 

Famili Flaws by Tiff

*Everyone has skeletons in their closets, black sheeps of the family, and secrects yet to be told.*

*Justin and Brian are no different. In this series you will be exposed to those skeletons, meet the black sheeps and find out secrects that were better left un-told. Come, pull up a chair and eat with us as we enter the family trees of Brian Kinney and Justin Taylor.*

Pairing: Brian/Justin

Genre: Angst, torture fic!

Rating: NC-17

Warnings: Extreme violence, rape, torture

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*Everyone has skeletons in their closets, black sheeps of the family, secrets yet to be told. Justin and Brian are no different. In this series you will be exposed to those skeletons, meet the black sheeps and find out secrects that were better left un-told. Come, pull up a chair and eat with us as we enter the family trees of Brian Kinney and Justin Taylor*

Another Kind of Hero

The red flash sliced its way through the busy intersection, blasting from a red light on its own side as if being shot out of a cannon. It sped past any cars in its path, nonchalantly swerving -only slightly- in order to miss them. Weaving outside the lines, it bumped over the median and crossed onto a one way street. Cars scattered desperately on either side to get out of the way of the unyielding driver. Inside the tinted windows a man smiled, his mirrored sunglasses reflecting only the turmoil he caused outside. His lips parted as if to speak, but he only laughed. He was alone in the Jeep.

Sirens wailed behind the wild man, the sound like second nature to his ears. He weighed his high, laced boot onto the gas peddle, rocketing above the one-twenty mark. Shaking several slightly long strands of dark brown hair from his vision, the mad man skipped over the sidewalk of a parking lot. He pulled a tight turn and exploded out onto the road again. Pedestrians had yet to learn the dangers that faced them as a few narrowly missed spending the rest of their lives eating from tubes in a hospital room. The mystery man hit all new speeds by the time he lost the squadron of cops on his tail. The chase had ended quick enough to evade a helicopter's eye, but only by mere seconds. Pulling into a side street and releasing the gas, he shifted into first gear as if nothing extraordinary had just taken place in this new city. He parked neatly in between a dark Jaguar and a black Jeep right outside of Liberty Diner.

The man got out and studied his reflection in the shiny surface of his new car. He smiled. Loose-fitting blue jeans caressed his shapely legs, giving away only glimpses of what pure heaven was like. A black vest revealed his hardworking arms and hinted at the beauty of his perfectly tanned chest. Pushing his sunglasses down onto the bridge of his nose, the stranger ran his hand over the clean exterior of the Jeep. His hazel eyes stalled on the competition: Another Jeep, perfect in comparison to his own. He decided that inside was the best place to go, took one last glimpse of the neighborhood and then one look to Brian Kinney's property with a hoarse chuckle. This was going to be a fun vacation.

Strolling inside, his walk was a faultless mix of sultry steam and cocky strut. The door closed behind him and all eyes fell quietly upon the new face. Offering a sexy half-smile to the crowd, he sauntered to a stool at the counter. He knew that they watched him and devoured it heartily. It had been a long time since he'd been too innocent to use his sexuality to get what he wanted. Pulling a menu towards him, he studied it over the rim of the sunglasses which so easily masked his emotions.

Brian watched with genuine interest but without the slightest hint of sexual energy. Predatory alarms went off in his head. Another Jeep. Another great looking man of his own stature and likeness. If he didn't know any better he would have thought that they were related…sighing mentally, Brian knew who it had to be.

\*

Justin was in the kitchen when he noticed the noise level drop dramatically. He gave up trying to sneak a cigarette out the back alley and went through the double doors to see what had happened. His eyes widened. \*Holy shit!\* Was the first thought that came to mind. Before he could react any further, the man grabbed a hold of his apron pocket and pulled him close, pushing his thick lips against Justin's ear. His voice was a low growl of deep Southern drawl.

He ordered and paused to capture the moment, releasing Justin, who just nodded at the order. Trying not to stare as the man smiled, baring his gleaming white teeth, Justin swallowed hard. \*He looks like something out of one of Brian's ads. Beer or motorcycles; something with the extreme heat of a desert terrain.\* The boy's mind fluttered.

"The food?" His wide lips snarled erotically.

"Right." Justin nodded again and wrote down the direction, handing it back to the kitchen, pleased as the stranger's smile grew.

Brian watched the man with envy, surprised that he would rather have Justin away from this new man than anything else. There was a familiarity that refused to allow Brian to get comfortable with him speaking so closely with the teen.

Justin returned the man's malicious smile, wondering why he suddenly felt so naked...so ferociously violated. His blue eyes sparkled with glee. The new patron was practically eating him with his shielded eyes. Justin could feel Brian's gaze upon them and smiled softly. The thick air of jealousy was practically fogging up the diner.

With a lightening-quick strike, the man pulled Justin close again, this time tearing his pocket wide open. "Name." He demanded.

"Justin." Came the whimper, as he looked into the deep recesses of the man's sunglasses. He could see leather whips and thick chains in his near future. The stranger had yet to liberate the fragment of Justin's ruined apron from his firm grasp.

"Justin." Brian beckoned. "I'm ready to order."

The man held Justin tightly and glared in Brian's direction. "Wait your turn." He told Brian solidly.

Brian stood up at his booth, his eyes mere slits of anger. "It -is- my turn."

"Bri." Michael warned, sensing the danger the wanderer possessed. He'd never seen Brian like this…his best friend had never needed to fight for prey before.

"Justin." Brian said again.

Yanking the blonde waiter closer to him, he whispered. "Does he own that Jeep outside?"

Justin nodded. His cheek tingled where the man had touched with his shadowed facial hair.

"I figured as much." He said loud enough for Brian to hear. "You -are- Brian Kinney." He grimaced. "I should have known you would give me trouble."

Brian bit his lip in final recognition. \*I'm never wrong.\* "Sulli." He breathed heatedly.

"This is yours then?" He asked, brushing Justin's cheek once again hard enough to redden it.

"He's not mine. Just the waiter." Brian remarked, staring at the man holding Justin.

"If he's not yours then you won't mind if I have a little fun. What say ya?"

Justin smiled. \*Either Brian admits that I'm his or I go home with this 'Sulli'…I don't think there's an argument from my end…although maybe in the morning…\* He winced just thinking of the pain.

"Back off." Brian said immediately through gritted teeth. The entire establishment was watching him get pushed around. He wasn't about to lose the fight for the place's hottest waiter, even if it meant losing the reputation of an unattached man. He could always prove the latter contrary by fucking anyone who questioned his availability.

The stranger got up and pushed Justin onto the stool he recently occupied, making the boy flinch. "Enjoy then. I'll be around for leftovers." He said in a tone reserved only for bitter, long-time enemies and left, his food in the midst of being prepared. The air remained stained with the scent of his sweat and cologne long after the doors closed.

Brian walked over to his trophy, but his eyes watched beyond the windows. He took Justin in his arms as if he'd just saved him from a fate worse than death; suffering which Brian knew all too well.

"Who -was- that?" Justin demanded, speaking the question on everyone else's minds.

"No one." Brian said icily; caught in the moment, he immediately released his charge. \*He's found me.\* Brian thought with disgust. \*And now he's found Justin.\*

"Are you okay?" Justin whispered, rubbing his cheek with excitement. \*I was just fought over.\* He thought with disbelief. \*Whoever that guy was, Brian just did everything to keep me away from him.\*

"I'm fine."

"Tell me who that was." Justin demanded, interest peaking as his adrenaline refused to calm down. He would never understand what the attraction to bad boys was, but the barbarous man was even more dangerous than Brian.

"My cousin." Brian exhaled wearily, exhibiting his usual control despite the rampant thoughts crashing inside his head. "Sullivan Kinney."

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"He's bad news, end of story!" Brian yelled with frustration.

"I just want to know why!" Justin bellowed, following Brian around the room.

"Why? Because going after him would be the stupidest thing you've ever done and I'm not about to sit here and pick up the pieces when you come limping back!"

The argument had been going on ever since the two left the diner, Brian guiding the young man swiftly by the arm and not letting go until they arrived behind the locked door of his loft.

Justin pouted, leaning against the refrigerator. The first time he'd gone against Brian's wishes was when he wouldn't stop hanging around, and now it was time to do it again. Good things had happened at his relentlessness, and he wasn't about to quit now. A piece of Brian's painful past was at his fingertips…a chance to finally get inside the man's head.

"Why can't I go with him?" Justin snapped nastily, his tone one usually pertaining to the arguments he had with his parents. "Just tell me!"

"He's like me but a thousand times worse, Justin! He's bad news and…and…I forbid you to see for yourself!" Brian shouted, throwing his arms up in frustration. How had this turned into a fight? The answer should have been painfully obvious to the boy. Why couldn't he go with Sullivan? Because the man was psychotic.

"Forbid me? Forbid me! All you've done up to this point is tell me to do my own thing as long as it doesn't concern you! And now?" Justin replied shrilly. "You're just like my father!"

Brian stepped back, catching his breath. \*That was inappropriate at best. Like his father? That man would -not- be trying to protect him from Sullivan! Craig Taylor has no idea what my cousin is capable of!\* With desperate control, Brian gritted his teeth and tried to pull the argument to a close. The boy was stubborn, but hopefully he wasn't stupid enough to rebel. "Your safety concerns me. If it didn't, I wouldn't be involved. I know for a fact that he will ruin you in more ways than one, and in more ways than you could ever recover from." To keep from shaking at the memory, Brian took a bottle of water from his fridge, pushing Justin away in the process and turning to look the boy in the eye. He turned away and stormed into his bedroom.

Justin sighed in a huff meant for Brian to pick up on. He wanted answers, but none were going to be offered. Not tonight. Possibly not any night judging by the way things were going.

"You can do whatever the fuck you want, but don't come to me looking for help when you're in over your head!!!" Brian shot bitterly from the darkness, hidden tears cascading down his cheeks. He had forgotten what Sullivan did the last time he fell in love. He was the reason Brian chose to not care about anyone, yet he always forgot. It made them the target of a competitive madman…but could he take care of Justin if he made him stay? Brian wondered, feeling as lost as he had the very first time he met the rage of his cousin. What could he do to keep Justin there? Tell him that he loved him and then later have the kid regret not finding out what he missed if he stayed? Let the boy resent him but relax that he'd be safe? Push him away and hope he came back like he always did? "Justin…" He whispered, his voice caught in his throat, inaudible. "I didn't mean…"

"Fine! I will!" Justin yelled, grabbing his jacket and slamming the door behind him. "You'll see! I don't need your help or your bundled emotions! I don't need you!" He yelled, fighting tears on his way to the ground-floor. \*Maybe a different Kinney is all I need…\* Justin thought proudly, whispering to himself. "And so what if everything about him is dangerous? That doesn't mean a thing. Maybe Brian's just too scared I'll like his cousin better. That's exactly what's going on here. He's jealous." He decided, flying through the front doors angrily. \*You can't admit that you care about me, but you still want to have me all to yourself. Well, I won't stand for it.\* He walked briskly, a sharp feeling resonating in his mind that if he walked long enough, Sullivan Kinney would find him.

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Brian grinned awkwardly, light brown hair falling over his eyes as he stared into the attic mirror. Golden sunlight filtered into the dusty room as dusk fell over the small Louisiana town. Looking at the figure behind him, Brian pretended to be absorbed in the mission to tuck a piece of tousled hair behind his ear. An intense humidity clung to two bare chests, another late summer memory forever instilled in the boys' minds.

'You're from Pittsburgh? I've never been.' The teenager in the mirror asked Brian, unaware of his allure to the younger boy, but willing to find out. 'Sulli says it's a mess up there.' He continued, staring at the wrinkles on his fingertips, his swim trunks still wet from the lake. Wispy blonde hair fell in gentle curls, some golden strands drying and breaking free of the soaked chunks clinging to his face and neck.

'It's okay.' Brian conceded, smiling as the boy shifted and sprawled out on the floor.

'Sulli said he'd be here pretty soon, he had chores to do.'

'He never does them. His mother treats him like a prince.' Brian whispered, meeting the seventeen year olds' green eyes for the first time with a smile. 'Is he really coming, Jeff?' He asked, turning around to face his cousin's best friend.

Jeff got up slowly, shaking his head. 'No.' He almost whispered. 'I wanted to talk to you.' Stepping closer, he pulled Brian's thin body closer. 'How old are you?'

'Fourteen.' Brian answered, unabashed. 'Aren't you and Sulli…you know?' He asked, suddenly full of vengeance for the teasing and pranks his older cousin had visited upon him over the years. Brian knew that Sullivan was in love with this boy, before he even asked, and after a quick deliberation, he decided that Sullivan would just have to learn to be nicer to him from then on.

'Love's a funny thing.' Jeff said hoarsely, pressing his erection against Brian as he leaned in for a kiss, neither boy noticing the form in the doorway.

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Brian screamed, sitting up in bed. Breathing heavily, he looked around the empty room. Checking his watch, Brian sighed. Only four in the afternoon. He didn't even remember falling asleep.

"Justin?" His voice wavered and he winced, scolding himself for being too weak to stop the boy from getting himself into trouble. The argument had happened too quickly and in the heat of the moment, making sure Brian had no time to explain exactly how bad Sulli could get.

The nightmare never ended, but it had stopped with the dullness of nights filled with amphetamine and alcohol. Brian got out of bed and searched his loft, as if hoping that Justin had returned unharmed. Shaking off the bad memory, Brian stood at his window, looking out over the city.

Jeff was his first love. His last love until…

Brian held his chin taught, forcing the lump in his throat to disappear. The screaming resonated in his mind, the blood…

"Stop it!" Brian scolded himself. "What's done is done! It's Justin's own stupid fault if he doesn't heed good advice. He's not your responsibility!"

But Sullivan was.

Brian grabbed his jacket and ran to the elevator, a new determination to find his cousin filled him. He had to get there before Justin did.

\*

Justin settled into the booth next to Michael, a defeated sigh escaping his lips.

"What the hell was that about?" The man asked eagerly. No one had gotten the chance to ask what was with Brian before he had dragged Justin from the diner.

"His cousin. Apparently, Sullivan Kinney is bad news and I'm forbidden to see him." Justin pouted, crossing his arms.

"Brian forbid you to go home with someone?" Michael asked, astonished amidst short gasps from the rest of the table.

"He's just jealous that maybe I'd like Sulli better!"

"You stupid kid!" Michael shook his head, wishing he had the audacity to smack the young blonde over the head like his mother did. "If he's making rules than it's obviously important to him. It's not jealousy, Justin. He only does something like this if it means survival. I mean, his rules for tricks were rock solid before you came along. Then, because he felt he could break those rules for you, he did. He does things for a reason." Michael defended his best friend valiantly. "And it -is- survival. Brian would know, he -has- been around the block a little longer than you have. If he says his cousin isn't your type, then listen!"

"Actually, I agree with Justin." David said.

"Butt out!" Michael said before catching his tongue. "Sorry."

"He practically forbid you to see me, Michael, and it was out of jealousy."

"See!" Justin said, even though Michael's speech did make a semblance of sense. "And it's not that Sullivan isn't my type. Brian says he's dangerous."

Emmett and Ted groaned as Michael felt bold enough for his mother's signature slap.

"Ow!"

"Yeah? Then don't give me a reason!" Michael sighed.

"Honey," Emmett said, taking the boy's hand in his. "I don't think Brian's the authority on many things, but I do trust him enough to protect the people he's brought into the circle you see here." He snickered. "Except David, of course."

"But he -forbid- me! He's starting to sound like my father."

"Ouch." Ted said, pleased.

"So what if he did? It's for your safety. Even if you don't like it, you'll be better off from it." Michael scolded, at the same time hurt that Brian had never even told him about Sullivan or the danger he posed. If he was such a significant mark in the man's life, shouldn't he have confided in him?

"I guess." Justin sighed.

"Good, you're not as stupid as you make yourself out to be."

"I don't think he's stupid at all." Sullivan purred, his head between Justin and Michael from the neighboring booth.

Justin jumped, his body tingling with a new fever.

"You ready to go, angel?" He asked the boy, leaning close to his ear.

"You said I'm not stupid, so why do you ask?" Justin turned around boldly, holding onto all the strength he had left.

"I guess Brian's got you trained pretty well then."

"Guess so."

"Do you think I'm beyond taking what I want?"

"You go ahead and try it." Michael said, wrapping his arm around Justin's waist.

The man laughed, but stood up. "Okay then. I'll remember who I have to go through next time." He said, cupping Justin's chin in his hand before backing out of the diner, his Jeep disappearing as Brian's settled into a space.

"Justin." Brian said, relief easily hidden after the first sigh. "I thought you'd left."

"I got hungry." Justin said casually, as if his veins weren't pumping pure adrenaline.

Michael released the boy, shaking his head and wondering if this game would ever end and Brian would allow Justin to make him happy. He looked up to see Brian's thankful smile projected just to him and returned it.

"Ready to go home?" Brian asked, hands on his hips and a sly smile on his face.

"I haven't eaten." Justin said matter-of-factly. He was still angry at Brian, though he didn't exactly know why now. Being new on the scene was hard enough, but being shown how much he still had to learn was like a slap to the face. He was trying his damnedest to fit in with this new group of friends, but there were so many deterrents.

"You will." Brian pulled him out of the booth and took him out the door, his mind like a storm-raged sea. For the first time, he was thankful Mikey had David to go home with. The man would keep him safe. All he had to worry about was Justin.

Sliding into the driver's seat, Brian looked over at the expectant blue eyes seated next to him.

"What?" He asked, trying hard not to smile at the boy's determination.

"I want to know everything." Justin said simply, though his tone was that of a patient mother.

"No you don't."

"I said I did, didn't I? I want to know what he did to you to make you behave like this. Not that I mind the whole white knight thing…"

"I'll tell you at home." Brian promised, hoping he could fulfill it without coming off as weak as he felt. He was grateful that this satisfied Justin enough to make the ride a silent one.

The loft door slammed closed with the sound of a barred-cell caging in its prisoner. Brian swallowed in a dry throat and closed his eyes. "Go sit down." He ordered, gesturing to the sofa. He couldn't believe he was going to tell Justin all of this; his past had remained relatively private, even to Michael.

Opening his refrigerator, he removed two bottles of water. Both were for him. The chill was welcome as it slid passed his lips. He sat next to Justin with a heavy sigh.

The boy was studying him. He always did, as if trying to see what made him tick. Well, he was in luck tonight. "Fine. Stop looking at me like that." Brian said coolly, sinking as far into the cushions as he could get.

Justin obeyed, staring straight ahead. "Take your time."

"And have you bug me for details at every pause? I'm telling you this because I chose to, alright? What I tell you requires no prompting, no pestering, no inquiries whatsoever, got it?"

Justin nodded.

"Even Michael doesn't know about this, and seeing as you two seem to hold this shit as some sort of treasure, I'd think you'd want to keep this to yourself."

Another nod, his heart pounding. "I understand."

"What you hear is what you get." Brian said, finalizing the fact. "I'll stop talking if you start. And after it's over, that's it. Don't bring it up ever again."

"Okay." Justin said, making himself comfortable by laying his head on Brian's leg, his fingers seeming childlike as they wrapped around a rift in the fabric around his knee.

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Brian closed his eyes, denying the soothing consolation the boy's easy breathing gave him. "This could have been you." He sighed, continuing. "I was fourteen years old, visiting my aunt and uncle in a town just outside of New Orleans. It was one of those summers where once it ends, you know you'll never see it again. I was happy, I was a stupid punk kid. My cousin Sullivan had always been an older kid, if you know what I mean." He reached down and stroked the short blonde hair right behind Justin's ear unconsciously as the boy nodded quietly. "He was a real prick, but nothing out of the ordinary. My family usually went down to Louisiana for the summer, but that year Sulli had a 'special friend' as my aunt May said in between fanning herself off from the heat and the disdain. She told me, but not my father. I guess she knew I would fit right in. She loved the kid, like only a mother would…even though he was a terror. This friend was Jeff Reeves…" Brian chuckled softly.

"He was gorgeous. I wanted him even before he spoke. We hung out all summer, the three of us. Swam in the lake, ran through the fields, terrorized the neighbor's livestock…typical boy stuff. Sullivan was always on my back, making me look bad in front of Jeff. I hated feeling like such a child; hated being treated like such a kid in front of those older guys." Brian stopped, his finger trailing behind the soft earlobe. "I guess you know what I was feeling…it's hard trying to fit in when they don't want to open up so easily to the youth they've already passed." He sighed and went on, vowing silently that Justin would feel more at home with he and the guys once this was over, even if he had to force them to invite him in as one of the group.

"One day he called me up to the attic of the old barn that we always hung out in. He said that Sulli was coming, that he had some chores to do first. I knew that he wanted the same thing I did because Sullivan never did his chores…Sullivan hadn't been invited at all." Brian recalled the events from his nightmares too clearly, his mind offering them easily, eager for the chance to vent. He paused for a moment, wishing that Justin would tell him that it was okay if he didn't want to go on, that he'd had enough and would stay away from Sullivan based on Brian's word alone. But it was not that easy. It never was.

"We danced around the bush a little, but only for a moment. We'd just been out swimming and were all wet. He got up and kissed me, and I knew I was in love. It was something I'd never felt before…it was so powerful that it scared me, but he knew what he was doing. I adored him, and I felt like he adored me. I could finally have something that Sullivan wanted, and Sulli had to suffer without him. It was innocent enough…my intentions, I mean. I never wanted things to go so badly…" Brian explained, choking on a sudden burst of emotion, glad that Justin was not facing him. "Sulli saw us kiss. He saw the way Jeff was with me, how gentle he set me down on the towel. We made love…it was my first time." Brian took another long drink from his nearly empty bottle and closed it, rolling it over his forehead. He knew he didn't have to tell Justin every detail, and even if he did, he couldn't describe the things he had felt back then. It had been too long repressed. But somehow he knew that the boy knew exactly which feelings he was having a hard time expressing. "Sullivan watched the entire time, not making a sound. They were boyfriends. I was glad to take that away from him, but he was only too happy to take it back from me. Jeff came, right after me. He smiled down at me, and I knew he felt the beauty I did. I wanted to tell him everything, all my feelings, the uncertainties…I wanted that beautiful smile to stay above me forever. Then Sullivan made his presence known. He had to have left at some point, though I don't know when, and armed himself with a knife." Brian stopped with a shudder as he felt Justin stiffen.

"I had never seen such rage in his eyes. It was inhuman. He didn't want to kill Jeff right away, his was a slow revenge. Sullivan sliced across his back…" Brian choked back a sob, his voice cracking. "He screamed…turned away from me, pulled out…I couldn't see the terror in his face, only the madness in Sulli's. He lashed down again, I don't know where he hit…his chest maybe. I crawled away. I remember falling into a corner, shivering. He came down again…and again…and again…no one ever came by the barn, I don't know if they heard the screaming or not, but no one came. Sullivan was like the town's dirty little secret, a perfect blend of chaos and steam, all behind the eyes of the devil himself. Jeff could hardly scream after awhile." Brian took his hand away from Justin, massaging his wrist under the bracelet everyone on Liberty Avenue could distinguish as his. "It was more…gurgling. Sulli didn't even blink. If I live to be a hundred, I'll never forget that: not once did I see those gleaming eyes blink. He m-murdered him, right there in front of me I…even if he'd told me to run I couldn't have moved. Then he turned to me, the kid that had just been so alive, inside of me…fell from the knife like a bale of hay; heavy and dead. He didn't even look like a person."

Justin was crying softly, carefully, as to not halt the revelation. Brian could feel the gentle rise and fall of his chest as he sobbed for someone else's plight. He leaned down and lightly kissed the boy's cheek, drawing strength from Justin like he could from no one else.

