed the first time he came up with that analogy because as quiet as it’s kept, he’s as much of a shopaholic as Brian. On the days when he and the illustrious, always fashionable Mr. Taylor-Kinney go shopping, Justin and I make it a point to disappear into the nearest coffeeshop to have lunch and catch up.

Getting to really know Justin, I understood exactly why Michael had a problem with him. He’s near-genius level intelligent and can converse on just about anything; he’s charismatic and has a sense of himself that matches Brian to a tee. Even if I had never arrived on the scene, Michael would have always been on the outside looking in where Brian and Justin were concerned. I remember telling
Colby once that Michael was like Icarus, flying too close to the sun. And like that fabled character, Michael has surely crashed and burned, never to rise out of the ashes of his own foolery. If one was to ask me, the thirty years he received as punishment for his misdeeds over the years was too light a sentence, since in some way or another, one or all of us will forever suffer the effects.

But in the meantime, I will continue to live my life to the fullest with my friends, who are really my family, and my man. Yeah... LIFE IS SO FUCKING GOOD!

JENN’S POV

I won’t lie...I miss Deb, but after the way she’s acted, I can’t be friends with her. The audacity of that woman to think that everyone should support Michael against Justin. Well, that obviously didn’t happen. If there is one thing I’m sad about, it’s that her continued blindness has now left her all alone.

As for everything else… well, while all of the people who contributed money to the Organization; Craig, along with Stockwell, Vance, the Hobbs Sr. and Junior, and Kip Thomas each received fifty years in prison. With any luck, one or all of them will piss off Bubba and end their lives a lot sooner. Harsh? Damn fucking right, I am! They messed with my babies- yes, once again I’m including Brian in that, but don’t tell him- so they deserve to get fucked in any way imaginable. One good thing came out of the trials though, and that’s that there was no trial for Evangeline Charles. No one is sure how it happened, since she came through the operation fine according to those inept, vindictive doctors who operated on her. But when they had gone to check on her in post-op, she had been dead for some time. I can’t say that I was sorry for what happened to her. I know we were all concerned about the influence she would have behind bars, and there was no way to guarantee that the people with vendettas against her would keep her contained. So even though she’s not serving time, I’m pretty sure that if God is merciful, she’s being jabbed every second of the day by Satan’s pitchfork. It’s still less than she deserves, but an eternity of torture… well, it’s a start.

Back to Craig for a moment… the ass still had the audacity to think that I was going to bail him out. From what I understand, Molly should be receiving a living bequeathment shortly. Sarah called and told me about it. Hmm, wonder what she’s up to now...

JUSTIN’S POV

I love this man… There is nothing that I could say about what it means to still have Brian by my side after everything we’ve been through. There were times when I never thought we’d get to this point in our lives. Hell, when I arrived back in Pittsburgh after being gone so long, I was willing to do whatever I could to see that we didn’t. We both were suffering too much, seeing each other every now and again in search of fame and fortune. Being together was easy; being apart wasn’t. Needless to say, I’m glad that he didn’t let me win that argument, that he actually fought for what he wanted this time, instead of falling back on the old mantras that kept his heart from me. I’m glad that he didn’t let me run away and ruin both of our lives in the process. Yeah, I can admit that now… I
would have run as fast and as far away from him as I could and from all the pain he’s represented to me for many years. But, I’ve also learned that Brian is the only one who has ever had the power to make me stay. There’s always been some invisible string which has kept me tied to him, even when all we wanted to be was free of the other. Looking back on all of it now, I hope it stays that way for us. Hell, if they didn’t destroy us, how dare we engage in self-sabotage now? Besides, I have a feeling everyone will kick our asses if we do.

I try not to think of our main detractor too much, but sometimes I just can’t help it. I don’t hate Michael. I know that many of you would gasp at that revelation, but don’t. In order to hate someone, you have to feel a certain way about them, and I don’t. Instead, I feel completely indifferent about him, and I think that’s the real tragedy. It used to be that I would at least call an ambulance and wait for it to arrive if he was bleeding in front of me, even if I hated him. Now, I would certainly call the ambulance as my civic duty, but I wouldn’t wait around to see if it arrived or not. Brian said he would rather me hate him than be indifferent towards him. I think Ethan found that out too, in the end. It was a hard lesson to receive at the end of his life, I suppose. Please don’t misunderstand… I’m in no way a completely cold person, but there is only so much I could take before I reached this point. And I have taken much over the years, so now I choose to literally put it all behind me… to put the Michael Saga behind me once and for all, and live my life the way I’ve always wanted to. And if Brian should bring him up from time to time, I’ll listen to what he says, but without addressing the Michael issue. He did the same for me many times in terms of Craig, so it’s the least I can do for him.

As for Deb, I don’t hate her. I pity her. But it’s more than clear that how I used to view her will forever be skewed by the scornful way she treated Brian and I throughout this ordeal. I may forgive her eventually, but we will never be the same way again. As I look over at the man I married, I know that no matter what, I’m okay with it all.

BRIAN’S POV

So this is officially the end of some eventful times in our lives. And I can honestly say I couldn’t be happier. Between the trials and Gus moving out, I crave normalcy. I never thought I was say such a thing but yeah… I find that other than this beach we’re on, I just want to sit the hell at home with my head in Justin’s lap, watching tv or fucking until our eyes are crossed. See? Normal! Well for us, anyway.