"Sullivan said something to me, his mouth and words a maw of spit and blood. I was beyond horrified…he grabbed my wrist. I closed my eyes, imagining the pain Jeff must have been in before he died. I thought he was going to kill me, but he didn't. He had other plans. When he cut me, it burned as if the blade had been out in the sun this whole time. I cried out…couldn't hear the words but somehow understood. He told me I would never live a day with happiness as long as he was alive. He would keep on taking what was mine until I was as miserable as he was on that day. I lost a lot of blood from what he did…brought the knife all around my wrist." Brian admitted quietly, loosening his bracelet and letting it fall to the floor, draping his hand so Justin could see. The boy took it and sat up, running his fingers along the thick, unending scar. "Sullivan wanted me to remember that day forever. He made me bury Jeff in the field. I still don't know if they ever found him. They dragged the rivers…but I think they all knew that Sulli did something to him. He swore to take anyone I loved away, anyone I cared about…Michael, Gus, you…he's relentless, and he means what he swore. I don't…know what I'm going to do…" Brian said, the force he used to hold back the tears of his life had vanished. "I moved out as soon as I could and tried to stay away from anyone. I was afraid he would find me and kill my family, or my friends. I didn't talk to Mikey for a month after I got back." Brian sunk into the white cushions of his couch, swallowing the last of his water and opening the next bottle. "And then I forgot. I made myself forget. I lost who I was and promised myself that no one else would ever get hurt because of me. I suppose I really fucked -that- up, too. Because I ended up having a kid. I ended up letting people into my life…I let down my guard. Now you're in trouble." He looked at Justin, the boy was intent on rubbing the scar on his wrist. Brian again found renewed strength to stop the tears as he took Justin into his arms, allowing the boy to feel the safety and warmth he had always wanted to find again. "I'm done." He said finally, giving one last squeeze before releasing the boy. "And now you know." Brian wondered if he would ever be able to close himself off from Justin after the confession. He had to try, to at least keep some dignity and remain a dominating presence in the sexual and predatory Liberty scene.

Justin sniffled. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be, for whatever you're apologizing for. Sulli's not your fault, neither is Jeff. You had a right to be angry with me for trying to bar you from something I didn't explain. I'm just glad that you went to Liberty instead of in search of him before I got a chance to collect myself." Brian said, trying desperately to withdraw himself from the situation, discomfort deepening as penetrating blue eyes watched his every move.

"I'm sorry you had to experience that." Justin reached up and kissed Brian on the temple. "I'm sorry someone had to die, that's all."

"It's okay. We have things to worry about now without adding the past." Brian said, finding it hard to pull the shield back around himself, but succeeding as much as he could.

"What are we going to do?"

"Now, we're going to sleep. I deserve it." Brian got up, surprised that he could even stand. He vowed to let this drop, to make sure it didn't effect him another night.

"Okay." Justin agreed, taking Brian's hand and leading him to the bedroom, holding him close, not wanting to lose the bond they now shared. "Good night." He smiled, trying his best to forget everything but the most important facts, as Brian wanted him to.

Brian nodded, turning his back to Justin in bed but sliding up next to him. He had never trusted anyone enough to sleep with his back to them, but with Justin, everything changed. He hoped that it was for a long time, uninterrupted.

The bracelet lay alone on the floor between the couch and coffee table, discarded like the pain brought by his past. It would have a place tomorrow, in public, but for the night, it was released. And so, finally, was Brian Kinney.

\*

Michael sipped his tea, though the warmth wasn't hitting the right spot. He had to admit jealousy towards Justin, though never aloud. David had gone to bed alone almost an hour ago, and all was quiet. Too quiet. He had no interruptions into his discontent.

The television was on, it's hue cast over the living-room like death. Characters on a Disney cartoon danced over something or another, their mouths moving; muted.

Swirling the sweetened liquid with his finger, Michael sighed. He felt left out, and he had a right to know what was going on with his best friend. If Brian asked, he would certainly tell him anything about his past…only Brian already knew everything. How had he managed to keep something so big from him? A hot cousin with a hotter head?

He got up, dumping the mug and rinsing it out, anger swirling in him as the green tea went down the drain. He picked up the phone, but held it above the receiver, trying to listen for David's snoring upstairs.

Nothing. It -was- too quiet.

Michael put the phone to his ear, cocking his head. No dial tone. Michael hung up the phone, urging the uneasiness to retreat. Picking it up again, he listened to dead air.

"David?" Michael yelled upstairs and concentrated on any sound returned.

Suddenly, the stereo exploded with new sound, drowning out his scream of surprise. David did not come downstairs.

Running across the room, Michael turned off the radio. Neither man living in that house owned such brash, hard music. "David?" He called again, his eyes searching for his cell phone though his body froze by the CD player. He had just seen it by the couch, hadn't he? It was no longer there.

"I noticed something today…" The Southern intonation soothed his ears, even as the man moved maliciously out of the shadows.

"How did you get in here?" Michael demanded, already looking for an escape route.

"I let myself in, sugah." Sullivan stood behind the couch, taking the remote control and switching off the television. The room around them fell under a blanket of sheer darkness, their silhouettes mere outlines of

cat and mouse.

"Where's David?"

"Upstairs. I made sure he won't bother us."

Michael swallowed but said nothing. If David were dead…

"As I was saying, I discovered something in the diner today: Brian has more than one love this time around. He's found new ways of loving different people. Interesting, no? I thought I had him convinced he was trouble for other people."

"Why don't you leave us alone?"

"He cares about you, or else you wouldn't have taken such a chance with Angelface. Justin is as important to you as you are to Brian; a protected friend. A close friend. Even a loved friend."

"Justin is too dumb to know what's good for him."

"Yes, so you took it upon yourself to be what was good for him, watching him until Brian could arrive."

"So what?"

Sullivan moved fast and was out of sight. Michael pressed himself against the stereo system, sliding against it towards the staircase.

"Michael?" The taunting voice called out from behind him, a flash of white light greeting his turn as Sullivan took him down with one accurate punch. "You're a fool." He said silently, dragging the man out the front door.

\*

Brian leaned against the glass shower door, physically and emotionally drained. Could he have told Justin that Sullivan had killed someone he held dear and left it at that? Yes, but it would never have satisfied the boy enough to keep him safe. With a heavy sigh and a heavier heart, Brian washed the conditioner out of his hair and stepped out of the shower. Why had Sullivan come to Pittsburgh? Why now? There was no significant date coming up, no anniversaries of that day...it wouldn't even be summer for another two months.

Justin sat on the counter, waiting like an eager child with a cup of strong coffee for the weary man. "It's Ghirardelli. San Franciscan. Carmel-Chocolate." The teenager smiled wistfully, urging a very stoic Brian to take a sip.

"Sounds like a coronary waiting to happen." He muttered, quietly relishing the smooth taste and immense heat. "Where did you get this?"

"The corner deli started selling it a couple of weeks ago."

"You went out this morning?"

"No, Brian." Justin sighed, sliding off the counter-top and slipping between the cup of coffee and Brian's mouth. "It's been in your cupboard for five days, when we went to get sandwiches and I insisted you tried it?"

Brian smiled and chuckled softly. "Oh. Right."

"Yeah, it was unopened..." Justin said, happy to see the smile on the man's face return.

"Well, it's good." Brian mused, turning his attention out the window where, surprising to him, the sun had come up in a new day and the sky was still blue. Nothing had changed.

Except for him.

\*

Sullivan Kinney walked into Liberty Diner, a cruel smile devouring the table where Michael, Justin, and rian had been the day before. Only the other four, two women and two men, sat there now.

"Can I get a cup of coffee, sugah?" He asked Debbie as she walked cautiously passed.

"You're not welcome here." She told him firmly. If she had been there when he had laid hands on Sunshine yesterday, he would never have the courage to return. "Nobody manhandles my waiters like that. Out."

"Sure thing." He bared his teeth viscously. "But can you tell Brian something for me when he comes in?"

Debbie leaned one hand expectantly on one hip, the other carrying an order of food. "What?"

"He was wrong."

"And what was he wrong about?" She persisted impatiently.

"His protection priorities." He nodded to her, slid his sunglasses on, and left with one smooth, liquid movement.

\*

Michael opened one eye, the other swollen painfully shut. Around him, the room was unfamiliar, quiet, deserted. He attempted to move, only to realize he was bound tightly with thick, meticulously wrapped duct tape on his wrists, ankles, and around the bottom portion of his face. He knew in the very least that he was alone. David was not there, unless he was somehow hidden by the bed, dresser, or lamp.

Under closer scrutiny, Michael could see that he was in some semblance of a hotel room. The thin wallpaper

and floral decor on the bedspread were obviously stereotypical of a cheap room.

He groaned, turning himself around on the brown shag carpeting in search of a phone.

\*

"Hello?"

"Brian, Lindz."

"What's up?" He asked in between sips of the coffee and even more delicious kisses from Justin.

"Your cousin just left Liberty. He had a message for you before Debbie kicked him out."

Brian paled. This couldn't be good news. "Oh yeah?" He asked, trying to sound nonchalant.

"He said that you were wrong. That your protection priority was wrong." She explained. "Does that mean anything to you?"

"Not unless somebody's missing besides me and Justin."

"Michael and David..."

"Son of a bitch!" Brian shouted and hung up the phone, immediately dialing Michael's cell phone, silently begging for a Pittsburgh voice to answer.

"I was waiting for you, Brian." Sullivan answered almost instantly. "I was terribly lonely without you. Michael and I were just starting to wonder if you had topped yourself last night instead of facing the consequences of my actions."

Brian swore under his breath. "Let me talk to Michael." He demanded.

"That can't be arranged, cousin. Sorry."

"Brian, what's going on?" Justin asked innocently, trying to listen.

"Let me talk to Justin." Sullivan requested and Brian could practically see the menace of his grin.

"That can't be arranged, cousin. Sorry."

"Hmm. If I didn't know any better, I would think that you were putting up a fight."

"Let me talk to Michael." Brian repeated, absently searching Justin's empathetic blue eyes for permission to

advance the game. "And you can talk to Justin."

"Oh, I do like a challenge. Unfortunately, Michael is unable to come to the phone. I had no idea you could manage so many different relationships on Planet Brian, congratulations."

"I want to talk to Michael."

"Good for you, I was beginning to wonder if you were going to let me get away with this." Sullivan muttered. "Meet me at the Rising Sun Motel six miles out of town, room 14." He ordered. "Oh, and Brian, you come alone."

Brian hung up, exasperated. "Justin...he wants me to meet him at the Rising Sun Motel, room 14. I don't know if Mikey's...if we both go..."

"I'll stay. I understand." Justin said immediately, without thinking. He didn't know how to tell Brian that he was afraid that Sullivan would want to trade Brian's life for Michael's.... He couldn't tell Brian that he was afraid of a -memory- of some terror, of Brian's reality, and that he felt paralyzed to the floor he stood on. How would Brian react if he knew Justin was relieved to be staying home?

Brian nodded his thanks and redialed Lindsay's number. "Lindsay."

"Yeah, what's going on? Deb's freaking out."

"She should be. Sullivan has Michael. I have to meet him--."

"And then what?"

"I don't know, but..." He trailed off and handed the phone to Justin, trying to compose himself. His best friend was possibly dead, and he was being forced to answer questions he just couldn't deal with.

"This guy means business. Listen, don't tell Deb, but Michael..." He turned his voice into a whisper to avoid upsetting the thoughts already in Brian's line of thinking. His eyes studied the man pacing the darkened bedroom behind slated glass doors. "Michael might be dead already. If he doesn't go, he runs the risk of never finding out. He has to go. Tell everyone not to worry?"

"I will." She said soberly, unaware of another answer, and too shocked to think up a new question.

"If I don't call you back in a half hour, get the cops to the Rising Sun Motel, room 14, okay? A half hour. I'll already be on my way if Brian doesn't call me by then, so it's up to you to make sure we have a little protection."

"Right."

"Goodbye, Lindsay." He told her and hung up, afraid of any conversation that would follow between them. "Bri?" He peeked his head into the room, eyeing the inky stillness, and the form lying on the king-sized bed. "Brian, you have to go now." He told the man softly, as comforting as he could manage while the fear closed around his throat. "Brian?"

"I know." He muttered, apparent terror shaking his usually bold voice. "I-I don't know if I can...see what he's done to Michael..."

"You have to." Justin moved over to stand beside the bed. "For Michael, no matter how badly hurt he is... You can make this right."

"How?" Brian sat up accusingly, glaring at the young man, lashing out at the one person who understood why he was upset in the first place. The one person that would forgive him no matter what. "I don't want to do this! Don't you see that I can't? You don't really believe that he's kept Michael alive, do you? That's not how he plays this game."

"You have to find out. Now come on, or I'll go instead and just have to explain to Sullivan that I decided to take your place." Justin threatened, grabbing the man's scarred wrist and pulling him to his feet. He grabbed the car keys and stuffed them into Brian's jacket pocket, then draped the black coat over his shoulders. "Hope springs eternal." He told the man, kissing him strongly on the cheek. "I'll be waiting for you to call. As soon as you get Michael, make sure you let me know. I told Lindsay to call the police if you didn't call me and I didn't call her." He said, failing to mention his plan to follow Brian if all didn't go right.

Michael whimpered behind his gag. He had heard the familiar voice in the adjacent room giving orders to a person that could have been no one else but Brian. Without the agility to see his watch, Michael had no idea exactly how long he had been a hostage. He held his breath when the connecting door unlocked, a stream of light pouring into Michael's vision, causing him to squint at the lean figure above him.

"Good Morning." Sullivan murmured. "We're going to have a little party in a bit. Don't worry about getting washed up, I want Brian to see you like this."

Michael attempted to speak to the man, but only his angry tone reached a decipherable level.

"Now, you wouldn't be in such a rotten mood if you knew that you were going to survive this, would you?" Sullivan sat Michael up, propping him against the bed. "Comfy? He'll be here soon."

He squatted beside his captive and yanked the gag from his bruised and battered face.

"He'll kill you for this." Michael threatened in his fear.

Sullivan laughed. "I said that he'd be here soon. I didn't say that -I- would."

"What do you mean?" Michael attempted to ask in an unwavering voice.

"I have an angel to fell." Sullivan told him and stood. "Now, be sure to scream loud enough for Brian to hear you. I told him to go to the room two doors down in case he decided to bring the police into this. It was nice meeting you, Michael. You've got a great ass. Too bad Brian's into blonde's, hmm? We'll have to get together some time." He winked and strode out of the room, deep Southern charm unendingly apparent in his every word.

Michael swallowed thickly in a dry throat. He squirmed, but only succeeded in falling back to the floor like a sandbag. "Shit." He muttered, hoping someone would hear him and emaciate him before Brian got there so he could warn the Boy Wonder before it was too late. "Help!" He swallowed again and repeated the cry. This seemed like the kind of place where pained requests for aid were commonplace through the thin walls. Still, he continued to scream.

\*

"Help!" Michael yelled, losing the little voice he had left. "Somebody?" He whimpered, leaning his head sleepily against the carpeting, absently wondering how many people had died on this same floor.

"Keep talkin' Mikey!" Brian's voice, like a burst of sunlight through black clouds, rang in his ears. No one would ever know how close to passing out Brian came when he heard Michael's voice, safe and alive.

"Brian!"

"Where are you?"

"Not fourteen!" He fought with the weariness and dehydration to continue talking his way out of this mess.

"Fuck!" He heard Brian mutter under his breath.

"You're close." Michael told his friend. "But he's after Justin!" He said, as if suddenly remembering. "I was a distraction." He admitted, though only to himself.

"Well then, we'd better get you out of here and go home." Brian said with a soothing tone softened by many years of calming his friend's hysteria. He picked up his phone and called the loft, allthewhile banging on doors, trying their locks, and coming face to face with a very many angry motel patrons.

\*

Justin paced nervously in the living room, eyeing the phone. Brian had been gone nearly thirty minutes. He jumped at the sound of someone leaning on the buzzer, his jacket in his hands as he was ready to desert the loft in search of his lover.

"Yes?"

"Justin, it's David."

Reaching for the lock-release, Justin's hand faltered out of instinct. David did not sound like himself, especially since he was supposedly missing in action. He sounded quiet, as if he were standing purposely away from the speaker. Or muffling it. He was possibly hurt, but did that give him the excuse to crawl to -Brian- for help?

"I'm sorry, David, I can't let you in."

"Why not? I need to talk to Brian."

"He's busy." Justin said forcefully and released the button. He left and slammed the door shut behind him, making sure to set the alarm. Heading down the stairs, Justin slipped into a stairwell that he knew would take him to the parking garage without revealing his location to anyone at the building's front door. Even if Michael's attacker -had- done something to David to cause him to come directly to Brian, caution was better used in any suspicious scenarios, and this awakened more suspicion in Justin than if Brian had been talking with a naked man in his bed and claimed to not have sexual motives. David would understand the intense instinct screaming from Justin's gut to get to safety as quickly as possible.

\*

Sullivan pressed his finger against the button below Brian's. A woman's voice answered.

"Yes, Ma'am, I'm here about a possible Freon leak. Can you buzz me in? The doorman is unavailable at the moment." He purred seductively, knowing by now that Justin was going to need a little more coaxing than he had originally planned. The boy was smarter than Michael realized.

The door unlocked with a loud buzz, and like a soft and silent breeze, Sullivan Kinney was inside. But Justin had already slipped behind the heavy door to the parking garage, out of sight.

\*

Brian kicked the doorknob with all the strength he had, sending wood splintering into the dark, empty motel room. He searched for a light. Not only was Michael still hidden somewhere, but Justin didn't pick up the phone at the house.

"Hey!" Michael called, hearing his friend fumbling for a lamp in the next room. "In here, Bri!"

Brian opened the door Sullivan had left unlocked and crouched down next to Michael, refusing to let the man's wounds permeate his emotions. "Are you alright?" He asked quickly, dismisively, while struggling to loosen the silver tape.

"Yeah." Michael sighed and smiled. "Hey, did you kick the door in?"

Brian nodded softly, concentrating on his task and not on the bruises and blood all over his friend's face.

"I wish I could have seen it, that would have been so cool!"

Brian couldn't help but smile. Michael certainly didn't act as hurt as he looked. "Sure, Mikey."

\*

Sullivan broke the lock easily enough after knocking repeatedly.

"Angelface, you have no idea how much the hunt turns me on, but really, do you need me any hotter? I am -not- in the mood for wasting time!" He hit the alarm box, now chiming annoyingly, with the heel of his hand until it fizzled to a soft whisper. "Time to travel to the -deep- South, boy."

Scanning the room, he slid the door shut and walked around. "Not a bad setup you have for yourself, cousin. Surrounding yourself with nice things...people that care about you. And all seem vaguely unaware that you're little more than a scared child with a past full of my revenge." He peeked his head into the bedroom, lifting up the silky dark blue sheets and looking under the bed. "Not a bad setup at all. Too bad you've got someone who's entirely eager to take it all away."

\*

"Here, try the house again. Tell Justin to hide in the garage in that place we know about, until we get there." Brian handed Michael the phone as the Jeep sped passed the city limit sign.

Michael nodded, glad to be sitting in the comfortable seat and not on the foul-smelling carpet, bound at wrist and ankle. He dialed the number he knew by heart since the very first time Brian moved into the loft.

Sullivan looked over at the phone as it rang, almost leaping toward it thinking Justin had made the noise. He picked it up but said nothing.

"Justin, it's Michael. I'm okay, but he wasn't after me. Brian says to hide in the parking garage. He says you know where, until we get there. We're about fifteen minutes away, alright?"

"Sounds great to me, cowboy." Sullivan smiled. "Fifteen minutes is all the time I need."

"Leave him alone!" Michael yelled into the phone, though it was only dial tone by the time he gathered his wits.

"Shit!" Brian hissed and pressed the pedal harder.

\*

Justin sat between two dark-colored vehicles that were usually still parked there, undisturbed, when he and Brian left for Babylon every night. He hoped that it would hold true tonight, and prove a furtive hiding place. Hugging his knees to his chest, Justin made himself as small as possible and rested his chin on his arms with a sigh. He knew that if Brian called, he would miss it. But he might call Lindsay to report whether everything went well if he couldn't reach Justin.

The door squealed open, protesting on its old hinges. Justin leaned over and peered under the car, watching the shadow of a man stand silently in the doorway. Stifling a gasp, Justin sat back against the cold cement wall and hoped to all hell that the familiar thin frame was Brian's and not someone of the same lineage. If it were Brian, he would know where to look for Justin, as both had discussed the great location his hiding place gave for privacy. Though when they spoke of it then, it was much more sexually inclined.

A shrill whistle disturbed the still quiet of the cold room as the figure stepped into the garage. It was dark, but not pitch black. If the man looked hard enough for his prey, he would find him. Justin risked another glance toward the man, who was now leaning down and searching the undersides of cars. How he had known to come here was beyond Justin, but that was beside the point. He had to think of a silent way to get back inside without bringing any attention to himself.

Another whistle. "Angel, I know you're here. I've got a surprise for you." He stood and passed his eyes over the garage. He had ten minutes to find the kid and get out before Brian got home to protect him. "If you don't come out, I guess I've just got to make due with Michael and Brian, since that's all I've got."

Justin rocked uncertainly on his haunches.

"I just want to talk, Justin. Honest."

Justin shook his head in silent protest.

"If you don't answer me, I'll take a knife and slide it neatly up your precious Brian's body; groin to sternum. I'll do it slowly so he can watch me kill him."

Justin sniffled quietly.

"I brought them with me. Would you like to see them? I would think that you would want to see them alive for the last time. But you could save them..." Sullivan prompted, still walking, bending over to look into the unmoving darkness. "You could risk coming to talk to me to save Michael and Brian. Unless you're afraid..."

Justin got down on his belly and pulled himself under the SUV to his left, his elbows guiding him along, one car at a time as soon as Sullivan looked under the cars across the lot. He paused and watched the man, then moved passed him under a convertible that had already been checked.

"I wouldn't want to have you carry the guilt of their deaths on your conscience for the rest of your life, Angelface. Sorrow does not become one so fair...come on out."

Justin continued to slither under the line of parked cars. He stopped every time Sulli took a breath or paused to try and hear an escape attempt.

Suddenly, a man entered the room. He smiled at Sullivan.

"Hey, Kinney." He nodded to the man, oblivious of any differences in his neighbor and the man he addressed.

Sullivan nodded, waiting to see if the man's presence would arouse Justin to call for help. He smiled softly as the man got into his car and slammed the door. Justin hissed as he saw the feet disappear above him. He pressed himself against the ground and hoped that the low car would spare him.

Justin breathed a sigh of relief as the man pulled out of his parking space, leaving the boy underneath both unnoticed and unscathed. He nearly got to his feet but remembered that there was more trouble at hand and dropped back down.

Sullivan searched behind him as the flash of color disappeared from the corner of his eye. A cruel smile danced onto his face. "I got to thinking." He mused aloud, waltzing towards the door where he originally came in. A few cars away from where he had seen Justin. "Perhaps the boy isn't in here. I said to myself, maybe he decided to go to the diner and await his knight's return."

Justin clenched his jaw. The man was heading back his way. The choice to run had to be now or never.

Gathering the fear and adrenaline together, Justin rose and sprinted towards the door with everything he had in him. An agile hand grabbed his shirt collar and brought him sprawling to the ground.

Sullivan grinned down at his prize. "But then I thought to myself: No, he didn't have time to run all the way from the loft to the back door without me seeing him. Michael called the loft just when I was going to go prowl Liberty Avenue, and told me that you had a special hiding place in the garage. I was ever grateful to him, no doubt." He pulled Justin to his feet, one hand still wrenching his collar and the other wrapping dutifully into his blonde locks. "And to think, if you were already naked, you would have been home free."

"Let go of me!" Justin protested, struggling.

"You don't really want to get away from me, Justin. I saw the way you looked at me the first time we met. I saw how much you lacked from what Brian gave you." He pulled the shirt tighter around the boy's throat and pulled him close to his face. "I knew that I had what you needed." He growled into Justin's ear and tightened his grasp on the boy's hair, making him wince painfully.

"Do that again, and they'll be tracing your body in chalk." Brian threatened heartily, a battered Michael at his side.

"Well, if it isn't the Dynamic Duo." Sullivan sneered, pulling Justin close. "Someone must have broken the speed limit..."

"Let him go, Sulli. This ends now." Brian growled venomously.

"Oh, I haven't even started yet. I decided to take my revenge, so that's what I'm doing."

"Your problem is with me, not him. Let. Him. Go."

"He -is- yours, Brian. Therefor, I really have no qualms about taking his life."

"The police will have something to say about that." Michael chirped.

"Do you really expect me to believe that you called the cops? Why, Brian, you would have to explain what was going on, wouldn't you? No one is privy to that information."

"I am." Justin said simply.

"How sweet. But you're not a stranger. Brian doesn't do cops."

Justin smiled, despite the situation. He knew for a fact that Brian loved a good cop sandwich when he could get one. Something about authority figures...

"The point being, Angel, that you and I are leaving now, and there is absolutely nothing Brian or his sidekick can do about it."

"But I can." Lindsay smirked as she pointed her fingers purposely into his back, simulating a gun as best as she could. Having called the police to the motel as instructed, she quickly made her way to the loft to check and see if Justin had any more information than she did. Meeting Brian outside, he let her in through the outer door of the garage and went the other way.

"Well, I always was a sucker for a lady with a gun." Sullivan chewed thoughtfully at his cheek.

"You're going to let him go. Now." She pressed harder, anger flaring around her voice. Whatever this man had done to Brian, and what shape he left Michael in, was not about to pass onto Justin if she had anything to do with it. This was one woman immune to his charms.

Sullivan laughed, but obliged. His grasp had left a spurt of hair sticking up and a wrinkled bunch in Justin's shirt, but had otherwise left him unscathed.

"The mother of his child. Charming. I suppose he would have to find a woman that would take his bullshit."

"His, maybe. But I am not about to take yours. Get on the ground and move slow, I'm not the best at controlling myself when I'm emotional you know." She pointed her fingers, grinding them into his back as he moved cautiously to the cement. As angry as she was, Lindsay could have penetrated his flesh and gone right through his spine with rage alone.

Brian graced Justin's cheek but did not falter on his way to help Lindsay. The woman was no less than amazing, and surprised him with the new abilities she displayed constantly.

"I thought you didn't have a plan." He whispered to her as he stepped on his cousin's back to hold him down.

"I didn't. Then I saw him holding Justin and I did something about it." She whispered back.

"You're a good mother." He smiled and turned away from her ear, looking at his best friend, his arms wrapped protectively around Justin. "Mikey, call the police. Sullivan has some explaining to do."

"This hasn't met an end." Sullivan promised.

"No, not until the cops arrive and get you the hell out of my life." Brian swore, crouching down and putting his knee against Sulli's back. "Then it will meet an end."

Lindsay walked to the others, a victorious smile on her face. Michael grinned.

"Talk about Wonder Lesbian! Between that and Brian kicking doors in, this has been the most exciting night of my life!" He smiled, a little dazed and extremely weary. Sullivan Kinney had been right about one thing, though. Brian did form different relationships with different people. Different types of love, but none less equal than the rest. Just -different-.

With a growl so furious it rang in loud echoes around the concrete room, Sullivan threw Brian to the floor and got to his feet. With a swift kick landing under Brian's ribs, he leveled him and ran towards the three friends to his left. Brian jumped to his feet and flung himself onto the man's back, grunting with the effort it took to sway him from his path.

"Brian!" Michael yelled as Sullivan pulled his cousin around to face him and took hold of his arms in a stalemate.

Justin ran and threw himself onto Sullivan's back, wrapping his arms around the man's neck and squeezing tight. "How do you like it?" He growled.

Michael and Lindsay joined in, grabbing the older man's legs and bringing him to the ground on his knees with as much force as they could muster.

"Oh no you don't!" Lindsay muttered, enraged.

"See, Sulli, if you had spent less time on planning revenge and more on making friends, you could be on top right now." Brian grinned, digging his fingers painfully into his cousin's upper arms as he held him. "Sorry, cousin, looks like I win again."

"You never one. My victory is just delayed." Sullivan admitted with a scowl as two squad cars shone their lights on the tangled mass of bodies. "And my revenge all the more eager to be satisfied." He released his own grip on Brian's arms and, relaxing his body, pressed himself firmly into the chilled cement floor.

The four stepped away from the man and let the police do what they did best. It was possible that stewing in prison would only serve to further his rage, but that didn't mean he would get out any time soon to exact it.

Brian sighed deeply before he could mask it. He looked at the three faces staring up at him, and saw his own exhaustion in their eyes. His past had taken its toll, but at least Brian didn't have to face that demon alone any longer.

He had Michael; gentle, compassionate Michael with a heart that cared desperately for all he met, even the ones he hated. Lost, confused Michael, undeniably naive no matter how experienced he became.

He had Lindsay; warm, strong Lindsay, the woman behind the shield held over her family and friends. Quiet, watchful Lindsay, the mother of the hurt, protector of the unprotected.

He had Justin; understanding, forgiving Justin, who's blue eyes could swallow the pain and suffering he took from Brian with one glance. Brian could get lost in those eyes.

"Remember tonight like you remembered that summer!" Sullivan yelled as they cuffed him and pushed him into the police car. He was the owner of the red Jeep they had lost the previous morning, and was just adding charges against himself.

Brian smiled thoughtfully, pushing his tongue against his cheek. "Already forgotten." He draped an arm over the shoulder's of the two shorter men on either side of him, his fingers on his right side curling themselves delicately around Lindsay's hair.

Justin leaned against the man he loved. He had no room to complain that his head hurt when he looked at Michael, but still wanted to curl up and cry in Brian's arms out of relief and fear. The adults around him stood by and watched the car carrying Sullivan depart while the others stayed to ask questions about what happened.

Brian replied simply: "He kidnapped Michael and tried to kill both me and Justin. He's psychotic and should be put away for a very long time. He has no qualms about murder."

Lindsay was the one that led them all inside after the garage emptied, tossing Brian and Michael a bottle of water and grabbing a soda for herself and Justin. She sat on the chair next to the couch and looked over the men. One beaten, the other spent, and one bright blue-eyed youth trying to absorb everything that had just happened to him. It was likely he was beginning to realize that he was a permanent part of their lives now, and that they would take care of them as one of their own. At least, that's what she -hoped- he was acknowledging.

Brian sipped his water slowly and stared at the blank television in front of him, deep in thought.

Or asleep with his eyes open.

Lindsay smiled. In college, he was not beyond practicing this while he was supposed to be studying, a soft, easy breath would float out from above some book he didn't feel like wasting his time on, and no one would be the wiser.

Glancing at Michael, she saw he had the same smile on his face. No doubt Brian began sleeping in such a way before she even knew him.

The man's eyes were drooping as Justin's hand stroked his lightly rising and falling chest, his blonde hair resting delicately on Brian's shoulder. Reaching down as slowly and gently as he could without disturbing Brian, Justin retrieved the bracelet from the floor and wrapped it back around his lover's wrist. Lindsay and Michael caught only a glimpse of the hidden past before it was once again masked from the public. He blinked a few times and lowered his head back onto Brian's chest, his fingers curled around the man's wrist as he too, fell into a content sleep.

Michael cocked his head at the two, wishing, if only momentarily, that his love from Brian was the kind bestowed upon Justin. He sighed and shrugged, getting off the couch without rousing the couple beside him. He and Lindsay made a decision, without words, that it was better to leave the two alone for the night.

Getting into the elevator, Lindsay pushed the ground floor button and stood next to Michael, hands demurely clasped in front of her.

"So." Michael said suddenly, trying not to think about what his mother would think, or how hard it would be to untie David once he got home. "What do you want to do -next- weekend?"

Mother's Child

Chilling cold rain fell angrily onto his hood, soaking the forest green cloth to a near black as the young man shivered. Baby blue eyes searched the quiet, abandoned Chicago street, an eagerness he could not shake penetrating into the far reaches of his mind. He thought about Pittsburgh, about the past he was forced to leave behind. His family, his friends; not a day had gone by where he didn't wish to sit in the safety of their company. But that was a reality he could not have, a life he had left behind five long years ago.

A weather-stiffened hand swiped forcefully at the dark blonde hair slicked over his

forehead, managing to shove the wet bangs away from his vision long enough to get a good look at the man beside him.

There had never been a warmth between the two, the chillingly stern gaze of the older man was enough to make a thousand Hells seem like a day at the park. He knew it was not good to stare at Lito, and he quickly averted his eyes. The tall, wire-thin man beside him, standing cruelly under an umbrella, was the least of his problems now.

Wrapping himself in a tight embrace that had nothing to do with the cold, he waited,

unsure how he would ever escape the wrongs he had done.

"Taylor." A familiar voice uttered at his back, obviously displeased and at the same time frightfully sadistic. "Hello, Lito." The man nodded to his cohort.

"Kriegg." He could feel his heart sink with dread at the sound of that name, at the

memory of what tortures he was capable of. No matter how skilled, how deceitful, or

how quick his reflexes had become, the blonde knew he had a long way to go before he matched his teacher, and that would prove more problematic than he was prepared to deal with. There would be no more time for training.

Pittsburgh filtered into his thoughts again: the art museum, the swings in the park he

could have stayed on forever as a child, the exploits of Liberty Avenue…the hidden bank account teeming with just under two-million dollars in stolen cash under the name 'Justin Taylor'.

"Where's the money, Kid?"

Straightening his posture, he stood his ground. "I'll tell you what I told Lito: I gave it to Roy, just ask him."

"I don't want to hear what you told Lito, I want the truth." Kriegg said gravely, a scarred hand absently rubbing over a three-day old beard. "Roy's dead, Kid."

It was no secret that Kriegg had a soft-spot for the blonde. When he had taken him in, the boy was nineteen and knew nothing about being alone. The streets harshly threw him around without a second glance and left him as anyone's raw meat. The master had taken an apprentice and now even the Kid, as he was known in their world, had betrayed him.

Roy was dead by Kid's own hand, but he looked shocked beyond belief with the

expertise of someone many years his senior; the swimming blue of his eyes glittered with tears. Lies that were part of his training took hold with the instinct to survive. "He said he had a delivery for you and it would be no problem to take mine, too." His voice wavered in disbelief and a childlike innocence found its way into his experienced face. "He can't be dead!"

"You never trusted Roy. How am I supposed to believe that you gave him almost two mil and didn't bat an eyelash, princess? He's been dead for three days, you've been missing the same. Imagine how elated I was when Lito said he tracked you down and brought you to this meeting."

"I haven't just been missing, Kriegg. I've been running errands. -Your errands-. All the deliveries were made to Floyd, and to Bissell. On time, might I add. I…didn't even know Roy was dead." He hung his head, then looked into the night, muttering sadly: "We got close over the passed four months since he got back into town. I -did- trust him." He raised his gaze to meet a pair of ferociously burning green eyes. Either the man didn't believe him or he didn't want to. "I loved him."

The rain poured between them for agonizing minutes as Kriegg scrutinized the story, his eyes studying the youth…his ward, his lover. He finally spoke.

"Twenty-four years old. Do you ever regret the path you chose?"

"I made my decisions in a solid state of mind. So no, I don't."

"You will." Kriegg nodded to the bald man who's advice to never trust the street urchin now came as wisdom. "Lito has suggested that you be the one to retrieve our money and I agree. You have forty-eight hours to locate it, or pry it from your dead -lover's- grubby little fingers and return it." He said jealously, grabbing the boy's jaw to make sure he understood. "After that time we -will- come after you. Do yourself a favor and do as you're told, Kid. Don't run, because you know we'll find you and then we'll find anyone you have ever loved. You'll watch them die before finding your way to the pits of Hell where you belong. Two days." He released his hold on the fair skin and stepped away.

\*I always have been one for a challenge.\* The blonde thought, watching Lito and Kriegg walk across the street. Taking a deep breathe, he urged his legs to walk away. Did he regret his current life? Yes. Did he regret taking the money from the wretched older man? Certainly not. Kriegg owed him for more than just the violent, often forced sex over the last five years they had been together. He -had- loved having sex with Roy, but he had also once loved Kriegg, despite the abuse. Kriegg was right about never trusting the thirty-something with a cent. Roy reminded him of life as a teenager in Pittsburgh, of the men who crossed before the new youth on their way to one-night gratification; Roy's rugged good looks and lean-muscled body were like sin in skin, that chestnut brown hair, dark eyes, it had been to familiar to let it slip through his fingers. But that life was over now. It was time to try and make it to the money without tipping off his predators and to get a warning to the people he loved before their lives became endangered.

Now was the time to run.

\*

Brian looked across the room at his young lover, every nerve on high alert. Justin had been standing by the window for hours without saying a word as to why. The blonde looked like he didn't want to be bothered but the silence was beginning to frighten him. Justin's bare feet had to have been frozen by now as the rain poured in shadows over his pale skin. Brian took a deep breath and decided to be the first one to speak.

"Are you okay?" He asked quietly, as if his voice would shatter windows after being

dormant for so long. "Did something happen at school?"

"Just thinking." Justin muttered, hearing the man step up beside him before he felt warm hands wrap under his shirt and across his stomach. He shivered against Brian's touch and melted into the man's body.

"Dare I ask about what?"

"Us." Justin leaned his head back and looked into Brian's eyes.

"What about us?" Brian wondered, worrying if he had done something to upset the boy even if he would never admit to caring if he did or not.

"Our sex life."

"Are you trying to panic me?"

Justin giggled and shook his head, that one shy gesture enough to break the tension as he spun in Brian's arms and leaned his face just below the man's ear. "Nothing's wrong with it. I was just...forget it."

"You know you can ask me anything you want to about sex." Brian kissed the top of the boy's head. It had been a long time since Justin had been so coquettish about anything.

"It's...personal."

"Sex tends to be." Brian hugged Justin closer, his voice a bare whisper.

"It's a...fantasy. I heard some people talking about it before class this morning. I thought, maybe?" Justin turned his baby blue eyes to study Brian's reaction.

"You have to tell me what it is before I agree to it." The man trailed his hand down

Justin's side and curled beneath his ass, finger lightly stroking the denim barrier between him and paradise. "There's no telling what your mind has been up to."

Justin turned his head, blushing.

"If you can't say it then you're not ready for it." Brian released Justin at arm's length.

"I can! I am! I just...don't know how to put it into words." Justin gritted his teeth and

sighed with frustration. He turned away from Brian and pressed himself against the

freezing window glass to stave off the erection already begging to be noticed.

"Would it help if you wrote it down?" Brian asked eagerly. If it was getting to Justin so much, it had to be an all-night event.

Justin smiled and blushed again because he couldn't help himself. "Doubtful."

"Then maybe I can guess..." Brian stood directly behind Justin, pressing his groin against the boy, his hand slipping against the glass and down to the blonde's erection. Justin gasped, hot breath coming in white steam against the cold window. "It has to be...hot." He rubbed his hand roughly over Justin's jeans. "Really...extreme." His fingers trailed up to unzip Justin's fly, dancing inside. "Too..." He wrapped his fingers around Justin's cock and squeezed. "Hard, to say out loud."

"Oh..." Justin moaned.

"It's...certainly not vanilla." Brian moved his hand up, down, slowly but with a firm grip. "It's something we haven't tried before. I bet I know what it is..."

Justin's head pressed against Brian's chest, red tongue pressed tightly between his teeth.

"You want to do a little pretending." Brian pressed himself harder against Justin's

backside making the boy groan with pleasure. "I wonder what has been going through your mind to get you so..." He squeezed the base of Justin's cock, two fingers cupping underneath his balls and bringing them into the rough grip. "Worked up."

Justin squirmed under the intensity, hands flying backwards to Brian's ass and pulling

him closer. "Please." He begged. "Say it. I want you to say it." He said with a whisper

husky with desire.

"You want me to say...it." Brian said, head bent low to Justin's ear as he pushed the boy into the glass. "Pain." He thrust himself against Justin and felt he would break through his slacks if the cloth didn't find their way to the floor soon.

Justin groaned, biting his lip. "Yes." He whimpered weakly, as if the very next touch

would take all his strength and bring him crashing to his knees.

"I've heard about this...the corrupting of America's youth...a very bad, bad thing is

happening..." Brian whispered to the boy, biting his earlobe. "Do you want me to break into my own home, Justin? Do you want me to take you by surprise? Hurt you? Make you scream? Answer me." He pulled upwards on Justin's raging erection making him cry out. "Answer me, Justin. Call you names, be rough? Do you want me to hold your throat until you nearly pass out and keep fucking you until I know you'll be sore for the next week? Fake the ultimate of intrusions? Push you to your limits?" He drew each word out in slow, deliberate breaths of air to Justin's ear sending goose bumps like a tiny army down his fair skin.

Justin took a deep breath, swallowed, and nodded because he could not find a voice to tell Brian what he wanted.

"You want to be a willing rape victim, Justin?" Brian wrapped his other hand in the

blonde hair and forced the boy to look at him. "Is that what you want, little boy?"

"Yes!" Justin moaned, knees collapsing. Only Brian's strong hold on his hair and dick

kept him from falling.

Brian released the boy and let him sprawl on the floor. He stood over Justin, hands on hips. Justin looked questioningly up at his lover, fear and embarrassment washing over him at the thought of Brian disapproving of his request.

The man finally spoke, hair already a mess, cheeks burning with power and excitement. "If you want me to do that, then you can't be expecting me when I do." Brian dropped his designer shoe against Justin's crotch and pressed down hard enough to make Justin's lips tremble. "Wash up and go to bed. I'll see you later."

"When?" Justin asked, hands barely able to hold him up.

"Good night, Justin." Brian said and turned to leave. "Make it a cold shower. I don't want you coming without me." He shut the door behind him and set the alarm, leaving Justin a quivering mass on the floor.

It had been a fantasy for Brian, but he never wanted to put it on Justin to decide, thinking the boy was too innocent no matter how much time they spent together. The power of taking him, ravishing him, with the boy crying for mercy was thrilling. Shivers shook his spine as he rode the elevator down, away, imagining the reckless abandon Justin wanted, all with a restraint and control the real thing could never hold; an intimacy between them that would be just behind their wailing, agonizing, excruciatingly marvelous sex.

\*

Justin shoved his hands against the shower wall, fingers spread as far apart as he could manage to keep from relieving the tension. The water poured over him like ice, his hair washing over his eyes as he pressed his face against the stall and took a deep breath.

Visions of silence and being utterly alone made his stomach jump with anticipation,

waiting for something to happen, knowing what it would be, but not knowing when. He couldn't see himself sleeping tonight, no matter what Brian wanted. He was too damn excited! Justin took another deep breath and held it, hearing his own future footsteps alone in the house, padding across the wood floor as he pretended to have a normal night. It was like watching himself in a movie where the audience knew what was going to happen, saw the dark figure hiding in the shadows, and tried to warn the victim before it was too late. It would be too late for this victim. That was the plan.

Brian arrived at Michael's apartment and had managed to calm himself on the outside enough to be presentable. He stood at his best friend's counter, watching a purple mess in his blender intently. The man knew he had to focus on something other than Justin waiting alone, vulnerable, waiting. He raised his eyebrows expectantly and made a disgusted sound in the back of his throat. "Are you sure this is going to be good, Mikey?"

"Vanilla frozen yogurt, blueberries, strawberries, and peaches, how could it not be?"

Brian scoffed. "Sure." He couldn't help but smile at his friend's enthusiasm. "That's

what you said about the 'Black Cat Blitz' you showed me how to make in high school,

and we nearly ended up in the hospital from throwing up so much."

"Maybe it's just the way you made it…you're not exactly the most experienced cook, you know." His best friend teased.

"Heh." Brian scoffed and went to sit on the couch.

"What's with you tonight? You can't sit still." Michael noticed.

"I'm fine." Brian smiled back at the man with his most innocent look. Of course, the

more innocent he looked the more trouble he was causing and Michael knew it.

"Yeah, sure. And since you're not running from being blamed for something at all, or

trying to find an accomplice for the night, why don't you tell me what's got you so

worked up?"

Brian swallowed, memories of his hand stroking Justin's cock while figuring out what

the boy couldn't say burning into his mind. "Nothing, Mikey." He whispered gruffly and wished immediately he hadn't spoken.

Michael laughed. "Jesus! You're really up to something!"

"It's private." Brian stood up. "Now let's try that purple goo before I lose my nerve."

\*

Justin dried off, hands shaking. Was he sure he could handle this? Would Brian really

hurt him? He took yet another breath and released it, forcing himself to calm down. It was pretend. The suspense was real, the sex would be real, but Brian wasn't really a stranger with his sights set on pummeling the blonde all alone in the loft. The man knew Justin's weaknesses; his likes, dislikes, what hurt too much and what made him howl until the neighbors called the cops. Brian might slap him around, but nothing that would leave a permanent mark. In fact, Justin was counting on it. He wouldn't push too far. The boy trusted his lover.

So why was the teenager suddenly regretting what he asked for? Justin smiled with glee and realized he was afraid for a reason. This was part of the game.

The phone rang, bringing Justin from his silent reverie with a scream and jump that

nearly knocked him down.

"Is Justin there?" A quiet male voice asked.

"This is him. Who is this?" He asked curiously but was answered only with a dial tone. Justin shivered. Brian. It was Brian building the fright. He didn't like the sound of the man, Brian or not.

The phone rang again and Justin threw himself away from the phone as if it was an

impending explosion.

"Jesus, Justin! Get a grip." He told himself and answered. "Hello?"

"Is Justin there?" A voice, different from the last one, asked meaningfully.

"Speaking. Who is this?" He demanded, liking this person even less than the first as he was once more greeted with the answers of dial tone. "Hello? Fucker." He hung up the phone. "Brian, have you done this before?" Justin hugged himself and shivered, which had nothing to do with the cold.

\*

Brian eyed his best friend's expectant gaze and finally groaned. "Fine! Call Justin and

ask if I'm there."

"Why?"

"Do you want to play or not?"

Michael nodded and picked up the phone, dialing Brian's number.

Justin shrieked and grabbed the phone. "This isn't funny, Brian!"

"Uh, hi." Michael stammered. "I guess he's not there, then?"

"No. Sorry, Michael."

"Are you alright? You seem upset?"

"Upset? No! I'm...it's just raining, and I'm getting creeped out."

"Do you want me to come over?" Michael offered and Brian shook his head violently.

"No!" Justin laughed nervously. "No." He calmed himself. "I'm fine. Brian will be home soon, I'll tell him you called."

"Thanks. Good night."

"Night."

Michael hung up and crossed his arms. "You never let him get freaked out. It's way

passed dark and...the look you're giving me tells me that it's on purpose. What's going on?"

"Gotta go, Mikey. Don't worry. Your Sunshine's perfectly safe."

Michael grumbled as his friend left. "He's not -my- Sunshine."

\*

Jennifer Taylor never expected to see her first born son again, let alone at her new condo with its unpublished address and in the middle of the night. She gazed at him with wonder, afraid to let go of the door frame. Words failed her and she fell into the young man's arms.

"William." She sighed. "Baby."

"Jennifer." The Kid gently shoved the woman back to her feet, his eyes stoney with fury.

Jennifer straightened herself properly. "Won't you come in?"

"Where's Justin?"

"He's not here."

"He's not with Craig, either. Where the fuck is he?" Will demanded bitterly. "Where's

my brother, Jennifer?"

"Honey, your father sent you away because it was best for all of us. Justin included. I

don't think it's a good idea to let you near him again."

Will raised his hand as if to slap his mother and the woman fell to her knees already

sobbing.

"I'm so sorry! We had no other choice! The drugs, the...men...William, we did what we thought was best for everyone!"

"You threw an innocent kid out onto the streets because he wasn't your ideal of an heir."

"It wasn't me! William, please believe me!"

"Oh, excuse me! Craig threw me out, so it's not your fault. I'm really sure you tried to reason with him! I'm only going to say this one last time: where is Justin?"

"I don't know!"

"What?" Will crouched by his mother and pulled her face to meet his. "You're his

Goddamned mother, you had better have been good to that kid or so help me-"

"He's gay...too." She whimpered.

Will swore under his breath, inhaling deeply and counting to ten before he massacred the

woman. "He's out on the streets? You and Craig kicked him out?"

"Craig...William, please. Leave us alone!"

"You bitch! Do you know how much danger he's in? And that's not even counting the

shit I've come home to warn him about!"

"And who's fault is that?" Jennifer shrieked. "You're the bad influence! You were the

one always bringing him along on your little flits with the other side of the law! It's no wonder he turned out wrong! We could have all been happy if you had never been born!" She hissed.

William drew back and slapped her, grabbing the collar of her nightgown and wrenching her to her feet. "Ever stop to think that you spawned two kids who ended up the same way? It was you, Jennifer. We had nothing to do with it. Fucking bitch!" He threw her to the ground. "I'm going to take care of Justin. I should have come back and rescued him from this high suburban Hell a long time ago! The shit I've gone through is nothing compared to the soul massacre you've put upon him!" Will ran down the driveway, hoping Justin wouldn't be the first one to feel Kriegg's wrath when the man figured out his Kid had skipped town.

\*

Jennifer crawled back inside, kicking the door shut while still on the carpet trying to

control her tears. She made herself get up and put the bolt on before running to the

phone. She was sure Justin was out at Babylon, but if she could get him out of Will's

reach it would be better for them all.