I owe Theodore a huge raise. If it wasn’t for him pulling my head out of my ass some years ago, I would have never gone after Justin. I would have worked myself into an early grave and just been fucking miserable for the rest of my life. I would still be beholden to the ideals of a few, while once again, punishing myself for shit that wasn’t my fault. When Justin and I first got out of the hospital, we spoke to Dr. Alex Wilder to try to process everything, prior to the trials beginning. We knew we were in for some details that would rock the core of who we were, as men and as a couple.
Talking to Alex for those sessions went so well, that whereas Justin ended his, only keeping them up on an as needed basis, I decided to continue with my own on a more continuous rotation. Justin didn’t question it or comment unnecessarily, but I know that he was silently supporting me and if I needed to talk beyond Alex, he’s always been here. As a result, Justin and I are stronger. We’re able to put things into the correct context instead of existing in the preconceived notions of others, who really don’t know us behind closed doors. We still argue like the world’s on fire, but we set the world on fire when we make up. Yeah, sometimes, I start fights on purpose just to have Dom Justin come out to play. Don’t judge me- he’s fucking hot when he’s angry! But all in all, we’ve come through all of the tribulations like tempered steel. We’ve been burned, tried, tested, and still standing.

Ironically in all of this, I really don’t miss the Novotnys all that much. I mean, sometimes I do, but I think it’s more out of habit than any real emotion. I know that I cared deeply for them at one time, but there is only so much abuse that I could continue to take. I know now that I used them as my crutch for a long time, as if I had a broken foot for more than twenty years. In a lot of ways, that revelation was sad. If you think about it, I was the one with a career that was to be envied, a sex life that most people dream about, and a six-figure bank account that most wish for. If I had looked at all I had accomplished in my life on paper, I should have been a lot more self-reliant than I was in reality. It took meeting and ultimately fighting for Justin to make me see all that; to make me see just how capable I’ve always been; to really show me what unconditional love was about; to really understand the difference between love and abuse since they had been synonymous in my world for so long. So now letting go of my crutches, while painful at times, is also very Liberating.

And speaking of no longer being enslaved, Joan and Claire will no longer be a factor for the nephews and I. After the sentencing, I took a look at the paperwork that I had regarding the house and bank accounts. Apparently Joan forgot that everything had my name on it, which was fortuitous since I didn’t need to see her ever again after watching her being led away in handcuffs from the courtroom. I asked both John and Peter what they wanted me to do with the money and property since I didn’t need any of it. After much discussion, they asked me to have the house fixed up and sold for not a penny less than market value. It was no sweat off my brow and they came away from the sale significantly financially stable. Ted has been helping them to invest it wisely. As for the boys- or the young men, I should say- each of them are beyond happy. They both work for Kinnetik Corp. and JT Designs, Inc. Also John freelances for Sarah and crew whenever asked. We’ve all still kept up relationships with all of our friends in the FBI. An ordeal like the one we’ve all endured tends to make you not want to let go of the people who saved your life in so many ways.

Speaking of which, Jason Dumas… well what can I say about him except that he is no longer a ghost in mine and Justin’s bed. Someone had gotten their hooks into him but good, and he now uses our house as a vacation or regrouping spot. I can’t help but laugh at the irony. Outside of that though, business between Kinnetik and Avlossa is still booming. The campaign Justin and I came up with more than tripled their market share and they just signed a three-year deal with us so we have some work to do once we return from Tahiti. And now that I have adequate staffing with the acquisition of Vanguard and all its contracts, swimming with the sharks of New York is no longer a worry.

Justin and I have survived much, but it was worth it all just to look over and see him beaming that Sunshine smile at me. After too many years of wondering if I’d ever be able to wake up to him, I’m
never letting him get away from me. I have finally come to that place where I can say, I don’t want anything more than the man next to me to continue to share my life. So fuck the sands of the hourglass, the worries, and people who will always think they can destroy what the Taylor-Kinneys are building. The world, this love, this time we have is ours, and it’s FOREVER!

Chapter End Notes

Well this is it, Darlings! The end of the TIME'S UP universe. I hope that you have enjoyed reading it as much as I have enjoyed writing. The whole series will remain very near and dear to me as it represents a whole lot of firsts in my career. First fanfic; first foray into M/M; first time sharing my work in a public forum before it was completed and soooo MUCH MORE, that I don't have time to list here.

This is all so bittersweet for me since it is the very first fic I started writing, even before I decided to do Volume I. Throughout it all, over two years-almost three years, you all have encouraged and stuck with me from the very first chapter. I am incredibly humbled and grateful for that. To all of those who have not only read, but reviewed my work, THANK YOU so much! And to those who have read, but have not reviewed THANK YOU! Your support is shown through the read count and I don't take it for granted at all.

A special THANK YOU goes out to Lorie and the LLLC for helping me to really see and understand the potential of my work on the days when it felt like I was spinning tires. As you know the life of a writer can be a lot like solitary confinement, stuck inside the prison of your mind, but you all have my journey rich and full of laughter.

Well y'all... HAPPY READING!

HUGS, and MUCH LOVE,

~Nichelle

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