If she could have her way, both boys would be safe and happy with her, gay or straight. She had learned a lot about mothering with her first son banished, his name an unmentionable within their family. But there wasn't a day she didn't miss him,

wondering if he was safe or even alive, hungry or fed, cold or content. It was too late to reach him now, to gain his trust with an apology, but she was damned if she couldn't save Justin.

\*

Justin paced the kitchen for what seemed like hours, fully dressed so Brian could rip the clothes from his body with all the violence he wanted. He even had shoes on as the clock ticked only a half hour from the time Brian left. Justin groaned and knew he needed to be doing something when Brian broke in.

The teenager grabbed a ready canvas and his acrylics, setting the style section out

beneath him. He dipped the first paintbrush and held it above the unblemished surface, a gob of bright ruby aching to make its mark. Justin closed his eyes and found his instincts taking over, the brush moving toward the familiar curves of a face, an eye, Brian's nose and wicked smile. The artist could picture the things going through that mind and brought them out through violet irises, curulean lips, canary yellow hair with orange sunset highlights. Justin saw long legs mounting each silent stair to the sixth floor and groaned, eyes flying open to see his masterpiece full of a vibrancy only the living man could match.

It had been an hour and forty-three minutes.

Justin set the canvas against the wall to dry and cleaned up his mess, glaring at the clock. He walked to the phone, walked away, decided not to call Daphne to just pass the time.

"You have got to get a hold on yourself! You know Brian will draw this out for as long as he can, and his libido is unfairly stronger than yours!" Justin swore. "A book. I need to read something." He told himself and sighed. Brian didn't own many books worth reading that would actually remove his mind from a sexual train of thought.

The phone rang for the fourth time that night and Justin managed to not only scream but hit the floor with hands covering his head. Music. He needed music. No more silence for him tonight.

As the thunder rolled like a broken record, Justin picked up the phone. "Hello?"

"Justin?"

"Oh, hi mom."

"Honey, I'm glad you're home. Is Brian with you?"

Justin blushed as if the woman knew what they had planned. "No, but he'll be back

soon."

Jennifer took a deep breath. "I wish you weren't alone..."

"Mom, I can practically see you wringing your hands. What's wrong?" Justin looked out the dark windows and gripped the phone a little tighter.

"Justin," She shook her head. If he knew his big brother was in town Justin would go

right for him. He never forgave either of them for throwing his idol to the streets but the boy just didn't know what was best for him at the time. "It's nothing. The storm, I know you get scared if you're alone."

"Mom!" Justin laughed. "I'm fine. The loft is locked up and Brian just stepped out to get some hot fudge...for the ice cream!" He added when he saw his mother's expression in his mind. "Get your mind out of the gutter." \*There isn't room for the both of us in there...\* He thought.

"Good night, honey." Jennifer sighed. "And stay inside."

"I will. Night, mom." Justin hung up and groaned, stalking to the radio and filling the loft with the loudest music he could find. If the neighbors complained tonight for the music, it wouldn't be the last time they were disturbed.

\*

Will searched Liberty Avenue, stopping men and asking if they had seen a kid, about

nineteen, who looked just like him but with lighter hair. Strangely enough, his inquiry

gained results only ten minutes after its start.

"Yeah, I've seen him." The man smiled.

"Great! Where is he?"

The man shrugged. "Don't know. He's always with Brian Kinney now, after what

happened."

"What happened?" Will asked, eyes already searching for his brother while the man

spoke.

"He got gay bashed, what rock have you been under?"

Will studied the man and winced when he saw it was the truth. Justin had been hurt, and no one could even find him to keep him informed. "Thanks. Brian Kinney you said?"

"Yeah, but he's unlisted. No one knows his number except his friends."

"You're pretty knowledgeable about him."

"Everyone's an expert on Brian Kinney." The man laughed. "Unless you're new in town and came here after Justin. That's what I hear, anyway."

"Great, thanks."

"Oh, you might want to try the diner." He pointed. "Kinney usually hangs out there."

"Right."

"Unless you wanted to come home with me?"

"I'm much more than you can handle." Will snarled and ran toward Liberty Diner.

\*

Justin fell on the bed, music pushing the thunder and rain to a distant whisper. He

grabbed one of his art history books and started flipping pages. The arousal had finally worn off and now he was just tired. Brian would be very disappointed.

A yawn rounded Justin's mouth and he didn't even bother stiffling it, blinking against the works of Monet as his head leaned to rest on it. Maybe he would be better off if he just too a short nap...

The door alarm blinked and disarmed, a universal card slipping through its slot with ease. A thin gloved hand pushed the door open slowly, knowing it made noise on its track. The music would have muffled it, but that was beside the point. Caution made it all go smoothly, at least in his experience.

Most of the lights were turned off, casting the vast front room in shadows. A blue hue floated dreamily from the bedroom, falling gently on the blonde's softly sighing form. Asleep. He was asleep.

The tall man moved to the bed, straddling Justin, his face uncomfortably on the pages of a school book. He bent his thin body slowly, still on his knees and not touching the boy, and inhaled his freshly cleaned scent. It was light, like coconuts, but mixed with the raw smell of paint. The dark figure gently lifted the boy's fingers out from beneath him and examined the paint smears with a smile.

The young artist was about to get what was coming to him.

The dark man's head snapped back as someone else entered the loft, creeping through the heavy music like it was a thick forest holding him back. Breathing heavy, the man got off of Justin and found his way to the closet, slipping inside and closing it almost completely. He watched as the second man came into the bedroom and gazed heatedly upon the boy.

Brian examined his prize and wished the boy hadn't fallen asleep. If he was having a

nightmare, Justin wouldn't want to cooperate with the uncooperative act. There was

something amiss with the scene, something wrong in a way he couldn't figure out. The music was loud, Justin's newest painting was against the wall, and the boy had been studying...nothing extraordinarily different from many nights. But still, something wasn't in the right place.

He stepped to the bed without a sound and turned off the music, wrapping a hand over Justin's face and hovering there. It was now or never.

Brian clamped Justin's mouth and jerked his head up, tearing the blonde's shirt off

instantly with his free hand. The boy struggled with shock as Brian grabbed the cloth in his teeth and ripped it into two strips. He used his mouth again to bind Justin's wrists behind his back before taking the other piece and wrapping it with a violent knot over his wide blue eyes. Brian wouldn't cover Justin's mouth again so he could ask his lover to stop if he got scared or hurt. All Justin had to do was say Brian's name and the make believe would be over.

Grabbing a handful of Justin's hair Brian flipped him onto his back and pressed himself heavily onto his victim, crushing his arms.

"Don't scream. We can do this the hard way or the easy way." Brian whispered in a gruff voice. "If you alert someone, it's definitely going to be the hard way." He shoved his knee between Justin's legs and stopped right below his groin so all he did was spread him open. "Nod if you understand."

Justin nodded, mouth open with heavy breaths. He threw himself against Brian suddenly, bucking beneath the man and managing to roll off the bed. The blonde ran blindly passed the bed before Brian grabbed the shirt at his wrists and yanked him back.

"No!" Justin screamed, fighting as his body was pinned once more beneath Brian.

"What did I say?" Brian grabbed Justin's hair and held him still. "No screaming!" He

slapped Justin's mouth and waited for the second it took for the boy to confirm that it

was okay by not telling him to stop.

"Okay." Justin whimpered.

"That's a good boy." Brian ran his fingers through that soft, familiar hair that now felt so energized, so different, going through his hands. "You know you want this." Brian hissed through his teeth, erection already pushing its limits behind restrictive cloth.

Justin shook his head. "No. No. NO!" He said, sure to keep his voice down like he was told.

Lito's eyes widened from the closet. He was sent here to capture the Kid's brother and use him for ransom. It was his order to rape and ruin the teenager as only he could: severe and bloody violence. What was he supposed to tell Kriegg when the reason he couldn't follow orders was that another rapist had made it there at the same time?

"Say you want it!" Brian bellowed, forcing Justin's legs open with his knee once more

and hurling himself against the boy's most private area.

"No!" Justin pleaded, tears streaming down his face.

"Say it." Brian said, hovering over the boy's face. "Or I'll hit you again."

"NO!" Justin screamed, struggling under the man's weight.

Brian shuddered and hoped Justin knew it was him. He felt like he should tell the boy to make sure, break the fantasy for safety's sake.

"Get off me!" Justin ordered, trying desperately to close his legs.

"This is going to happen you little shit." Brian grabbed Justin's cotton pants and tore

them down the front seam, exposing just the smallest hint of tight dark blue underwear.

Justin squirmed under his lover, forcing himself to ride the adrenaline and not get hard yet. He was busy untying his arms. If Brian thought he was going to be an easy victim, the man had another thing coming.

Brian grabbed the boy's cock with such ferocity Justin screamed with surprise and

couldn't help but react by dropping his shields. His erection met Brian's with an eager

pulse, bringing a victorious grunt from his attacker.

"That's what I'm looking for. No such thing as an innocent anymore." Brian rubbed his hand over Justin's underwear roughly. "Now you can't say you don't want it."

"Please, don't." Justin begged.

Brian grabbed Justin's underwear and pulled in, letting Justin's legs close in order to get them down because they wouldn't tear. And they were Brian's favorite pair. He shoved Justin's legs open again and grabbed his cock.

"Don't..." Justin sniffled, his tears darkening the cloth around his eyes.

Brian's left hand traveled north while the right pumped Justin's erection nearly to its end. He wrapped his fingers around the blonde's neck and cut off Justin's air supply with a sharp gasp. The boy shook his head violently, pressed heavily on the pillow. Brian let his hand up just enough to let Justin talk if he needed to.

He stuck two fingers in Justin's hot mouth and wet them, letting go of his neck

completely and shoving inside the boy's tight hole without preparing him first. Justin

moaned with pleasure as Brian moved his fingers in and out, thrusting harder. He pulled out suddenly, Justin murmuring with disappointment.

"I knew you would like it." Brian moaned, barely able to keep from sinking into Justin

completely. "Beg me to hurt you."

Justin shook his head. Brian gripped the boy and held it, pulling it away from his young body.

"Do it now." Brian growled, slapping the other side of Justin's face with the back of his hand. He clenched his hand into a fist and shook it to keep from releasing all his strength on the boy's face.

Justin whimpered, almost untied. "Don't hurt me, please. I'll do whatever you want."

"You'll do whatever I want? I want you to be in pain!" Brian slapped him again.

Lito held back a groan from his hiding place, hand rubbing over his cock at speeds far exceeding Brian and Justin. He bit his lip and pressed his head into the designer suits at his back.

"Please..." Justin moaned, slowly sliding his hands out from under him while Brian

focused on slapping his face. He slapped Brian back, slamming his body off the bed.

Justin got up and ran, tearing the blindfold off as he ran. Brian was right behind him,

knocking him to the hardwood floor with his body weight.

Justin gave a cry of shock and went sprawling, turning around to fight Brian's hands

coming straight for him. Brian gathered Justin's wrists and held them above his head,

kissing him ruggedly, scratching the stubble of a fresh shadowed beard against Justin's skin until it was raw.

Lito crawled from the closet and went to the scene for a closer look. He swallowed back a rocking orgasm and pressed himself against the nearest glass plate to Brian's bedroom.

Brian reached into his pocket and got out a travel packet of lube, hiding it from Justin

with a choking kiss. The boy freed his hands and pulled at Brian's hair. The man kicked himself out of his work slacks, not wearing underwear to begin with. His shirt flew open as Justin clawed for help, buttons shooting across the floor with tiny clattering sparks catching the blue bedroom light.

Lito took his gun from the small of his back once he got his breath back and aimed at

Brian's back.

The man covered his dick with lube, shoving into Justin without the slightest warning

and covering the yelp with his mouth.

"Oh..." Justin moaned blissfully. "Oh, God!" He couldn't help but scream at the top of

his lungs as soon as Brian released his lips.

"Dirty bitch!" Brian grabbed Justin's jaw and pulled him into another kiss, thrusting into the boy with everything he had over and over again.

"OH!" Justin groaned, wrapping his legs around his lover.

"You coming?" Brian asked gruffly, pulling out until only the head remained then

shoving fully inside of Justin.

"Yes!" Justin screamed, legs spasming as stars rocketed through his vision. Brian

followed his call, pushing into his lover deeper than ever before.

"Ughn!" Brian moaned, laying to rest without the strength to even control his breathing.

Lito smiled and steadied his aim. It was a hell of a way to go out. He only hoped when it came his time, he could die the same way.

A gunshot exploded frosted glass over Brian and Justin, sending Lito to his belly on the bedroom floor.

Justin screamed, covered with the entirety of Brian's body though no one knew what had happened except the man standing in Brian's doorway.

"Get up, Lito!" Will shouted, gun trained expertly on his enemy. "And leave the gun on the floor!"

"Will!" Justin gasped at hearing the voice.

"Hey, kiddo. Ready for some action?" Will asked, eyeing the ass of Justin's lover who's identity had been well known enough for tracking by former tricks. "More then you're already getting, I mean."

Lito got up slowly from the floor, fingers laced together on his head. He would be no

good to Kriegg dead, and he was especially valuable with the information he had

gathered about the sordid sexual preferences of the younger Taylor. But he had been in this business a lot longer than Will, and he was quicker and much, much stronger despite his thin looks. Dropping to his knees and grabbing the gun, Lito rolled to the side in one fluid movement. He fired twice in the direction of Will's shots before the younger man dove for the floor shouting for Brian and Justin to stay down.

The loft grew dreadfully quiet, Brian's hand covering Justin's mouth to keep the boy

from shrieking and distracting the man by the door. Brian pressed himself against Justin, proving that he was still solid and ready to give the boy protection with his last breath. He met the wild blue gaze with his eyes and tried to calm the boy wordlessly. They hadn't moved much since the firing started, their exposed skin only a breath away from splinters of bullet-destroyed glass scattered over the floor. Brian hoped Justin wouldn't get cut being on the bottom, his own back littered with shards and thin lines of blood.

"Nice of you to join us, Kid!" Lito shouted and moved to a stance closer to the bed. He crushed himself to the floor out of the path of Will's answering shots.

Brian looked at the first man, vowing he'd tear an explanation out of somebody tonight whether they liked it or not. He ran a hand soothingly over Justin's hair and kissed the boy on the forehead, wishing they could move further out of range. He looked again at Will questioningly and was surprised when the younger man seemed to read his thoughts, shaking his blonde head in the negative. Will looked even more furious than Brian felt as he moved behind the island counter and peered around the side trying to get a better view of the enemy.

His studious eyes were harder than Justin's but no different in color, his face in sharper lines looked older but no less smooth. Their height was only inches apart, weight seemed to be off by no more than ten pounds of Justin's well-fed happiness. Will was thinner than his brother from years of the life that constructed his body movements into a cagey near-military riggidness. And the anger...the anger in his face was something Brian prayed Justin would never grow into.

Will never spoke and gave away his position. He eyed the bedroom and then Brian,

raising an eyebrow in question to the man.

Brian craned his neck and watched the room behind shattered glass doors and lowered himself again, shaking his head. He couldn't see Lito, either.

Will silently cursed and crawled closer to the naked men, staying on the ground with his right hand wrapped around the gun. Just because they couldn't see Lito didn't mean he had a blocked vision of them, too.

"Are you okay?" Will mouthed to his baby brother, still feet away.

Justin nodded, eyes full of worry. He had no idea Will was even still alive, let alone

toting a gun and his own set of bad guys.

Will breathed a silent thank you and focused on the situation. If Lito was here it was

necessary to believe Kriegg was not far behind. They had found Justin, they had known to look for him because he was the only thing in Pittsburgh Will would ever come back for. In more careless days of his naive youth, he had admitted this and not had a second thought about guarding his secrets close.

Justin watched his brother with the same admiration he held before. Memories came to him of tagging along with the older man and never feeling alone or left out, of feeling protected, of being watched with a loving and cautious eye. They visited dark places with darker eyes memorizing every detail of their young bodies, but Will's hand never left Justin's. He would stand his ground next to anyone who dared challenge the younger boy's safety. In Will's logic, Justin was safer with him in the worst of places than he was with the tyrannous Craig Taylor and his moral throne of righteousness. He had been right then, though the eldest Taylor had mellowed drastically after ridding himself of his first born son.

Lito sighted down the barrel of his nine millimeter with a grin so wide on his face it

stretched the skin to an inch of its life. He found Brian's back and steadied himself. This man was the only one that Kriegg hadn't mentioned to take alive and Lito would be damned if he didn't kill someone tonight.

Justin glanced into the bedroom and saw Lito's shadow behind the bed. He saw the gun from his angle on the floor and reacted before thinking about what he was doing. The teenager flung Brian up and away from him, landing the man on his butt only a foot away as the bullet grazed the air where Brian had just been, grazing the air above Justin's bare chest.

Will fired back and kept firing, puncturing the bed but not the wiry man behind it. He

grabbed Justin and pulled him behind the island before stopping to reload. Justin curled his fingers into Will's shirt with the fright and intensity of a small child, trying his best to bury his face in the man as if that would make it all go away. He could be afraid now, he had been heroic enough for one night.

Brian crawled to his lover and pried the boy's fingers away from their only chance at

making an escape without the assistance of body bags. He held the boy close, rubbing his hand over Justin's back knowing he would definitely have to thank the boy later. Justin settled comfortably against Brian and sighed when the man kissed his sweat-soaked hair.

"You two get the fuck out of here." Will ordered under his breath.

Justin snapped his head up. "Will-"

"Now, Justin. Go, I'll follow." He nodded to the still open door.

Brian knew now what had been bothering him when he first saw Justin. The alarm had already been off and he hadn't noticed. He silently cursed himself and urgently moved Justin to the door under cover of the kitchen. Justin no longer protested and stayed low as they made it into the hallway.

He crawled into the elevator and wrapped himself into a tight ball in the corner, head

rested on his knees.

"Hey." Brian gently chided him, pulling his arms from their embrace over his knees. "It's okay." He made the boy snuggle against him again as he reached up to pull the lift door down.

"No!" Justin started to shout before Brian muffled it by pressing the boy into his chest. "No." He whispered and shook his head. "We can't leave without Will!"

"Shh. We won't. I promise." Brian said, holding onto the door halfway down. He

wouldn't admit to the boy that the only reason they were waiting for the second gunman was because the elevator made too much noise operating for them to make a quiet exit.

Justin seemed content with Brian's promise and hid his face in the crook of the man's

neck, body rigid with the effort it took to not begin an unending fit of violent sobbing.

Brian quietly hummed a wordless song in Justin's ear to calm him, the tune that of their own rhythm, the melody a silent breath, a smile, a shared moment. He felt Justin relax in his arms and watched as Will fired off two more rounds before edging his way to the elevator.

Lito returned the shots but didn't move. He knew Will wouldn't get far, and he knew they all needed Justin to get to the money. The thin man let Will escape with the other two, sure that they would meet again very, very soon.

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Will met them at the elevator door and shook his head. "No." He said and pointed to the stairs.

"What the hell are you talking about!" Brian whispered harshly.

"Stairs."

"No way, this psycho can beat us by two minutes to the lobby if we take the stairs and leave him to the elevator. And Justin's not up to running."

"We're not going to the lobby, and let me worry about Justin." Will groaned quietly and grabbed Justin from Brian, leading the boy away.

Brian had no room to argue and kept up with the two younger men. Will pulled out a card and gained them access to the loft three floors below.

"Try to find some clothes." Will ordered Brian, bending low to whisper something to

Justin.

Brian didn't know his neighbors but he knew somebody lived here. He moved to the

closet and closed his eyes thankfully. They lived here -and- had style.

Picking out a pair of pants and button-down shirt for himself Brian grabbed a smaller pair of cotton sleeper pants for Justin and an undershirt. It looked like the man had a lot of female visitors who never stayed long enough to leave more than a few articles of random lounge clothes. The women's things would fit Justin and weren't too feminine.

When he returned, Will had Justin sitting on the couch watching cartoons. Brian moved close and set the things down with a smile.

Justin didn't look up at him and Will brought an arm around Brian's shoulders and led

him away.

"He'll be fine, let him watch cartoons for a second."

"He only watches cartoons when he's sick."

Will shook his head. "Maybe when there aren't gunshots still ringing in his ears. He's

scared and that's just as bad as being sick. I'm his brother, I know."

"You're his brother and you've brought all this shit crashing down on his head. Where

have you been for the past few years of his life? I've been right here, and I know what happened and how to deal with his fears. I think it would be a great idea for you to disappear."

"If I could erase this, I would! If I could take away every ounce of pain anyone has ever caused him, I would die to do it!" Will countered with a violently angry whisper. "But I can't. I came here to save him, not to bring anything out to hurt him. We have to get out of town."

"You are not taking him." Brian said flatly, arms crossed over his chest.

"You expect they'll follow me out of here? He's the key to what they want, Kinney! They won't stop hunting him until they have what they want, and then they'll kill him." He lowered his voice even more. "No, they'll torture him, then maybe they'll kill him."

"I don't believe you."

"And I don't give a shit what you believe! He'll come with me, ask him. Justin will

always follow me to the end's of the Earth if he could. Now he can."

"That life isn't for him. He still gets afraid of the dark! Your world is not suited for a

kid." "If I don't know that first hand then I don't know who does."

"If you take him, you'll destroy everything he is." Brian protested, prepared to fight this until his dying day.

"Don't you get it? If I don't take him they'll be the ones to destroy him and the worst

you've seen, the worst you can imagine, is mild in their eyes."

Brian looked to the couch and wanted desperately to hold Justin, to turn off the cartoons and take their place as his comforter. He sighed. "If you take him then I'm coming with you."

"What?" Will asked, the surprise showing on his face.

"I said I'm coming with you."

"You would give up everything you had to make sure Justin is safe?"

"Yes." He said instantly, without having to think about it. The loft was nothing without Justin, his life was trick after trick and nothing special without the smiling Sunshine to come home to. His work meant nothing, his days and nights before the boy seemed like a distant bad dream of monotony and depression. Brian would not give this up.

Will held out his hand. "I apologize for judging you and your devotion to my brother

based on the reactions of you by others. Protect him and you're a friend in my book."

Brian glared at the younger man. "It's going to take a lot more than your apology for

misjudging me to get you a space in my good graces." He snapped. "Getting us out of this alive is a start. Never showing your face after you do is a good second approach."

"Fine." Will withdrew his hand. "We don't have to like each other, but as long as we

have a common goal I suggest we get moving."

Brian walked to Justin, unable to help himself from admiring the stranger's home on his way. The furniture was less expensive then Brian's, which pleased him, but the television was bigger and the surround sound more extreme. He vowed to get that worked on when the things in his loft got stolen or maimed because they left the door wide open.

"Baby?" He knelt down in front of the boy, between the TV and Justin. He slowly

reached up and touched the flawless face. "Justin?"

"Hmm? Brian?" He asked sleepily, a child fresh from a bad dream seeing that his mother was right there when he woke up.

"I'm here, Justin. It's okay. Do you want to get dressed?" He asked, holding up the light blue bottoms speckled with clouds, stars, and half-moons. "These are cute, huh?"

Justin smiled sweetly. "Yeah."

"I bet I could find a top that matched if you wanted me to."

Justin shook his head. "Can I keep them?"

"Of course." Brian reached up and pulled Justin down to hug him. Will watched with a

curious smile on his face.

Justin had never been one so easily pulled from his cartoons, especially when he was sick or hurt, or as scared as he had been just seconds ago. The boy had grown up significantly and Will had been forced to miss it. But he was happy next to Brian, already smiling, blushing, laughing, and joking about keeping the ridiculous pants.

Brian knew Justin would keep the pants. He counted on it, picturing how adorable he

looked in pastels. The man gave Justin a warm smile and hugged him again, eyes cast over the boy's shoulder at Will with a 'see, let me handle it' look he knew the older Taylor could read.

Will nodded and went to look around the kitchen for food they could take with them,

wishing he knew where it would be safe. It would be a long trip, no matter where they went.

Brian got Justin dressed and switched off the TV. "I have to call some people and warn them."

"Deb has to know!" Justin chimed in, stronger and more adult now that he was dressed. He looked Will right in the eye and gave him a look that dared him to argue.

"You want to call her?" Brian asked.

"No, she'll try to get things out of me."

"True. Go grab some socks and try to find shoes. Jackets, something to keep warm."

Brian caressed the boy's face and let him run back to the bedroom.

Will stood back from the phone and let Brian use it, watching his brother shuffle around finding things and not bothered in the least about taking them. He smiled almost proudly and leaned against the counter.

"Deb? Hi, Brian. No, we're fine. Sorry, I didn't realize what time it was. Listen, no,

Justin's fine." The man paused and rolled his eyes, letting Debbie talk. "No. No, Justin's fine. We're going to take a break from Pittsburgh for awhile. Yes, yes." He sneered. "No, I haven't told anyone else. If I wanted it kept a secret I would have just left but I wanted to let you know. Yes, we're fine. Good. No, he needs a little break, some sun and fun."

Will shook his head. "Tell her the truth and maybe she'll know when to run when Lito

and Kriegg figure out who Justin is close to, who you both have in common, and bring them to their knees trying to pry loose information they don't have."

"Who was that?" Debbie demanded.

"Justin's brother. He's in trouble and came home to drag everyone else through it. We have to run until we think of something better."

Will lowered his face, heat rising up in his cheeks.

Debbie gasped. "Oh, honey...where are you going to go?"

"We can't tell you, Deb. We'll be back. Good bye."

"Make sure Justin has his pills, his allergy medicine. Warm clothes! Clean underwear!

Come here first, I'll pack some food and-"

"No." Will shook his head even though he couldn't hear the woman. He took the phone from Brian and wiped it down for fingerprints, hanging it up.

"Why the hell did you do that?"

"Because the man who lives here is going to come home and find he's been robbed,

they're going to want to find prints."

"I didn't mean that, fuck the cops and this asshole with his big screen TV. I mean, why did you hang up on her."

"Justin didn't want to get on because she would get information and a few more seconds you would have given her anything she wanted to know." He pushed passed Brian and stood in the bedroom. "You ready, kiddo?"

"I guess." He said, piled to his chin with clothes. "Shouldn't we call mom and dad?

They'll go after them, too."

"I already called them when I got into town and told them to be careful." The man lied. If Kriegg was stupid enough to think he cared about Craig and Jennifer he could waste his time on torture. Will opened the closet and pulled a suitcase from the top shelf, throwing it on the bed and taking Justin's bundle. He snapped the lid closed and shoved it against Brian's chest. Grabbing Justin's hand Will led them to the window and out onto the fire escape.

It seemed like the time to run was far outmatching the time to relax and play with the winnings, and he didn't like it one bit.

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"We'll need transportation." Brian reminded the blondes, trailing behind them as they hit the sidewalk in a full run.

Will didn't look back and he didn't stop, but shouted behind him. "They'll have your car guarded!"

"Then we'll get something else! Justin's feet are bare and it's still fucking raining!"

"I'm fine!" Justin said, trying to look back as he was pulled along. "And you can stop

talking about me like I'm not right in front of you. Both of you." He said and pushed

against Will to make sure he was listening.

Will took out his gun and broke the driver's side window of the nearest car, helping

Justin inside before falling to his knees and tearing the connectors from the starter wires. Brian got into the backseat and held Justin's hand as the boy moved to join him from the front. Will sat up when the Toyota sparked to life and sped away from the curb.

"Will?"

"Yeah, kiddo?"

"What are they after?"

"Money."

"What money?"

"Money we can't get to right now."

"You said he was the key they were looking for, why?" Brian asked, stroking the hair

from Justin's face as the smashed window blew cold air over their faces.

"The account is under his name." Will admitted softly, voice full of regret.

"What! Why would you intentionally put him in trouble like that?"

"Because the money is for him!" Will glared at the brunette from the rearview mirror. "I didn't expect to come back and find him taken care of. I thought our parents would be the same fucks they were when I left and that Justin would either be fucked up beyond repair by their upper-class molding or out on the streets because he wasn't good enough for them. Either way, I wanted to take care of him-"

Justin cleared his throat loudly. "Still. Here." He pouted.

"Wanted to take care of -you-, Justin. My sugar daddy had money but he wouldn't give it up in the amount I needed without a little compromise. And I'm sorry. I'm too fucking sorry for words, kiddo. I never wanted you to have anything more than the good in this world that I didn't have. It backfired. I got caught." He blinked away the tears biting like fire at his eyes.

Justin shifted in the seat and wrapped his arms around Will's neck from behind. "I love you, Will."

Will smoothed his hand over Justin's arm and planted a gentle kiss on the boy's right

hand. He said nothing, watching the road.

Brian's tongue found its way to his cheek as he watched Justin give his adoration to Will when the man had obviously never returned the affection in words. He was beginning to see a pattern with the men Justin fell for, and he didn't mind being a copy of the big brother as long as when the night was over his lover would follow the right man.

Justin settled back with Brian and put on his seatbelt, muffling the click with his sleeve so Will wouldn't know he hadn't been strapped in. He grinned at Brian and leaned his head on the man's shoulder. Brian put an arm around Justin's shoulders and closed his eyes, resting his head on Justin's wet hair.

This was definitely not how he had planned their night would go. He kissed Justin's

forehead, silently checking to see the boy was a normal temperature and not cooled from shock or feverish from the rain. Justin raised his lips to Brian's and kissed the man back, deeply, passionately, forcing away all the bad and focusing on the extreme heat of his lover's return kiss.

Will eyed the two from the driver's seat and turned around to get a second look. Sure, Justin had been naked with the man before. Sure, the kid was having sex. Gay sex, just like his brother. But it was one thing knowing and another entirely to see this stranger given Justin an exploration worthy of the highest paying customer Kriegg set up.

"Hey, you two." Will grumbled, turning his attentions back to the road.

"Hey nothing." Justin beamed at his brother as Brian trailed kisses down the boy's

vulnerable and exposed neck. "I know you're not a virgin, I was there when it happened." Brian pulled back and looked at the boy. "You saw your brother lose his virginity? What kind of childhood did you have?"

"He didn't see it first hand, he was just there when it happened." Will snarled. "In the

next room with Bear."

"Bear?" Brian raised an eyebrow.

Justin nodded. "Bear-Bear. He's this huge black guy that baby-sat me when Will had to go somewhere less suitable for kids then usual. Like when he had to-"

"Justin!" Will shouted. "Any further talk about our virginity is to be between us. Got it?"

Justin hung his head, all cheer gone. "Sorry, Will."

Will took a deep breath. "I'm sorry too, kiddo. I didn't mean to yell, but try to keep some secrets to yourself for a little while okay?"

Justin nodded and leaned back on Brian, closing his eyes and fighting the hot silent tears slipping down his cheeks. He hid his face in Brian's shirt, the man softly rubbing the boy's shoulders.

"Hey, this is some adventure huh?" He asked in a hushed whisper, breathing heatedly on Justin's ear. "Gun fights, hot sex, running naked to a stranger's house and stealing their clothes? If I didn't know any better I'd say this was starting out as one hell of a great story to tell our friends."

Justin nodded and laughed through his tears, sniffling and looking Brian in the eye.

"And wait until the sequel!" Brian joked, playfully pushing the boy.

"Too bad we've already had the climax..." Justin whispered.

"Good movies always have more than one." Brian whispered back and kissed Justin on the nose.

Will looked in the rearview and gritted his teeth. He wanted to be as close to Justin as he once was, knowing how to make him laugh like Brian did. It wasn't fair! What had he done to deserve such punishment? Ostracizing from his friends, isolation from his parents, forced to stay away from the one person he could bare his soul to and convinced it was better for everyone if he did what he was told? To stay away from his baby brother had been murder, but he suffered through it for the kid's future. Now Justin had a deeper affection for Brian that had far surpassed Will's. Jealousy was putting it lightly.

But as long as Justin was happy...some days that thought was all that kept him alive.

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Will drove for three solid hours, the dawn a grey mist shining in the sky. He pulled into a driveway and pulled on the parking break, rubbing his eyes. Justin had been asleep for at least an hour, but Brian had never even closed his eyes. He didn't trust Will and cared little if the elder Taylor knew it.

"Where are we?" Brian asked.

"Bear's. He moved out of town years ago but we kept in touch."

Brian let out a deep breath and leaned back on Justin's head. "Why are we here?"

"Because he's a friend."

"I don't trust you, why should I trust him?"

"Because you don't have a choice. He helped raise my brother and Justin trusts him, so live with it or go home." Will snapped and got out of the idling car, leaning back in the open door. "Stay here for a second, I'm going to see if he'll help."

"Great." Brian rolled his eyes. "My heart's content now."

Justin squirmed in Brian's arms, getting more comfortable to anyone who hadn't watched him sleep. Brian knew the boy was half-awake and absorbing his situation, something the boy had gotten in the habit of doing since he woke from his coma. He was making sure Brian was there when he was ready to wake up completely. The man gave an extra squeeze to Justin's shoulders and smiled warmly as the boy relaxed and his breathing fell back in a deep sleeping rhythm.

Fifteen minutes later the front door of the suburban house opened and Will stepped

outside, wearing the charming full-tooth smile that matched Justin's but managed to hold something sinister under the surface.

A man stepped out behind Will and locked his door. When Justin said 'huge black guy' he wasn't kidding. The guy had to be seven feet tall if he was an inch and would have trouble fitting in the little green Toyota. Bear's girth earned him the nickname if his height didn't.

The big man crooked his head and looked into the window at Justin and Brian with a

smirk. Brian could make out a few words: 'Skinny' and 'Wimp' and 'Not black?'. Brian

knew the conversation was not about Justin but on his choice of lovers.

Will got in the car and waited for Bear to fit before pulling out of the driveway. "Bear,

this is Brian. Brian, Bear."

"Hi." The man said, his voice alone booming. Brian didn't want to hear the man shout. Bear turned to Justin and opened his mouth to greet the boy but stopped short when Brian gave him a warning glare.

"Don't wake him up." Brian said low, threatening.

Bear smiled and let out a loud, challenging laugh that shook the car. Brian held Justin's ear and pressed the boy against his chest.

"This guy's all right for a pip-squeak." Bear laughed again.

"I am not a-" Brian started to protest.

"Are you going to tell me we're all not dwarved by Bear, Kinney?" Will glanced back

and switched lanes.

Brian furrowed his brow and concentrated on keeping Justin asleep for as long as

possible.

"He's a riot." Bear laughed again, voice straining to be quiet, unused to the act of silence.

"Yeah, he's something all right." Will grumbled.

"Ah, get over it." Brian grumbled right back.

"Fuck you!"

"Not your job to do the fucking around here!"

"We'll see about that when you both turn your backs!" Bear growled. "Shut the fuck up!"

Justin shifted and gave a soft cry to the shouting and new, unfamiliar voice, keeping his eyes shut and gripping for Brian to come closer.

"It's okay. Shh." Brian soothed. "It's Bear-Bear." He kissed Justin's earlobe and his

jawbone.

"Bear-Bear?"

"Hey, blue eyes."

Justin looked at the man and grinned. "Hi!"

"Heard your big brother got into some trouble. I'm here to help you hide."

"I think we'd be better off hiding without -your- ass giving us away." Brian muttered.

Justin smacked his flat stomach. "Brian! Be nice to him." He turned back to the new

man. "I haven't seen you forever."

"Yeah, I found some trouble myself and left town. You were so small, I never thought you'd get taller."

Will chuckled. "He's got an ass on him, too."

"Oh yeah?"

"Will!" Justin blushed.

"Lemme see, blue eyes."

"No!" Justin laughed. Brian bit his tongue and didn't know how the boy could be having fun with this massive predatory mountain of a man.

"Apple or orange?" Bear asked, craning his neck and trying to see Justin's backside.

"Hard and sweet or soft and round?"

"Apple." Will laughed. "Certainly not a cherry..."

Justin flushed crimson and sat with both of his hands under him. "Shut up, Will!"

Will smiled and kept watching the road. "We're going to ditch this car for one of Bear's just down the road. And he's got a place in mind where Kriegg won't think to go."

"Bear's got a big rig to fit in?" Brian mumbled so only he could hear it. "I'm not getting into a semi-truck with this guy."

Justin nestled against his lover and kissed the man's neck, though he spoke to Will.

"Does Bear's hiding spot have separate rooms?"

"Forget it." Will said. "Sex is out right now."

"But-"

"No buts but yours, in my room, without Brian. He can stand guard with Bear if he wants to."

"I don't care what he wants to do, I want him with me." Justin complained, grabbing

Will's headrest and whispering into his brother's ear. "Please? I need him."

"You'll be safe without him for awhile."

"Force me and watch what happens William Richard Taylor!"

"Don't follow orders and see how fast they kill you!" Will shot back, swerving the car

and nearly clipping oncoming traffic.

Justin was thrown back and hit his face on the window before falling to his seat, Brian's arms around his waist pulling him to safety. The pale shock on the boy's face enough to send Brian into a fit of rage, the fresh trickle of blood from his mouth enough to start a war.

"What the fuck is wrong with you! You selfish, undeserving little asshole!"

Justin sucked his bottom lip and took a deep breath through his nose not bothering to hide the tears this time. Brian stroked his face and used the sleeve of his shirt to tenderly wipe the blood away.

Will clenched the steering wheel and said nothing, trying not to listen to Justin crying

because it was slowly breaking what little heart he had left. Bear sighed and shook his head. He'd known Justin since the boy was seven and Will since he was twelve. No one before or since had shown the affection to protect someone like Will did Justin, nor could they hold a candle to Justin's shrine for Will. Now the boy's were arguing; Justin crying with a split lip and obvious fear barely hidden under a face of calm and Will clutching at desperate straws to get the boy out of the fire he'd brought with him, trying his damnedest to keep the bitter, jealous tears at bay.

Bear swiveled in his seat and touched the underside of Justin's chin, examining the

wound. "Not too bad, you chip a tooth?"

Justin sniffled and said in a very quiet voice. "No."

"Well okay then. Listen boys, I don't know about you but a big man's gotta eat. Pull over here, Will. It's breakfast time."

Justin's eyes lit up and he smiled. Bear turned back in his seat and offered Will the same affectionate smile they'd shared years before. The twenty-four year old mouthed 'thank you' and took the next off ramp toward food and hopefully, better moods.

\*

Lito drove the car, evenly spaced behind two other vehicles and Will's Toyota. He

followed their victims off the highway, glancing at Kriegg from the corner of his yellow sunglasses. The man wasn't happy that Will had gotten this far from them and not even been wounded. He wasn't happy that the boy had outsmarted them and vanished better then Kriegg could ever have taught him. And when Kriegg wasn't happy, people died.

Will pulled into a McDonalds and parked in a space not far from the entrance. Four

people got out, one whom Lito didn't recognize but instantly thought better of taking in a hand to hand fight. Justin was their target to be kept alive. Will was their target to be kept alive. And Lito had been thinking of severely arduous plans for Brian Kinney that involved much more than a single bullet, but in the end, would not keep him alive.

Justin happily sat down in the enclosed play area and waited while Brian and Bear went to get the food. He gazed at the running toddlers wistfully until he caught Will staring.

"What?" Justin asked, still angry at the man. His tongue flicked out and touched the cut on his mouth unconsciously.

"You have dreams of a future with children." Will turned and watched the kids, avoiding Justin's glare. He had never seen the boy look that mad, let alone felt it directed at him.

"Brian has a son. Oh, God! You don't think they would go after Gus do you?" Justin

stood up.

"No, no, calm down." Will eased his brother with frantic gestures to not draw attention to them. "We'd be lucky if we're a half hour away from Kriegg and Lito."

"You mean you think they're following us?" Justin paled.

"Yes. But that's to be expected. The important thing is whether or not we can lose them. This is a good diversion, stopping. Kriegg thinks that I'll go as far as I can without stopping."

"I don't like this." Justin focused back on the kids.

"You're not meant to. This isn't for fun, kiddo."

"Don't call me that. I'm not a child."

Will closed his eyes and sighed. "I know that, it's just...Damnit Justin, you're still a child to me all right?"

"No, it's not all right. Nothing is all right about this situation, Will! I should be in class

right now. College, William, if you haven't figured it out. I grew up just fine without you and without mom or dad. Mom's been supportive, she's okay. Dad's settled down but he still hates fags and kicked me out of the house. They got a divorce, but we knew that would happen eventually. But fuck!" Justin shouted, drawing the attention of some very concerned parents and a chorus of gasping children repeating what he said.

Will smiled apologetically at the nearest parents. Justin continued. "Will, I have been

fine without you. I missed you but I never knew if you were alive or dead. You never

wrote to me and I know you didn't forget the address!"

"I let them convince me it was for the better, Justin. It was a mistake that I will never forgive them of. I tend to make a lot of mistakes these days."

"I noticed."

"Justin, I missed you too. Every day, every night. I couldn't help wonder if they were

hurting you twice as bad because I wasn't there to take the blows. I didn't know if you would start hanging out in the trenches where I used to take you, going alone and unprotected...I was so afraid you would get hurt because of my carelessness and that was the one thing I knew would kill me beyond a shadow of a doubt. I did anything I could to make sure you were taken care of. Not the horrible shit in Chicago; the drugs, prostitution, fighting, stealing, destroying, it was all pale in comparison to what I imagined happening to you. You're still the innocent little boy I had to fight to keep next to me at all times, still the smiling blonde kid who waited on Bear's lap when I had to..."

"Give your virginity for a gram bag." Justin finished for him glumly. "Back then I didn't even know what virginity was, yet I knew what you were getting for it."

"I know that's what I told you at the time, Justin, but it's not true. It was to ensure your safety even if I wasn't with you. I knew years before they threw me out that I wouldn't always be there to protect you."

"You did that?"

Will nodded, looking further into the distance than his eyes could have possibly seen.

"Because people were noticing you, Justin. They all wanted you and I couldn't let it

happen. You were nine fucking years old, what was I supposed to do? Leave you at home where dad could mold you into something you weren't? The streets were kinder than him."

Justin put his hand on Will's across the table. "I'm sorry."

"It's not your fault, it was my own choice. And now here I am yelling at you, frustrated with you, driving carelessly when you were out of your seatbelt and hurting you because you aren't the same kid I left behind. You don't look at me with the same shining light you did before, the same light you look at Brian with now. I can't stand that life went on without me here, as if I expected things to be the same and you would be four waiting for me to come home from school or ten waiting for me to get out of the business I was in. It's me who should be sorry, and I am."

"I still love you, I just don't have glorious, all-night long sex with you." Justin grinned. "I never wanted to go home without you there, but I never wanted to leave either. Mom and dad forbid any conversations about you in the house but I had nobody to tell besides them. I pushed you away because it hurt too much to admit that after every sun set, after every Saturday passed with no one to watch cartoons with, I knew you weren't coming home."

Will patted Justin's hand with his own. "So I'm forgiven?"

"I could never stay mad at you."

"You have glorious all-night long sex with Brian..." Will said contemplatively.

Justin slugged him playfully. "Don't tell him I said that. And don't tell Bear, either."

"He's impressed with that ass you've got."

"That's nice, I'd never let him fuck me."

"Kiddo...Justin, I don't think anyone but the terminally desperate or severely comatose would let him tear a new hole to get his dick in there."

"If I recall you weren't desperate or comatose..."

"I wish I was." Will cringed. "Boy did that require an epideral shot..."

Justin laughed and Will joined him. Bear put a hand on Will's shoulder and sat down

with a plastic tray of food. Brian sat beside Justin and set his own down.

"Everybody happy?" Bear asked.

"I'm not." Brian muttered.

"You don't count." Bear said.

"Everything is fine, Bear." Will smiled at his brother.

"Good to hear."

"I have to go to the bathroom." Justin said. "Brian, will you come with me?"

"Sure, Justin." Brian got up and followed him out of the playroom.

Will sighed and watched them go. "He's going to miss Brian."

"Yeah." Bear shook his head. "But the man's a liability."

"And a distraction." Will agreed. "How are we going to get rid of him?"

"Let them take care of business and then we'll think of something."

"Right. French fry?"

\*

Justin grabbed Brian's collar and dragged him into the bathroom, throwing the man into a stall and locking it behind them already drowning in a sensual, penetrating kiss. Brian let the boy take the lead, feeling the strength behind his eagerness and yearning. They hadn't been long from the last time they fucked, but when they had gotten used to several times a night once was not enough.

"Did the guns turn you on like it did me?" Justin asked, voice thick and breathy as he

pulled away from the kiss, locking eyes with Brian before his fingers went to open the shirt's menacing buttons.

"Yeah. I thought I was going to get shot." Brian admitted, leaning back in for a kiss.

"When you played commando kicking me off like that I thought I would come right there on the floor...again."

Justin pulled the man to him again and gripped the man's hair, lips falling to his ear.

"Fuck me. Fuck me hard." He begged.

Brian threw Justin against the stall door, pushing the metal to its limit with the boy's

face. One hand had hold of Justin's cock inside the cotton pants while the other forced the material down to pool around the boy's ankles. Justin moaned as Brian pumping his erection.

"Oh, please." Justin shivered. "Please, fuck me."

Brian stopped suddenly. "No lube. No condom."

Justin bit his lip and pressed his face against the stall with a heavy grunt. "Damnit...but you didn't use a condom before." He said, realizing it for the first time.

"I didn't..." Brian swallowed. "Justin, I-"

"No, it's what I wanted. It felt right."

"It doesn't matter how it feels, Justin." Brian squeezed his eyes shut and slammed both fists into the walls at his sides making the boy jump. "I am so sorry I fucked up."

Justin shook his head. "I trust you."

"That's not the point." He said and wanted to scream at the kid for not understanding

how important wearing protection was. There was no excuse for Brian to have forgotten, nothing the heat of passion could have blocked. Except...that he wanted to fuck Justin bare back. He desperately wanted Justin to feel what it was like and not worry about the danger of playing with a possible fire.

"Brian, if it happens then it does but I'm not worried. Look at me." Justin ordered

cautiously, skirting the subject as if afraid Brian was mad at him.

Brian turned regretful hazel eyes to the boy. "I'm so sorry. If anything happens...to you..."

"Brian, you wanted to. I can see it in your eyes. You wanted to as much as I wanted you to, and it's nothing to be ashamed of. It's stupid, sure, I've heard the lecture, but for once I am tired of being careful. Sex is supposed to be dirty or you're not doing it right."

"Dirty, not stupid."

"If I'm tired of being cautious then I know you have to be." Justin stepped close to his lover and placed both hands on the man's chest, gazing into his eyes. "We were both just tested and were negative. I don't want this to be the only time we do it without a condom."

"I'm sorry, Justin, I can't put you at risk like that. Never again." Brian pushed past the boy and left the bathroom. He went straight across to the ladies' room and found it to be blissfully empty. He found the first stall and collapsed onto the toilet.

Before Brian knew it he broke down in silent sobs. He couldn't believe he had done it

and not realized. It was even worse that unconsciously he had wanted to forget, just once, and be inside Justin with nothing between them. It was stupid and naive, and they both should have known better.

\*

Justin pulled up his pants and pressed his head against the cool yellow metal wall. He

forced the tears away, hiding them for Brian's sake. If Will knew Justin had been crying because of something Brian did...or didn't do...It would be even worse if Bear found out.

If he could have lied, could have told Brian that he had worn a condom and didn't think about it because it was instinct to wear one, Justin would have said so in a heartbeat. But it was impossible to take back now. If Brian meant they would never fuck again...

The tears made their way out and over Justin's wall of denial. If they never slept together, there would be no reason for the man to give a shit about the rest of the relationship! Surely Brian would move onto someone who wasn't so inexperienced, so welcoming to a fatal disease for the sake of a little more sexual sensation. Justin's knees spilled him to the tiled floor and he buried his face in his hands, hardly able to breath around the heavy sobs.

\*Lito nodded to two men sitting behind he and Kriegg. "We want both of them." He

reminded the bulky men. "Leave Kid, he'll make himself known later on when we want him to. Just get the brunette and the younger blonde."

"Right." One man said as both left the black car behind. One headed to the men's room, the other to women's.

Justin perked up, quieting when the door opened. He sniffled. "Brian?"

The man stood in front of the locked door and Justin knew by sheer leg and foot size that this person was not his lover. He screamed before he knew his voice had strength to do so.

The hired muscle reached under the door and yanked Justin out, covering his mouth and dragging him out into the hallway. Brian was already muffled behind another man's enormous hand, but Justin had gotten an alarm off in time. Will and Bear ran into the restaurant, patrons grabbed their children and screamed while diving for the floor as soon as both parties revealed their guns.

"Let them go!" Will shouted.

The men held their weapons on Justin and Brian, continuing toward the doors as if they had no obstructions in their path. The boy struggled, kicking and fighting while Brian bided his time by being stoically silent. When he made his move it was down and to the left, away from the gun. He figured the man was strongest in the hand and arm where he held his gun and played on the only leeway he had. He used the momentum of his body weight to fall on the floor, twisting his body under a nearby hard plastic booth lining the wall where the big man had to either work to get to him or hide behind the only remaining hostage. What he didn't expect was Justin's captor seemed to forget who was supposed to get who and dove for his partner's prize leaving the blonde to duck under the adjacent booth.

Will fired twice, Bear reaching Justin first and pulling him out by the shirt collar. The big man apologized profusely and dragged Justin outside using his own massive body to block any shots that found a place near their escape.

Brian tried to follow but didn't move out into the open fire range. Will was hiding behind a trashcan by the front door and slowly edging outside. The older man knew what Justin's brother's intentions were and cursed the minute he left Justin alone in the bathroom.

"Don't you dare leave me!" He shouted at Will.

"Next time count yourself lucky I didn't just shoot you when Justin wasn't looking!"

Lito was running from the back parking lot where he'd parked after hearing the gunshots. He opened the door and met Will's gun pointed at his most important decision maker.

"Back off, Lito." Will said through gritted teeth, still crouched on the floor. "Tell your

men to ease down."

"You fuck!" Brian spat.

Lito smiled. "You can go. Gentlemen, give the Kid safe passage with his brother for the moment. I have what I want."

"Will!" Brian shouted pleadingly. "JUSTIN!"

Will backed away from the scene, gun still trained on Lito but moving from his crotch to his head. "Sorry Brian, it really is best for Justin."

"You sound like your father!"

Will laughed. "Yeah, thanks. Try saying that again with Lito's dick fucking your bleeding body and maybe then I'll listen." He said, wishing there was a better way. He didn't want Justin to cry, and he certainly didn't want to be the one who had to explain why Brian was left behind.

Justin got free from Bear and ran back toward the restaurant already screaming for Brian. Will ducked out the door and tackled his brother, rolling them both into the parking lot. He ended up on top, pointing his gun at the closed doors. Bear caught up and lifted them both, Will to his feet and Justin up and over his shoulder.

Lito came outside, Brian slung in the same fashion over one of the larger men's

shoulders.

"We have a deal then?" He said and knew what it would do to the younger Taylor.

"Brian!" Justin screamed, trying to turn and see beyond Bear's back.

"We can have Kinney in place of Justin? You know we'll finish him off and come for

more, right?"

"WILL! BRIAN! Please don't let them have him!" Justin cried, struggling and making it

as difficult to hold him as possible.

"It's not true, Justin." Will said. "He's lying."

"Oh no he's fucking not!" Brian yelled.

"BRIAN!"

Kriegg shook his head, standing beside Justin. The two looked at each other curiously for a second, the man's burning emerald eyes promising a world of pain Justin couldn't even imagine. He took out his gun and drowned out Justin's screams with one shot to Bear's back and another to his thick neck, Kriegg's devotion for torturously slow death his most notorious act. The big man hit the pavement like a sack of bricks, Kriegg's hand grabbing Justin's hair so he wasn't trapped beneath his former protector.

Justin shrieked, sheet pale face splattered with Bear's blood.

Will turned around, too late.

"How about all three of you take a ride with us back to Pittsburgh? There's a little matter of two million dollars I want taken care of. Then we're going to play twenty questions with twenty different fingers. Guess who has to watch the others get their hands broken?" He asked Will.

"Kriegg, don't do this. Please! If you didn't come after me I wouldn't have run. You said two days. I was going to get you your money." Will pleaded. None of this was working out the way he wanted it to.

"Get in the car, Kid. Lito, you may have your beautifully passionate trophy for all your hard work. Be sure you disarm the Kid before we get a move on."

"Thank you, Kriegg. I will."

"NO!" Justin bellowed.

"Oh, you'll get your turn child, but Lito is not going to be the one doing it." Kriegg

promised and followed his men and the new captives to the car. "I hear you like it

rough."

It was Brian's turn to protest but Lito grabbed his chestnut brown hair and pulled until the man's neck cracked in disapproval. "Now, now, you know he does."

Justin couldn't take his eyes off of Bear's bleeding body, once so full of strength and life and now absent of anything that remotely resembled-

He gasped as one hand twitched, then the other. Bear was still alive!!!

\*

Kriegg shoved Justin into the car last and got in. It was a tight squeeze, even when the two men that Lito hired left with their pay and took the stolen Toyota as a bonus.

Brian was in the front seat with Lito with Will at one back door and Justin in the middle, Kriegg's arm wrapped tightly around his waist.

"Now." Lito said, pulling back onto the highway. "If you make us crash or do anything stupid your adorable little masochist is going to end up shooting straight out the windshield. Do you understand?" He asked Brian.

Brian glared at him but didn't have time to answer before a sharp slap knocked him into the window.

"I asked you a question. You will learn to answer immediately or you will learn what it means to be in true pain."

"I understand." Brian said through gritted teeth.

"Master." Lito grinned, his skin stretching unnaturally over his thin facial structure.

"Master?" Will scoffed. "When did you move up in the food chain?"

"Shut up!" Kriegg said, softly trailing a finger over Justin's jaw. Justin shuddered.

"I moved up when you turned from salvaged street rat trash to the person who stole two mil from our boss."

Will wanted to make a comment about the man's stinginess but decided Justin would be the only one to suffer from any smartass remarks from then on. He kept his mouth shut and hoped that while they were using Justin to get the money they wouldn't let Brian kill him. Will knew the man would.

\*

Pittsburgh had started to snow by the time they arrived at the First National Bank. Kriegg got out of the car and gestured for Justin to do the same. He leaned back in as the barefooted boy shivered beside him.

"Kid, what's the account number?"

"18373-98987-11474."

"Got that, little one?"

"No." Justin whimpered and braced himself for a slap in the face.

Kriegg clicked his tongue and caressed the boy's cheek. "That's alright. Will can come

help you. We're going to be very nice and civil inside that bank. No tears, is that okay with you, little one?"

"I don't want Will to come." Justin whimpered and stared at the ground.

"Then I suggest you memorize that number before we get inside." Kriegg growled, a

rough hand on Justin's trembling shoulder. "I can be real nice or I can be real mean, what is it going to be?"

"Nice." Justin sniffled.

"Will, step out of the car please. We're all going to forget your betrayal to me and to your little brother and his boyfriend for a minute and go get that money."

"They won't give you all two million, Kriegg, and you know it." Will got out of the car.

"We can get it started with what they will give us, Kid. The rest is going back to Chicago into an account I have set up. Do you have an objection I don't know about that has to do with my money and where I put it?"

"No." Will said through clenched teeth.

"I didn't think so." He knocked on Brian's window and Lito unrolled it with a switch on

his door. "Lito, no bruising unless he gets antsy. I want this to draw as little attention as possible please."

"You got it." Lito said, happy just to have the permission of Brian all to himself no

matter when he got to enjoy it.

"Kid, take your brother inside. I'm coming right behind you. I am also very armed so the first one to act in a way unbecoming of a gentleman is going to pay for it. Move along."

"Don't they...um, don't they have metal detectors here?" Justin said, avoiding Will's

extended hand.

"Do they, little one?" Kriegg stepped menacingly close to the boy and bent down to look in his eyes. He read the kid easily enough, his innocence and fright showing directly in his face as if he had never had to lie in his life. The boy believed what he said.

"I think so." Justin seemed to wither under the man's scrutiny. "I'm almost positive this one does, at least. I've never been inside, I didn't know I had an account...but I think most of Pittsburgh's-"

"I believe you, little one." He patted Justin on the head. "It's so nice to have the truth told to me after all this time."

Will took a deep breath and let it out in a rush of white steam. "Let's get this moving,

Kriegg. He's in bare feet."

"Justin, go inside. Will, the number again so Justin can do this by himself?" Kriegg

demanded, unwilling to release his hold on the weapons.

"18373-98987-11474." Will grunted.

"Justin, the number is?"

Justin stammered. He was in no mood for a quiz. "183...73..."

"98987-11474." Will finished.

"He was in a two week coma, leave him alone." Brian said angrily from the open

window.

"Boss?"

"Go ahead, Lito."

Lito drew back and punched Brian below the nose, his hand washed in a mess of blood. Justin screamed and hid his face in Kriegg, the closer of the two men. Lito reared back and slugged the man again, aiming directly at the nose this time. Brian's head flew back against the seat and snapped forward. Lito hit him once more in the teeth just to have his own hand feel the pain of new cuts.

"You were in a coma, little one? When was that?"

Justin sobbed and shook his head, turning into himself as if trying to curl into a ball while he was still standing. He knew if he didn't answer he wouldn't be the one to pay for it. "A few months ago...please, don't hurt him. I'll remember."

"We hurt him for his outburst, not your memory. The only thing suffering from that, or rather, the lack thereof, are your poor feet, little one."

Brian moaned in pain and let his face and hands fall to his lap.

Justin closed his eyes. "18373-98987...11474?"

Will nodded.

"Can you remember that all the way inside?" Kriegg asked in a condescending voice.

"I think so."

"Be sure or don't go in there. I don't want a fuck up, little one, or the next time Brian

gets hurt it will be your fault."

"18373-98987-11474." Justin repeated. "18373-98987-11474. I got it." He gave a

reassuring smile. "But...if I go in there and get your money there is no guarantee that any of us will make it out alive. Say I don't do what you want and you kill us anyway but you will never get the money. Or say I do it, and then you leave us here alive with only the marks we have from our treatment so far. I want to know you won't kill us."

Anger flared in the man's eyes for the first time since he'd gotten his hands on the boy. He grabbed Justin and shoved him back into the car, slamming the door shut. The tinted windows kept anyone outside from seeing in. Will tried to get in through Brian's window but Lito rolled it up with a smile.

"Private party, Kid. We'll be out in just a sec."

"Kriegg, don't you hurt him!" Will warned.

The man landed on top of Justin with a heavy grunt, pinning the boy's body with his own. He growled in a voice the boy knew would haunt his nightmares for years to come.

"I don't make assurances!" He slapped Justin once and came back with his hand the

other way. "I don't give safety. People do what I want or they face the wrath of a very angry man!" He slapped the boy again and backhanded him until blood splattered the seats on both sides. "I am not questioned in my motives but known for my trail of bodies!" The open hands turned into fists landing blows across Justin's chin, jaw, cheeks and mouth.

Brian struggled in his seat, Lito holding him down with a strength he didn't look to have. "Aw, your pretty pet isn't used to the real thing is he? The slaps you gave, I watched. He doesn't like it so much now!"

Justin cried out for pity in a gurgled mess of blood and bubbling spit. He tried to sit up, coughing and gagging on the hot metallic liquid flooding his mouth. Kriegg let him lean over the seat edge and spit.

"Now no one is getting the money today because you've gone and messed your face up. Do you know how angry that makes me?" Kriegg asked, stroking the boy's hair.

"Ple...no, I..." Justin gagged and nearly lost the nonexistent meal in his stomach.

"It makes me angrier then I have been in a very long time." He turned the boy's face back to the front and turned his passion on the boy's eyes, this time not bothering to begin with an open slap.

"Will can go in." Brian said from the protective hold on his nose and mouth. Each

sickeningly wet sound bounced off his ears and he didn't dare look back, didn't dare put the slick splashes with the image of what or who they belonged to. When he spoke, the noise stopped.

"Boss?"

"Let him finish."

Lito clenched his jaw but obeyed, whispering. "Just wait until I fuck you."

"They look alike, all he needs is Justin's ID. He already knows the PIN number, and this way you won't have to worry about forgetfulness or coming up with a good lie to transfer the funds because Will knows what to say."

"Are these Justin's clothes? I see no pockets for a wallet, Mr. Kinney." Kriegg sat up,

still pinning the boy down from the waist on.

"There is a reason we had to leave the loft without the essentials and it isn't our fault. If you want, we can go home and get it. There's still plenty of time to go there and back here for your money before closing time."

"You have a point." Kriegg nodded. He opened the door for Will. "Get in, we're going to get your new identity."

Will obeyed, staring in stark horror at his brother's mangled face. His stomach sank and he spent the rest of the ride with his face pressed against the window to hide the silent tears of regret cascading down his bitter face.

\*

Michael searched through the wreckage of Brian's loft in dismay. So many things were destroyed, shattered, struck by bullets. He looked at his mother and crawled over to Justin's most recent painting. It was Brian, but the canvas had been punctured right above the man's left eye. It was unsalvageable.

"Do you think this happened before or after they called you?" Ted asked, lifting a

cushion with his toe and coming back with a rain of feathers.

"I don't want to know." Debbie shook her head. "I'd like to think they got out of here

before someone came to tear up the place. Why would they come back after calling and saying they were on the run?"

Melanie studied the bed. "There was a struggle here, pretty intense. Somebody was..." She picked up Justin's ragged shirt that had bound his wrists. "Tied up here."

"That's Justin's shirt. I've seen him wear it." Emmett said worriedly.

Lindsay picked up the pants Justin had been wearing. "And his pants. Torn to shreds."

"Someone was in the closet." Melanie added with disgust. "And he came on Brian's

suits."

"Is it too late to turn in as evidence?" Debbie asked.

"I have no idea." Melanie said. "But it couldn't hurt to check."

Lito shoved Brian into the loft followed by Justin and Kriegg. Will was made to stay in

the car, unsure if his legs were even steady enough to carry him.

"Oh, God!" Debbie screamed, both of her boys bloodied hideously. Justin began to cry and lunged for the woman but was held back by Kriegg's hand in his hair.

"Fuck." Lito said, searching his teeth with his tongue, deep in thought.

"Well, now we have people to help us find the ID. Ladies, gentlemen, we need little

Justin's identification for a fix to our situation." He said. When no one moved he kicked Justin's legs out from under him and let him fall face-first to the hardwood floor. "NOW! Goddamnit! No one listens without violence anymore!"

Michael was the first to fall on his hands and knees, searching for Justin's wallet. "Where is it?" He asked Brian and only hoped the man could answer.

Brian shook his head, hands still guarding his face. He couldn't speak anymore now

without the pain of air through the swelling of his lips and broken nose. Lito kicked his knees and let him fall next to his lover just because he could. Brian hit the ground solidly, landing first on his elbows with a cry of pain as the shock reverberated up his arms.

"Jeans." Justin whispered hoarsely, barely audible through the blood.

Michael fished through clothes flung on the floor but it was Melanie who found the right pair folded near the foot of the bed.

She reached in and riffled through his wallet, finding his student ID. "Here." She put it on the floor and slid it to the men.

"A smart woman, don't see that every day." Kriegg laughed and picked up the plastic

card.

"Now, how many of you have seen our faces?" Lito asked casually, killing people part of the job he took great pride in. "I count...six."

"And you have a six shooter! Isn't that marvelous." Kriegg nodded.

"Wait!" Melanie said.

"I'm sure there's going to be a wonderfully witty idea coming but we are pressed for time already. I didn't pay the parking meter and it's always tick, tick, tick." Kriegg said with a genial smile. "Friend, do your worst."

"No." Justin grunted and spit blood on the floor. "No!"

"You have no say in this. Your brother is going to get our money and then we're going to show you what real pain is. I didn't ask for an objection, and frankly, I would have thought you learned your lesson from the last time you raised your voice with me. Or do you need another reminder?"

Justin shook his head and instantly knew it was a mistake. Dizziness washed over him in a powerful wave and he threw up all over the freshly waxed floor. Tears streamed down his face as he tried to breath, mumbling an apology for something he wasn't sure he did though no one understood a single word to tell him either way.

"They must really mean a lot to you, little one. But we must cover our tracks, don't you understand?" The man knelt down and stroked the back of the boy's neck, toying with the little curls of hair at the base of his skull. Justin's arms gave out and he fell to the floor. Kriegg turned him on his back, careful to avoid the vomit.

"I do want to be nice to you, but you are making it exceedingly difficult."

Lito nodded along with his boss, gun swinging from Michael to Debbie to Ted and

Emmett, Lindsay and then Melanie and back again. He grinned, showing big teeth in a too-small face. He started mouthing: "Eenie, Meenie, Miney, Moe..."

Brian turned himself on his back, eyes glazed and staring painfully up at the ceiling. He was going to get hurt more no matter what happened in the next few seconds but at least he would make Lito think twice about getting his dick anywhere near Pittsburgh's most notorious top. He swung his leg up as if scoring the winning goal, catching Lito in the groin so hard it lifted the man off his feet with a high squeal.

Lito came crashing down beside Brian, hands no longer holding anything more then his aching dick. Kriegg growled and took his own gun out to warn the advancing friends to keep their distance.

"That was most unwise, Mr. Kinney. You are going to have to carry the little one out

now." He said and raised his foot, smashing it down on Justin's face and slamming the boy's head against the floor with a swift kick. The soft, wet sounds Brian had heard before meant nothing to the one that echoed in the quite room when Justin's head found it's mark and lay still. "He is already having trouble breathing through his broken face, how could you have done this to him? Do you want so desperately to carry him not only back to the car but as his pallbearer when we are through?"

Brian shook his head. "I'm sorry." He said nasally. "Justin..."

"Stop it!" Debbie screamed. "Leave them alone!"

"Oh, do you know how futile that is, woman?" Kriegg sneered. "I see it all the time,

begging, pleading for mercy when you're not the one being tortured. When it all comes down to it, I think it's right selfish of you to want us to stop their pain because you can't watch it anymore. Would you rather take their place than die from a gunshot to the head?"

"Yes." She answered plainly, hands on hips ready to fight for her boys.

"That's most noble of you. Loyal. But it's out of the question. Friend, get to your damned fool feet and know that your carelessness has not only gotten you hurt but has made young Taylor stop breathing." He leaned down and listened to the boy. "No, I'm wrong. He is still breathing but it won't last long."

Lito nodded and said. "On it, boss." In a highly pinched voice, but diligently got to his

feet. He covered his crotch for just a second longer and then stood straight.

"Mr. Kinney, get up." Kriegg ordered.

Brian did.

"Lito, unzip."

The wiry man smiled. "Yeah, make it feel better."

"See, my friend is a very good persuasion. He never truly loses his erection because our work calls for the most wonderful things to happen that turn him on. It's amazing, truly amazing. Brian, we're waiting for that apology for hurting more then his pride."

Brian winced. The thought of blowing this man in front of everyone was degrading, but with a busted nose and cracked lips it made the task nearly impossible.

"Do it. The longer you wait the less time the little one has. Are you going to let him die right here on your living room floor?"

Brian grunted and took a deep breath. Nearly impossible, but not completely. He couldn't hear Justin breathing, the rumbling gasps had faded to low gurgling whimpers until there was no sound at all. If the boy was dead, no embarrassment or pain could make him feel worse. Their last words alone had been angry and afraid of something that would take years to even take effect on their health. It was nothing compared to what had happened when they separated in the restaurant.

Lito shoved himself, already hard and recovering quickly from his wound, into Brian's

mouth before the man had time to prepare. He felt his lips stretch and break, cracking with dried blood and mending cuts. Lito thrust hard as if trying to come out the other side. Brian gagged but had nowhere to pull away to, the man forcing his head down the shaft deeper and deeper.

"Stop!" Michael begged. No one could watch what was happening to their friends.

"Watch." Kriegg ordered maniacally. "Watch, all of you, or my friend won't be the only thing shooting in Brian's mouth when he's finished." He waved the gun.

Everyone turned their heads, slowly, reluctantly. They saw the doorway, the couch, the face of pure evil behind tacky yellow sunglasses, but they didn't see Brian. No one saw the man waver on his knees from lack of oxygen. No one saw his hands pressed against Lito's bony hips trying to push away. They didn't see him swallow every inch of his aggressor involuntarily. Everyone saw Lito's face when he came.

The man released Brian in a heap on the floor, coughing and gagging, sucking in breaths in deep gasps until it seemed like there would be no air left for the rest of the human race. His hands trembled uncontrollably and he couldn't hold himself up any longer. The floor rushed up to greet him and he lay still just remembering how to breathe.

"Very good." Kriegg nodded. "Now I need to ask you a serious question." He said to

Lito.

"Ask away." Lito answered, pleased with himself as he used one of Brian's couch

cushions to wipe clean.

"Are you through with him? There is no way we're going to carry both of them and make sure the Kid doesn't jump us when we come down."

Lito bit his tongue violently. "There's no way in Hell I'm finished with him. Sorry, boss, but there are plenty more orifices that deserve a good pummeling. Little one's probably dead by now, we could leave him here."

"Oh, but dead or alive I'm taking my share off his hide."

"That's almost poetic." Lito grinned. "You'll have to write that one down."

"Thank you. But that brings us back to square one."

"We could leave him," he pointed at Ted, "and him," to Michael, "alive for the trip."

"Ah, I knew there was a reason I kept you around." Kriegg said proudly.

"We won't do it." Michael said, tears running down his face.

"Excuse me?" Lito asked, offended. The background victims were not supposed to make noise.

"We won't do it." Ted repeated.

"Go get Will and bring him up here. We don't need the cooperation of these fucks to get the job done." Kriegg ordered. He reached down and grabbed Justin by the collar, holding him against his chest. A drawn-out breath escaped the boy's lips as if waiting to be released for ages. He let Lito go before pulling a stool over with his leg and sitting with Justin on his lap.

"You won't get away with this." Debbie cried.

"I already have. You just don't know it yet." Kriegg sneered.

Lindsay looked at her lover. She glanced at Brian, at Justin, and back at Melanie. The

brunette gave a slight nod to the door while Debbie was distracting the man.

They could rush him. He couldn't shoot them all when he was holding Justin with one

hand and aiming at the entirely wrong angle to get a good round off in time. His skinny friend was already heading down in the elevator and wouldn't be able to get back up in time to help his boss.

The women agreed without words, looking once at Michael and Ted and Emmett, trying

to get their attention. Emmett nodded, having already thought of the same thing. Ted was

busy with Michael and Debbie with Kriegg. The three silently chose to go without a

countdown and moved forward using every ounce of adrenaline pumping through their

bodies.

Emmett hit Kriegg first, throwing himself into the man and knocking all of them to the

floor. He was also the first to catch a bullet. The shots rang around the loft, sending

everyone to the ground. Lindsay fell with a scream, holding her left arm close to her

chest. Emmett lay stunned, a red explosion of liquid pain melting just below his

collarbone. Melanie hadn't been hit but she wasn't finished yet.

The woman threw herself on top of Kriegg, Justin's body now on the other side of her

and away from his attacker. The man easily flung her away, shooting twice in her

direction but too stunned to make contact. He pulled Justin back to him as a shield and

stood with his back to the refrigerator.

"Brave." He breathed. "But stupid."

"You don't have that many shots left, you can't hit us all." Debbie snapped.

"I won't have to. Pick a few off the vine and the rest will cower before me. I don't see

another rescue attempt." He smiled as a parent would to naughty children. The elevator

whirred to life bringing the man's backup. "And when we get situated I'm going to make

six bodies on the floor of this nice loft."

Lito came into the room, face flushed with rage. His eyes fell hard upon every face in the

room as he made his way to Kriegg. The thin man knelt down and whispered, almost

fearfully, into his boss' ear.

"Kriegg, Will is gone."

Will got out of Kriegg's car as soon as his brother was out of sight. A million thoughts

ran through his head about running and forgetting, denying that anything had changed for the rest of his life. Knowing Justin would hate him for the things he did, even after the boy forgave him for dragging them into this mess, was too much. His big brother had betrayed him and the man he loved, gotten them hurt and they had yet to feel the full fury Kriegg and Lito had planned. He stood for a moment beside the car, looking up at the building, up at the sixth floor windows, and wondered if he could even forgive himself.

A cold wind jarred his thoughts and forced him to make a move. Will took his key card out and looked at it. Kriegg used them for easy breaking and entering, a quick in-out for his men. He knew he could go inside and make them shoot him, kill him, put him out of his miserable life. But deep down, Will didn't want to die. He had survived for so long it seemed like a waste. Besides that, he knew if he wasn't there to get the money in Justin's place Kriegg would torture the boy and keep him alive long enough for his face to look presentable to do it himself. That didn't mean the rest of his body was safe, not by a long shot.

And then there was Brian. If the man was a vengeful type Will was out of luck. He had been used as a bargaining chip, and although he would have gladly taken Justin's place at the merciless hands of their attackers, things just didn't work out as planned.

Will got inside the building, taking the stairs up a few flights before sliding against the wall down to the floor. He wouldn't cry. It was not an option anymore. Knowing Justin was in pain and it was his fault did not make Will the one to be pitied. He leaned against the door they had entered only a day before and listened. No one was home. The man slid the key and watched as the security code broke and let him inside.

"There has to be something here." Will searched the loft. He tore through the closet that had already been worked through and cleaned up by its owner. "A gun, something! Don't you people believe in home security? Christ!"

\*

Kriegg flipped Justin's ID from front to back. "All right, he is a coward and we will leave him to destroy himself with guilt. Justin will heal for us in time." He said, pushing his body from the refrigerator and standing upright. Carrying Justin over his shoulder he eyed the rest of their friends.

"You, smart woman." He pointed his gun at Melanie crouched on the floor putting

pressure on Lindsay's wound. "You're coming with us."

"What?" She asked before thinking.

"You are coming with us. You are going to help carry Kinney. You are going to play

nurse maid to the little one or you will die. If he dies, you will die. Get up before I give you no reason to care for your lover." He cocked the hammer of his gun and pointed it at Lindsay.

Melanie stood and took Brian under the arms. She waited for Lito to grab his feet without being told what to do. Though her jaw was clenched she didn't mouth off, she didn't protest. She turned frightened brown eyes to Lindsay and walked out the door backwards, Brian in tow.

Kriegg was the last to leave, also backwards. "We have left you alive." He scanned the group with his gun. "We have three of your friends, your family, your lovers. There are reasons people do not go to the police. This is one of those reasons."

\*

Will threw the last thing from every drawer, every shelf, ever box he could find. No guns. He grabbed the biggest knife he could find from the kitchen and headed upstairs. If he was going to go down, it would be fighting.

\*

Melanie felt her back hit the elevator as far as she could go. Brian was heavier than he looked and it was pure pride that kept her from dropping him.

The man was still shaking his head side to side, breathing through his mouth in long

draughts. If Melanie didn't know any better she would say he was in shock. But she did know better. She had known Brian for quite some time and the man did not do shock. No matter how hurt, intoxicated, or drugged he always had a knack for seeing the situation for what it was. Justin was hurt, and while breathing Brian was thinking of a way to right the wrongs.

Lito dropped Brian's legs because he could, using both hands to push Melanie onto the floor.

"Hold him up." He ordered and pushed the lobby button.

Melanie stroked Brian's cheek, one hand left to feel the strength in his grip when she

wrapped her fingers into his. He was planning and he was pissed. The woman made sure Lito and Kriegg didn't see anything more than her comforting him by stroking his face.

"I think Justin should be upright too." She said softly.

"That's the problem with taking a smart one, they think too much." Lito said.

"You need him alive." Melanie countered. "And he isn't going to stay that way for long if you keep the blood rushing to his head. You brought me to take care of him, so let me do my damn job!" She shouted, hoping the anger far outweighed the fear in her voice.

"Aw boss, she's feisty. Can I have her, too?"

"Not until we're through." Kriegg growled. Sometimes having a walking hard-on for a

right hand man got tedious. He let Justin slip into his arms and set him down by Melanie. "There, girlie, happy?"

"Ecstatic." Melanie pulled Justin's bangs from his face and couldn't even recognize the boy. His face was swollen to a bloody pulp. The beautiful smile was nothing but a gaping wound, button nose too soft, blue eyes sealed shut behind massive black bruises. "He needs a hospital." She whispered to herself.

"You're the doctor now." Kriegg snarled. "If you need supplies that we don't have in our extensive collection, Lito would be more than pleased to get the lady everything she

requires on the way to Chicago."

"Chicago! I hope to hell you have an operating room in your car!"

"We have plenty of things that are more then adequate, girlie. I want you to keep things to yourself from now on unless I speak to you directly, understand?"

Melanie nodded.

"Oh, Lito! She -is- smart."

\*

Will crept along the wall towards Brian's loft, eyeing the already open door. Inside he

could hear crying, no, outright sobbing. But it wasn't Justin and it wasn't Brian.

Unfortunately, it wasn't Kriegg or Lito, either. The young man stepped into the room

unnoticed.

Debbie was the one sobbing, Michael at her side. Ted was crouched over Emmett

pressuring the wound and Lindsay was stopping her own bleeding.

He was too late. Again.

"Goddamnitalltomotherfuckinghell!!!" He screamed, kicking the door as hard as he

could.

What was left of the group jumped, wide eyes staring at the new man. They knew who he was just by looking at his face.

"Where did they go? How long ago?" Will demanded.

"They're already gone by now." Michael whispered. "They didn't say where, but they're pissed that you were missing."

"FUCK!" Will shouted, collapsing on the floor with his head in his hands.

"Get up you selfish little shit!" Lindsay screamed. "Get up! You have no right to fall

apart now! Brian and Justin are suffering, and now they have one more because you

weren't there to help carry! Get over here!" She ordered, voice trembling with such rage that Will didn't bother to argue.

She grabbed the man's shirt with her right hand and pulled him close to her face staring him straight in the eye. "You are going to fix this. You are going to get Justin's driver's license and get whatever they needed you to get with it. They have his student ID, but it's not going to do him any good with his face mangled like that. Go, now! Save him. Save all of them."

Will nodded and picked up the license. He could use the money to barter for the safe

return. If he switched bank accounts the PIN's wouldn't be the same as what he told

Justin.

The time to run was over.

"I'm coming with you." Michael stood.

"No, baby." Debbie shook her head and reached for him.

"How do we know he's not going to screw us, screw them?!?"

"He's my brother!"

"Yeah? And look what you've done to him so far! Not as highly commendable as you

thought it would be, is it? I'm coming too and we're getting them back!"

\*

Melanie sat with Justin across her lap and Brian at her feet. Lito and Kriegg were in the front seat, the thinner driving and the latter watching her every move.

They weren't lying about having medical supplies and she didn't want to know how

many times emergencies had been made and dealt with in this car.

Some of the blood had been dried and wouldn't come off without her scrubbing it, and Mel doubted Justin was up for scrubbing. She rinsed off his eyes and nose, reminded of how gentle she had been with Gus as a newborn baby. Justin was as delicate, if not more so. Brian was awake, gripping her leg. He was afraid to move, to see what they had done to Justin.

Justin moaned weakly, trying to get away from the hands probing his wounds.

"Sweetheart, it's Mel. Melanie. You're going to be fine." She soothed.

Justin mouthed something, unable to form words, but he stopped squirming. Mel put a gauze pad to his temple and taped it there. Kriegg had reopened the original scar Chris Hobbs had graced him with during one of his tirades and if there was one thing Melanie wasn't going to do, it was give him fresh stitches without an anesthetic. Something told her most of their backseat patients didn't get time to worry about topical pain relief.

Brian was growing restless, both not wanting to see and needing to. He gave a soft groan and forced himself up. He leaned over Justin and immediately wanted to lie back down.

"Oh, now he's awake. After all our hard work." Kriegg muttered. "Better sit in the seat and wear your seat belt. Wouldn't want you to get hurt again before Lito can get his hands on you."

Brian closed his eyes but did as he was told, sitting beside Melanie once she lifted

Justin's head away from the seat. The woman put Justin down on Brian's lap and

continued to wipe away blood from his nose and lips.

"Can I help?" Brian asked in a voice too high for his throat.

"Clean yourself up." Melanie said, handing him a wet washcloth.

Brian nodded but used the cloth to run over Justin's hairline and wipe away the blood. He looked down at the boy and had a flash of the garage, the sound of a bat hitting cement and his own screaming. Then the hospital and the numbness that took away all the joy that night had brought.

Melanie put an arm on his shoulder. "Clean your face." She said softly, lifting his hand to his nose. "You don't want him to see you like this, do you?" She asked, speaking of the future she wanted Brian to believe they had.

"No." Brian said, gingerly touching his own bloodied face. He winced but looked down

again at Justin and knew the boy was in much more pain than he was. Justin was getting cleaned up, so could he.

"Buh..." Justin moaned.

"I'm here." Brian answered, taking the boy's hand and feeling him relax. "Brian's here, baby."

"You knew what he wanted." Melanie noticed.

Brian looked at her thinking of course he knew, he loved the kid, didn't he? But he

couldn't say it aloud.

"That's really, really good Brian." She said sweetly, wishing in that instant that she could take back every bad thing she had ever said about him. "Really good."

"I dun...at mah..." The boy mumbled, right eye forcing itself open against the bruise now that it was clean.

"I'm not mad at you, Justin." Brian leaned down and kissed Justin's forehead without a second thought to how much it hurt.

Melanie gaped at the two. She couldn't even understand Lindsay when the woman

mumbled half-asleep and here was Brian making entire sentences out of bare syllables from Justin's disjointedly swollen mouth. She shook her head with admiration.

"Ick don...slet gane?"

"Don't worry about that, I didn't mean it. I was never angry with you, baby. There's

nothing in the world that would make me stop," He leaned down and whispered so

Kriegg and Lito wouldn't hear, "sleeping with you again."

"Sob...be."

Brian laughed. "Don't be sorry. We'll get through this."

"Well I understood that one." Melanie said.

"Wet ill? Go...ling?" Justin asked, both eyes now squinting at his lover.

"Will is back in Pittsburgh. We're going to Chicago and he'll meet us there." Brian

promised what the kid needed to hear. The more people he knew were around to take care of him the better off he would be. He stared down into the incredibly awake blue of his young lover's eyes and knew that it wasn't as bad as it looked.

"No taye et?"

Brian leaned down and whispered again. "No, we're not okay yet. We will be."

Justin closed his eyes, clicking his tongue and trying to swallow. His cheeks were torn

from smashing against his teeth, but he could breathe through his nose. It was more than Brian could say. His head hurt terribly but nothing as bad as during his recovery from the attack prom. Justin told himself he would be okay. Somebody had to take care of Brian and his broken nose. It would take a while to figure out how to send coherent sentences his brain formed down to his swollen tongue in the same shape they were made in, but he wasn't worried about that now. Brian was here. Melanie was here. He was as safe as he was going to be and Justin wanted to go to sleep. His body didn't argue.

\*

Will made the call to Kriegg's car phone before the men even left Pennsylvania.

"I have the money, Kriegg. Nothing Justin can do will help that. I went in and they didn't bat an eye when I transferred the funds. I want all three of those people back, no more hurt then they are now, or you are out a nice chunk of drug money. Do I make myself clear?"

"Oh, Kid. If it wasn't my money I would be proud."

"It isn't your money, Kriegg. Not until Justin, Brian, and..." He looked at Michael who

mouthed her name. "Melanie are released."

"You call the shots now, Kid. What are we going to do for a trade?"

"Let them go right now. I want them home before you get the number."

"Not a chance. The minute you see them free you'll finch your end of the bargain. I

raised you into the urchin you are today, do not forget that."

"Listen, Kriegg, I don't trust you any more than you do me, but I have something you want and you have something I want. I stole the money to take care of Justin, but he's taken care of now and I don't need it. I don't want it. I just want Justin and his friends."

"I want the first seven numbers."

"I want Justin."

"No. I am going now. I want Justin, too, Will."

"Damnit, Kriegg!"

"Now I want all of the numbers or no deal."

"You need me to get the money." Will said, almost bashfully. He was more afraid then ever before. "You need my ID and my face, not Justin's. Give them back and you can

have the numbers. You can have...me."

"A very tempting offer, my young apprentice."

"Tempting means you're thinking about it, Kriegg."

"I promised Brian to Lito, I can't take it back now." Kriegg said and Lito grinned. "It

would be bad form."

"If you hurt any of them the deal is off!" Will shouted.

"They are already hurt. How do you know how hurt they are when you cannot see them?"

"How hurt are they, Kriegg?"

"What have I told you about holding your cards close to your chest, Kid? Never let on

how good or bad your hand is until you're sure you can win."

Will hung on the phone in silence. "I'm not playing a game." He said finally. "If you've already killed them then I'm going to the police. Lito's shot more than his fair share of bullets in this loft and he'll be easy to catch. I'll testify against you and I won't have to lie on the stand to put you away for life. I swear it, Kriegg. If I don't get them back you are going to lose everything! I have created a very legal and very logical explanation for -my- money, so I'll be spending while you're stuck watching a communal television and sleeping when you're told to. I want to know that all of us are going to make it out alive before we go anywhere. Give me something."

It was Kriegg's turn to think things over. "Melanie will go free and you will give us the numbers. Brian will be released when you come to me. Justin will leave with you and that will ensure both of you leave together."

"Or both of us stay together. Not going to happen, Kriegg. You raised me, remember? Melanie will go and you will have your numbers. Brian and Justin in the place of me and the link to the money."

"NO!" Kriegg roared. "You are not worth two."

"Me and ten million dollars are well worth the safety of everyone involved."

"Ten?" Kriegg asked before he could build his facade from the last outburst.

"Do you really think I've been good up until this very last transaction? You trusted me with more money than even Lito. I took it all, Kriegg. You slipped up and I took it. I was going to only give you two, now it is ten, and I have the winning hand. This is the only time I am making this offer. If they are dead, any of them, it's all over."

"How can I trust you?" Kriegg asked, voice so rumbling low it was like thunder.

"Because you have no choice, Kriegg. I am giving myself to you for these three people, to do with what you will. But they won't ever hear from you again. If anyone involved with Brian or Justin dies, the testimonial facts will go to the police and there is plenty of evidence locked away to make sure you won't see the sunlight ever again."

Kriegg boiled red with rage. "So be it."

"Let me speak to Justin."

"He cannot speak."

"Brian." Will ordered, trying to push the tightness of his stomach away.

"Mr. Kinney, can you speak?"

"Yes." Brian took the phone. "Hello?"

"It's Will."

"Big surprise."

"I'm going to get you out of there. Are you all still alive?"

"Yes."

"Are they making you lie?"

"No."

"Justin is okay?"

"He's asleep. We're fine."

"This is going to work. Give the phone back."

Brian handed it back to Kriegg.

"So this is a done deal?"

"Remember not to hurt them."

"Continue."

"Melanie gets out of the car now. In a half hour I'll call you with the numbers and you'll tell me where to meet you."

"That is fine, Will. But I have some demands of my own."

"You have no leverage."

"I do. I have your brother and no matter how much money you hold it will kill you to

know he got hurt. You have my money to do with what you will and I have the smoothest pale skin of a boy since I first met you. In thirty minutes I am going to do my damnedest to make you regret ever crossing me. If you disagree, keep the money and I will keep my hostages. The quicker you agree the less pain Justin will be in. A half hour is a very long time to wait for Melanie to be in the clear, is it not?"

"Bastard."

"Indeed." He motioned for Lito to pull over. "This is your stop. Get out and to a phone as quickly as possible, Will's orders." He told Melanie with a victorious grin.

She looked at Brian. He nodded and said, "Go." The car door shut behind her and they drove away.

"Now the plan is set in motion. If it takes her thirty minutes to call you, that is not my problem, it is Justin's."

"Where are you, Kriegg?" Will demanded suddenly aware of his tactical mistake.

"Much longer than a half hour to the nearest city, my dearest child. Play with the King and you are going to get royally fucked!" He said an hung up the phone, looking back at his two remaining hostages. "We have a lot to do before the girl finds a phone." His eyes traveled down Justin's sleeping body. "A lot to do."

"Damnit!" Will threw the phone against the wall, shattering it into Brian's kitchen.

"What's happened?" Lindsay asked. No one had been expecting such an outburst when things seemed to be going their way.

"And why did you tell him ten million? You only transferred two!" Michael shouted.

"Because two million isn't as significant as ten. He wasn't going to let them all go for it.

I had to think of something."

"But once they find out you lied, they'll kill you." Michael said.

"And Justin and Brian will be safe. When they figure it out we'll all be in a bank. Public places aren't Kriegg's favorite thing to do. I'll cause a scene and...disappear for awhile if I can. If I can't...Justin will still be safe. Kriegg knows you have evidence in a lock box to release if you feel threatened so hopefully he'll leave you alone. But he had some orders of his own that I couldn't refuse. He gets to do what he wants to Justin and Brian until I call. Fuck! Shit! I fucked up. I fucked it up." Will ran his fingers through the dark blonde hair and took a deep breath. "They let Melanie go."

"Then what's the problem?" Lindsay asked again. "That's what we wanted, right?"

"They were too far gone, too far out. I don't think she'll get to a phone in a half hour, let alone for the rest of the night. I was supposed to call him with the number, once her safety was confirmed, and now I can't." He pinched the bridge of his nose.

"Well then fake it!" Emmett cried. "For Christ sakes, just call them. If they really let her go they couldn't know she didn't have a cell phone."

"The fucking bastard knows how to play the game. He won't pick up the phone for a half hour just to spite us whether she calls or not. Until then...Kriegg's got an open

playground with the boys."

\*

Justin clutched Brian's shirt, burying his face in the man's stomach as his legs dangled off the seat's edge. He was still laying across Brian's lap, still too weak to sit up on his own. The atmosphere in the car had changed for the worse and he could sense it.

Brian stroked the boy's back and tried to relax with Justin's warm breath against his

stomach. They were in serious trouble, and the man had a feeling this would be their last time together. Unless he could convince their kidnappers of a better solution.

"It's okay, baby." Brian whispered.

"I'm scared." Justin whimpered, his clearest sentence in hours.

"I know, but we're okay. Remember that movie we were talking about?" Brian asked

nasally, the pain giving him a migraine on top of several other throbbing headaches.

Justin attempted to smile up at him but thought better of it when his dry lips cracked.

"Well, this is the part where the good guys have to outsmart their enemies." He said in a low whisper, pressing his lips to Justin's ear.

"How?"

"I'll tell you later." Brian said when he really meant 'I haven't the slightest idea, but I

know we're fucked if we don't think of something soon. Literally.'

Justin nodded slowly and rested his face on his lover's lap with complete trust.

Brian watched the scenery unfold. He had no idea how long they had been on the road, but it was getting to the deep blue haze of dusk. With Lito driving the back roads and

deserted trails, Brian had no doubt they would never see Chicago. He went back to

stroking Justin's hair and wanted desperately to push the boy out of the car. If there were anyone within a mile radius, he would have done just that and jumped after him.

"I think Will is going to call soon." Kriegg said. Lito nodded and pulled over.

"Well we certainly wouldn't want to miss our chance to desecrate our hostages before the time limit is up." Lito sneered. Both men got out of the car.

Brian shot to the front seat and locked their doors. He didn't mean to dump Justin on the floor but the men were outside, a few tons of steel between them, their filthy intentions, and two unwilling victims. Justin closed his eyes, glad to have landed on his butt and not his head. He watched Brian moving from driver's side to passenger side locking the doors Lito and Kriegg opened. The men outside were throwing the set of keys to each other over the car, sometimes faking it but keeping the keys and going for the locks at the same time. Justin got up and helped hold the fort by locking the back doors while Brian concentrated on the front. He didn't move nearly as fast as Brian, the world still reeling from his injuries, and his lover covered many of the locks he missed.

"Come on, Kinney. You can't hold out forever! The slut of Pittsburgh has to be drying

out by now!" Lito complained, still enjoying the chase.

"In case," Brian leapt to the door and locked it, "you haven't noticed, I'm taken!" He

threw himself the other way and kept the back door on Kriegg's side closed.

That was his mistake. Lito had taken the keys and Justin was busy watching Brian lock Kriegg away. The skinny man opened Justin's side and pulled him out knowing he would give up less of a fight. The boy screamed and reached for Brian.

"No!" Brian grabbed his wrists and held on. Lito used one hand around Justin's waist and tossed the keys to his boss over the car. Brian heard the keys hit and skid over the roof and had to make a choice. Justin or keeping the car locked. There was no contest.

Brian lurched from the front seat and got a better hold on Justin. Kriegg was going to

separate them, and this was not going to be the last time Brian held his love. He felt

strong arms wrap around his ribcage and heave him from the car. Brian hit the dirt with a grunt, the air flying away from him in a hurry.

Justin clawed his way back into the car, Lito clinging to his legs. He kicked against the man violently, fingers reaching for anything he could. Grabbing the headrest, Justin turned himself and gave a double kick to his attacker's chest with all the strength he had. Lito fell onto the ground as hard as Brian had. The teenager slammed the back door shut and locked it, climbing into the front and closing the door on Kriegg and Brian.

Tears streamed down his face as the bigger man held Brian down and yelled for Lito to help him. Lito ran around the front of the car, glaring at Justin through the headlights. He slammed his fists on the hood and made Justin jump.

Brian hit Kriegg's head with his own and didn't have the logic to regret it, his vision

swimming with impressive stars. Lito grabbed his arms but he didn't feel it. Kriegg

pinned his legs down.

"Help me get his pants off." Lito pleaded.

"Fine, fine. Let's hurry up, that kid's got Lincoln Towncar hot-wiring in his blood."

Justin shook his head and pressed his hands against the cold window. They were going to rape Brian! He screamed and nearly hit the roof when the phone rang behind him.

"Hello? Help us!" Justin shrieked.

"Justin! Kiddo, it's Will. Where are you?"

"Will! Will! They're going to-" He screamed and dropped the phone as Kriegg

completed his task and headed back to the car. "No! No! No!!! You can't! Please!" He

begged. "Don't!"

Kriegg unlocked the back door and switched to the front without going for his first

success. While Justin was still hunched over the back headrest Kriegg opened the door.

"NO!" Justin screamed, clinging to the seat. "Will!"

"Oh, is that Will on the phone?" Kriegg asked. He released Justin and picked up the

phone. "Hello, Kid. Did Melanie get home all right?"

"We haven't heard from her, Kriegg, and you know it. You made sure she was in the

middle of a foreign place close to dark. But I waited a half hour and now I've called, it's

time to leave them alone."

"Fine, give me the numbers."

"It's part of the deal, Kriegg."

"The numbers, then their safety."

Justin sobbed and slipped out of the car. He ran to Lito and threw him off of Brian. The teenager lifted Brian's head onto his lap and lightly slapped his cheek. "Brian? Brian!"

Lito snarled and ran at Justin, knocking the boy to the ground. "You little shit! Your

boyfriend fucked you nice and proper and you won't even share." He licked the side of Justin's face. "But you belong to Kriegg now, and Brian is mine."

"Fuck you!" Justin spit in the man's face.

"It must be the fact that we're in the middle of nowhere and all the bodies we buried here because you're breaking up, Kid." Kriegg said. "I'll just have to call you back when we get to a more...civilized place."

"Kriegg! Goddamnit! Kriegg!" Will shouted.

"Buh bye, Kid. Enjoy the -ten- million dollars. I have a bigger prize waiting for me."

Kriegg said and put the phone against the floorboards. He didn't hang it up, he had plans for haunting Will's dreams.

"Lito! He's mine!" Kriegg came back and kicked his associate off of Justin.

"I know, I know! He was gonna run, I stopped him." Lito crawled like a wounded dog

back to Brian.

"Come on, little one, I think you deserve to have the expensive seats of my Towncar

under that fine candy ass."

\*

Brian moaned, consciousness slowly coming back after what seemed like a lifetime of

evasion. He felt someone on top of him but couldn't see in the dark. He was freezing cold laying on hard ground, headlights yards away the only light shining straight ahead. The body over his was warm, thin, and as undressed as either man was going to get. Fear ripped through Brian's chest, sinking into his stomach like a tight ball of fire.

Lito grabbed Brian's right leg and used his left to shove it to one side. The skinnier man reached up and grabbed Brian's nose, squeezing it until his victim cried out telling Lito he was awake.

"That's it." Lito grinned. He rammed inside Brian without another second's hesitation,

laughing at the top of his lungs when the man beneath him shouted in surprise and pain. "Oh, I bet you're tighter then that boy. I bet I got the best deal." He shoved into Brian, harder each time, his hands wrapped in Brian's hair and pulling as if to tear strand by

strand until their heads matched.

Brian struggled, more afraid now that he didn't hear or see Justin then of the man

pummeling his insides. The brunette knew who was on top of him and that meant the

more powerful man had Justin. He winced as Lito seemed to find a way to go even

deeper, the man laughing crazily enough to make Brian worry he wouldn't stop driving himself into his victim until he came out the other end. The man was already coming, his breathing ragged, hot against Brian's bare skin. Lito pulled out suddenly leaving the world cold and alone, quiet. Brian didn't sense him anywhere around in the darkness.

He turned onto his side toward the headlights and blinked a few times. The lights

were...moving...bobbing up and down as if-

"Oh, God." Brian pushed his knees under him and tried to run to the car. A wash of stars sprayed his vision as Lito smashed a rock against the back of his skull. The bald man grabbed Brian and dragged his limp body further and further from the Lincoln until the lights seemed no more then a hazy dream.

Lito left Brian on his side, body stained with mud and dirt. He pushed into the man again, the first signs of orgasm fading as he began a second time. If Brian Kinney thought he had been done, the man was stupider than he thought.

\*Justin hit his fists against Kriegg's chest as the man waddled to the car with the boy

dragging between his legs. The teenager fell against the front seat and couldn't move as Kriegg's weight crushed him down. The man laughed, positioning himself close to the phone. He knew Will wouldn't hang up. He would listen in horror as his baby brother was raped and murdered, knowing there was nothing he could do but hear the last sobbing breath.

"Get offa me!" Justin yelled, more angry now than scared. He closed his eyes and used his knees to keep the man from completely collapsing upon him.

"Not a chance." Kriegg hissed, loosening the drawstring to Justin's stolen pants. He

pulled the clothing down over his ass but couldn't get it passed his knees. It didn't

matter, as long as what he wanted was unprotected.

"No!" Justin shook his head, hands yanking at his pants as Kriegg undid his own.

The man stuck a finger in his mouth and trailed it down Justin's body, massaging the

tight hole almost gently before shoving inside. Justin gasped and shivered, shaking his head no. Kriegg removed his finger and licked a second one, pushing one in and then the other, then both. He grunted, hips pushing through Justin's knees. The man's penis throbbed at the entrance of the blonde's puckered hole, waiting for the fingers to take their turn.

Justin couldn't help but moan with pleasure, the ball of fear in his gut sinking lower and lower until his own cock grew hard. He closed his eyes and saw Brian grabbing him and tearing his shirt.

Kriegg slowly removed his fingers in a slow circular motion and pushed inside with his waiting hard-on before the cold breeze had time to dry the spit. He used Justin's

shoulders as leverage, pulling himself deeper into the boy. Justin gasped with the

pressure. He felt himself held down by familiar hands, warm hands, caring hands that only hurt him as badly as it took to make it feel good.

Justin groaned and remembered his own scent clinging to his shirt as it captured his

vision and Brian's hands going to his throat cutting off his air as the heat rose in his virile body.

Kriegg moved in and out slowly, feeling the tightness and reveling in every moment. This boy looked so much like his brother down to the very last detail; the way his nose scrunched when he closed his eyes too tight, the way his teeth grazed his lower lip when the rhythm got too hot to handle. He was innocent, soft to the touch. Kriegg felt tiny goose bumps under every part of skin his fingers caressed.

"Look at me, boy." Kriegg ordered and as soon as he spoke the illusion was broken.

Justin tensed and made the man groan, his blue eyes wide with fear.

Will had been the same way, still so virginal despite a rough life. The boy had been as afraid as Justin was now.

Kriegg bit back the leaping of his heart, the pure excitement driving him to the edge. He slowed his body until all that moved was his breathing and Justin's humming-bird quick heartbeat pounding under his flat chest.

"You're beautiful, little one." He forced Justin to look at him. "Like your brother."

Kriegg said and wanted to pick up the phone to hear Will shouting. As for now, the floor offered both perfect clarity for the Kid and no sound for his brother's terrified ears. There were other things for Justin to listen to now.

Justin stared up at the man and saw Brian beyond Kriegg as tears slipped silently into his sideburns.

"Not yet. We're not finished." Kriegg said soothingly, stroking the boy's face.

Justin shut his eyes and let Brian's voice fill his thoughts as Kriegg picked up his slow

pace. It was Brian's hand that found his cock and tenderly pumped it along with his

thrusts. It was Brian's moaning breath that floated to his ears. Brian was almost at

orgasm, his rhythm maniacal, fast, faster. Justin was filled with his lover's warmth and the blindfold fell away as his own orgasm shook the world.

Justin felt the smoothness of expensive slacks against his naked flesh and knew it wasn't Brian who had just fucked him, who had just pulled out and settled into the passenger seat. He did know that the only thing left on Kriegg's list of things to do was murder and Justin didn't want to die.

"Please." He whispered hopelessly.

"You like it rough, I couldn't give you that satisfaction. Lito told me. He saw the whole thing."

"Lito saw nothing. He was too busy yelling at Will about sharing the money they stole." Justin whimpered without blinking an eye. He was already out for survival.

"What?" Kriegg stopped zipping his pants. "Look at me."

Justin turned his baby blue's to the man. "He...said that they were supposed to share the money and that if they ran away together you would never find them." Justin searched the man's face, eyes sparkling with truth. "Lito said you could never do it on your own, that without he and Will you would be lost." Tears ran down Justin's cheeks, more of surprise at the gentle sex from the rough-looking man then from fear. "I promised not to tell about Lito...I told Will I wouldn't tell. Please don't tell him I told you?"

Kriegg watched the boy. "You're still telling me the truth, little one?"

"I just want to go home." Justin sobbed, hoping the act was as believable to Kriegg as it sounded in his own ears. "I don't want anybody else to get hurt..."

"Of course you don't, you're a very good boy. You liked what I just did to you, Justin? Did I make you feel good?"

The boy nodded. "I can't take it...rough." He turned pleading eyes to Kriegg.

"All this time Lito said he hated Will, knowing that I would have to trust one of them!" The man bellowed.

Will held the phone so tightly his knuckles threatened to break through the skin. He had kept what was happening to Justin away from his friends but their faces showed how easy it was to figure out. Will couldn't believe the effect Justin had on his former lover even after being raped. There was no sobbing, no pleading, no begging. He could practically see the tears that matched the quiver in the kid's voice. He was struggling to make it out alive. The boy was good. Damn good.

"Kriegg?" Justin propped himself up on his elbows. "I'll make Will tell me where the

money is. He'll trust me. Everyone else tried to hurt me, but you didn't. You were so

gentle."

"You want to work for me, little one?"

"Anything's better then school. Who wants to work hard at an honest living anymore

when there are better things to do?" Justin beamed, letting his childlike excitement push away the fear and uncertainty. "These pants? They're not mine." He held his head up high. "I stole them. The shirt and socks, too, right out of someone's dresser drawer."

"Looks like I chose the wrong brother." Kriegg smiled fondly on the boy.

"It happens, we look a lot alike." Justin moved close to Kriegg and snuggled against him. "What are we going to do about Lito, Kriegg?" The teenager moved his hands around the man's waist searching for his gun.

"Kill him."

"Do I have to watch?"

"Of course not. You won't see anyone in the dark."

Justin nodded. "What's your first name?"

"Hayden."

"I like that." Justin found the weapon at the small of Kriegg's back, but if he was going to be safe without having his hands on it the teenager decided it would be better to leave it alone. He didn't have the right angle to shoot the man even if the element of surprise bought him enough time to aim, let alone find the safety and take it off.

"Hayden, what are we going to do about Will? He'll go crazy if he knows we're together. He gets jealous. I...don't want to watch him suffer."

"Don't you worry about him, little one, he'll pay the price."

Will winced. He knew Justin had lost the lie. Somewhere along the line he had slipped up and Kriegg was no longer being pulled along. If he was reaching for the man's gun, that was it. The beast of eagerness pushed through the boy's innocent facade and that was what Kriegg had been following.

"I guess." Justin said, fingers still itching for action against the cold metal of the gun.

Kriegg's posture had changed from betrayed to quietly enraged behind a granite face. The boy knew his audience was no longer believing his performance.

Thinking quickly, Justin got to his knees and planted a soul-searching kiss on Kriegg's

surprised lips. He pushed his tongue inside the man's mouth, scratching his face on the black beard. Justin felt the erection press against him and knew it was too late to turn back. If he was going to play lover to Kriegg, then so be it. His pants were still down and he thought of Brian's heavy breathing, his scent, the way it felt like liquid ecstasy flowed through his veins whenever the man touched him. Justin's cock twitched and pressed hard against Kriegg's stomach. He knew Brian was out there somewhere in dire need of help.

The teenager pulled back with a loud moan and looked deep into the glassy green eyes. "I always wanted someone who would protect me." He said, hoping the sheltering part of Kriegg was strong enough to find the dainty desperation in his voice and flow to it like flies to honey.

"Well if that's not all the truth I need." Kriegg leaned back and admired Justin's erection. It was sex after all that won his affections back. Somehow Justin wasn't surprised.

"I'm not a liar." He traced the shape of Kriegg's balls through the slacks and didn't want to be anywhere near the massive bulge again in the near future. Kissing the man chastely on the lips before sliding over him, Justin got out of the car and pulled his pants up over his hard cock slowly, teasing. He held his hand to Kriegg, purposely rubbing his leg against the other's hip.

Kriegg grinned and got out of the vehicle, letting Justin lead him into the darkness. The man pulled Justin close, pressing his erection against his new treasure's round ass. Justin leaned against Kriegg though it was hard to walk with his attacker's cock trying to gorge its way through him from the back out. He laughed with pleasure, a low, guttural sound.

"I don't think I could kill a man." He admitted sheepishly.

"No, I don't think you could."

"I'll...try to be brave. For you." The teenager said in a sultry whisper reserved for the

most intimate of occasions.

"You can stay as cherry as you are, little one. I made the mistake of training your brother into a worthy adversary. I want a princess by my side, not a warrior."

"I can live with that." Justin searched the darkness for Brian and couldn't see past his

own feet. "Do you think Lito took off? I mean, if he figured out I would tell you..."

"No, he's away sinking his dick into your ex as long as he stays warm."

Justin was proud that he didn't tense physically like he did in his mind. "Then where are they?"

"Lito's like a hyena, a scavenger. If he could drag an orifice away from the actual body and keep it hot enough to fuck he would."

Justin closed his eyes and would have stumbled if Kriegg didn't have such a tight grip on him.

"Terribly sorry, little one. I need to learn to keep you away from violence, not bring it to the table."

Justin gave a nervous, if not shy laugh. "Thank you for catching me." He reached behind him and caressed the man's neck.

A feral moan floated to the men as Lito came. He dug his fingernails into Brian's naked thigh and pushed himself until the power of climax dulled and he was able to go again as if starting anew. Brian was crying softly, a child's sound, hiding his face in the dirt.

Kriegg released Justin and took out his gun, the metal shining with the barest hint of

ferocity before exploding in a bright star. Lito hit the dirt gasping for air, one hand

finding its way to his cock. The thin man tried with his dying breath to come. His boss gave a faintly sad chuckle and turned back in the darkness to the boy.

"Now for Brian." He said, the flash of his shot still a shadow in his vision. "Am I right,

little one?" Kriegg asked, but only to empty air. Justin had Brian by the hand and both men were running with everything they had back to the beacon of light only a scream away.

\*"Hurry." Brian urged from the passenger seat. He held the door closed just enough so it didn't slam. Justin was under the steering column trying to copy his brother's technique. The man watched Justin and wished there was a way to ask if Kriegg hurt him like Lito hurt Brian.

"I'm trying." Justin said calmly, half out of the car. "But I can't figure out which wires go where. It's dark enough that I can barely see colors at all."

"We can't turn on the lights."

"Shh." Justin whispered, stopping to listen. "I think he's coming."

"Fuck." Brian sunk lower into the seat.

"Hello!" Will shouted from beneath Brian's feet.

The man picked up the phone. "Hello?" He whispered.

"Are you two okay?"

"We're trying to be."

"Where are you?"

"Don't know." Brian answered, quieter each time he spoke.

Justin looked at his lover with a shock of horror. Will had heard everything! He pushed it out of his mind and kept working.

"Where are Kriegg and Lito?"

"Coming and dead." Brian said bitterly.

"Ask which wires go together." Justin said.

"Which wires to start the car?"

"Red and yellow."

"Red and yellow." Brian repeated, tucking himself into as small a ball as he could

manage. He wanted to hide his body, even from Justin in the dead of night.

Justin took a deep breath and crossed the wires. It sparked but the car didn't start. He did it again, ducking the sparks, and again until it started. He got into the car and hit the gas, peeling out in a cloud of dust in the blackest midnight.

"Fucking finally." Brian sighed. "Get us out of here."

"Okay, where's Kriegg?"

Brian rolled his eyes and hung up the phone. "Is it okay if I slug your brother?"

"If you get in line." Justin said, studying on the road as if there was more out there than a plain dirt road.

"Justin...."

"Yes, he did."

Brian squeezed his eyes shut. "I tried to get to you."

"I know. I...it wasn't bad. He treated me like a lover. Like he treated Will when he wasn't mad at him I bet. Are you okay?" It was the only thing he could think of asking.

"I'll be fine." Brian said and stared into the darkness.

"Brian?"

"I thought about you when I was awake. I was worried." Brian admitted.

"I saw you...when he was doing it, not Kriegg."

"You did?"

"Yes. He was convinced I was being so docile because I was innocent and falling in love with him. I only thought about you, about hurting Lito for what I knew he was doing."

"You got Kriegg to shoot him." Brian smiled in the inky black void separating the

wounded lovers.

"Yeah." Justin smiled too, though he couldn't see Brian's. "I feel bad for not feeling bad about it. Does that make sense?"

"To me, it does." Brian sighed. "Pull over, Justin."

"Why?"

"Pull over. Please?"

Justin stopped the car on the side of the make-shift road, pulling the parking break.

"What's wrong?"

Brian scooted across the seats and settled into the familiar body of his young lover. He wrapped his arms around the boy and smelled his hair, tasted the salt remains of dried tears down his cheeks. Justin leaned into Brian but let the man fill his senses with the warmth of his love. Ragged sobs trembled through Brian's body as he melted against Justin. The blonde snaked his arms around Brian's waist and lightly caressed his bare back. His own tears fell silently into Brian's hair as the man nestled against his chest, trying to get closer, to get warm, to find comfort.

"I was so scared." Brian whispered.

"I was, too."

"But I was scared they would kill you. I wasn't...I didn't care if anything happened to me if I could save you."

"That's how I felt, too, Brian." Justin lifted the man's face and smiled at it in the dim

lights on the dash. "If you were okay, then I could be too."

Brian stroked Justin's face, wiping away the tears with his thumb. The two stared at each other for a moment longer, lingering in the truth that both had made it out alive in a situation neither thought would end without death. They were together.

"We have to keep moving." Justin kissed Brian lightly on the forehead, letting the man sit beside him, thighs pressed against each other, driving as one.

\*

By the early light of morning Brian was driving the Lincoln with Justin tucked safely

under his arm. He smiled down at the boy as the road went from strange and paved to blissfully familiar. The man remembered being taken this way, but the hitchhiking figure was even more of a solid reminder that they were heading the right direction.

Brian pulled over and unrolled the window. "Need a ride?"

"Brian! You're...all right?" She looked into the car. "You're naked."

"Is that a no to the ride, then?"

"The very opposite." Melanie got into the backseat. "Is Justin?"

"He's fine. They're sick fucks, but they won't make it very long without people to

torment."

"But you're, fuck, Brian. You look like-"

"I know what I look like, but we aren't the kind of friends that get into it."

"You're right. I'm glad you're both alive."

"So am I." He started back onto the road and watched Melanie through the mirror.

"Lindsay and Emmett got shot. It wasn't bad, though."

"I think I remember something along the line of stupid heroics."

"To save you!" Mel retorted in her usual defensiveness.

Brian chuckled. "I'm glad you're here." He said and Melanie didn't push it. Whatever it meant for the man to need as many friends as he could get around him, she wouldn't fight him on it.

\*

Brian ended up stopping just outside of Pittsburgh and making Melanie get him some

clothes from the nearest shop. He didn't approve of the tee-shirt and jeans approach, but anything was better than walking into his loft fully exposed. Everyone would be there waiting for them, that much he figured just by knowing them all so well.

He smiled at Justin and the boy smiled back, the same unaffected warmth radiating from him that had captured Brian the very first night they met.

"What are we going to tell them?"

"Nothing." Brian said. He was going to talk with his fists, but Justin didn't need to know that.

"Works for me." Justin sighed and hugged Brian close. He whispered, more to himself

then the man. "I love you."

Brian kissed the top of the boy's head. He thought about just how much he loved Justin, too, and smiled. It had been a long night, but not long enough to say the words to anyone but himself.

Epilogue

Brian entered his nearly empty home to find it cleaned up and knew he would have to thank Debbie later. Brian had a broken nose, but it would heal nicely. Justin didn't have a broken bone in his body but did need a few stitches to seal the scar back in place at his temple, and a few on the inside of his left cheek. Lindsay and Emmett had gotten a quick visit and Melanie stayed with them when the other two left, but Brian didn't have time to think about anyone else. He headed straight for the only person waiting for them and punched him so hard the young man collapsed on the floor.

Justin put his hands on Brian's hips, standing behind the man. "Go away, Will." The boy said plainly. "I don't want to see you right now. Not for a very long time."

Will nodded with tears in his eyes more from heartbreak then from Brian's fist. He got up and dusted himself off. "I'll be back, kiddo."

"Just go." Justin said.

"Bear's gonna be okay...he's got a place to go, so I'm heading out. Good bye, Justin." He walked quickly passed the two and stopped in the doorway. "I'm going to do it right this time. I promise."

Justin didn't turn around, tears burning the backs of his eyes. He pressed his face to

Brian's back and cried.

"I'm sorry." Will tried one last time with a desperate shrug. "I...I love you, kiddo."

Justin turned around. He shook his head. "Don't."

"Don't what?"

"Don't say that. You've never said that."

"I never needed to. I never fucked up this bad before. I'm grasping at straws, but I don't want you to forgive me. I deserve you to be angry, because god knows I'm angry with myself. I tried everything, kiddo. I tried to trade myself for you and Brian. I was out of my league and you ended up handling yourself better then I ever could. You're stronger then I am, Justin, and you always have been."

"I know." Justin said softly smiling. He ran to Will's arms and hugged him. "You have to go away for awhile, but I'll always love you."

Will fought the tears glistening in his eyes. "Take care of him." He told his brother because if he said anything to Brian he knew the man would charge. As it was, it seemed like Justin wore the pants in the relationship. That could be their little secret, though.

"I will." He held the door open for Will.

Will kissed Justin on the cheek and got into the elevator. Justin waved good bye.

"I need a vacation." Brian sighed as his young lover closed the door and set the alarm.

"Can you forgive him?"

"I'm still working on liking your father, Justin and he didn't give me a broken nose."

The boy laughed and came to face Brian. "That's unfortunate. I hate to tell you, but if you dislike Will, you're going to get a real kick out of my -other- brother."

The Right Thing to Do

The warm night air caressed his healing skin, the scathed surface rough with wear over his bare arms and rosy cheeks. A summer wind tousled his dark blonde hair as he walked onto Liberty Avenue, taking in the new surroundings; his mind intent on absorbing the different area with a prowess like nothing he'd ever felt before. This was the place he thought existed only in a dream. An emancipated smile danced over his lips, the curiosity growing larger with every face that passed, every lean, sculpted body that turned to look back. Suddenly, Mark knew where he belonged: eleven years old and as soon as he found the man he sought, this world was his for the taking.

\*

Michael laughed, nearly falling over in the middle of his story as he walked alongside his friends towards Liberty Diner. "So then he said: 'Oh yeah? Tongue my shitter!' David was so furious that he just sped right through the red light!"

Brian shook his head as the others laughed. "I take it he didn't like the invitation?"

Michael laughed harder. "Well, the guy wasn't exactly a Greek God, despite the hot car!"

Smiling, Brian stuck his hands in his pockets to keep them away from Justin's prying grasp, teasing him with a few clicks of his tongue. "Keep your hands to yourself." He scolded.

A lot had happened between them in the passed two months, most of it something they wanted to forget. Sullivan Kinney, Brian's unabashed and wickedly sadistic cousin had killed Brian's first love in a fit of jealous rage nearly sixteen years ago and vowed to come back for anyone Brian ever fell for.

Jeff Reeves had been Sullivan's boyfriend at the time he and Brian made love, Brian's first time.

Sulli was in jail now, sixty-one days and holding after an astonishingly quick trial and sentencing. Brian knew the judge, but on how well his lips were sealed. Justin didn't mention what had gone on, but knew much more about Brian and the man's shady past. It satisfied him enough to back off with his determined questions, even though Brian still had nightmares every now and then.

It comforted the man more than he would ever say to have Justin there when he woke up frightened, in the dark. The blonde knew what the dreams were about and could comfort his dark haired lover accordingly.

"Please. I'll keep that in mind when you want to fuck tonight. Hands off!" Justin rolled his eyes, stopping to gaze at the sight before him. "And I thought -I- started young!"

"Oh my God, that kid's got to be like, three!" Michael grinned.

A shock wave rippled goose-bumps over Brian's tanned arms. "Eleven, actually." He said through gritted teeth as two men took position in front of the boy, one reaching out and stroking his shy prey's bone-thin arm.

Brian grabbed the man and tossed him aside, growling. "You touch him again and I'll make you regret learning how to walk upright!" He took the boy's arm and swung him into the diner, launching the child into an open booth.

"Hey! Don't touch me!" Mark protested, his dark eyes glaring at the older man through a slight Southern drawl before recognition kicked in.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" Brian yelled, drawing every eye in the place to their argument. "Are you fucking stupid?"

"I just wanted to see you!" Mark protested.

Emmett stifled a gasp. "Oh, don't tell me he's gone to younger territory!" He said, covering his mouth.

"I'm calling your mother!" Brian said, standing in front of the booth opening to hinder escape.

"No!" Mark grabbed for the phone.

"You're going home!" Brian snarled, turning away to dial the number.

Melanie, already seated with Gus, stared at Lindsay as she stood behind Brian with a bottle of ketchup in her hand. The blonde's wide eyes displayed the emotion inside: for the second time in as many months she had no idea what was going on with Brian Kinney.

"Please, don't!"

"Knock it off, Mark!"

"Dad!" Mark yelled, the hushed whispers around them sucked into sudden silence.

Brian squeezed his eyes shut, gripping the phone to keep from throwing it. "Shit!" He hissed under his breath.

"Let me explain, would you?" The boy scooted towards the end of the seat, gently taking the cell phone from Brian's hands.

Justin, at a loss for words, leaned back against Michael for support. The two had gotten close after Sullivan attacked, his eyes set on their destruction.

"Will you sit the fuck down?" Mark demanded, pulling on the man's arm. He was determined to make Brian pay attention to him, no matter what it took. Turning to their audience, he shouted: "Mind your own fucking business!"

"Well we know who he got his mouth from…" Melanie whispered to Lindsay.

Brian rubbed his eyes with the backs of frustrated hands. "Where is your mother?"

"I don't know."

"Bullshit. Please don't tell me she's still in New Orleans, Mark. Don't tell me you came here alone."

"I don't know!"

"For wanting to explain, you sure don't know a whole hell of a lot about what's going on!"

"You told me not to tell you what I was going to tell you so why bother? Calm down! I just wanted to see you." The boy leaned an elbow on the table and rested his head on it, the brazen smile on his face one of instant familiarity to many in the restaurant. The feeling of comfort and safety floated over him as the end of his long journey came to an end. He had found his father. Now all he had to do was convince him to let him stay.

"Does she know you're here?"

Mark shrugged. Brian had to take him in and the boy knew it, only there was no easy way to ask. "She doesn't care." He pouted, turning his eyes to the people still watching and grinning at Justin. "Who's he?" The boy raised an eyebrow at the older blonde.

"Mark, your mother cares enough about you to ask me to help conceive you, and I sure as hell pay enough so she can take good care of you, so your side of the argument is shoddy at best, kid. Why are you here?"

Mark retorted in a huff, crossing his arms over his chest. "Money can't mean shit to me when I don't see any of it!"

"Watch your mouth, Mark." Brian warned. The whole point of the kid living in New Orleans was so Brian wouldn't have to change his lifestyle, only now he had Gus. Too many years had passed between the births, he'd forgotten about his resolution to never make friends with another woman who wanted a kid. The support payments had become routine, and his secretary did the mailing each month without a question asked about where the money was going. It wasn't that he'd never seen Mark…just not in person. A few pictures exchanged from years back, but Susanna never wanted anything from Brian except his money to help through the rough spots with her job, plus a cup of sperm.

"Why should I watch my fucking mouth?" Mark argued, ready to match any tone his father put in front of him. "It's not like you've been around! Why should I let you tell me what to do!"

"Susanna wanted a kid, not a husband, and she wouldn't have gotten a kid if she wanted me to marry her first. I did what she wanted, and that was the end of it."

"That's not the end! She wanted a husband too, but she probably never told you anything like that in those sugar'n spice letters she sends all the time, did she? Mom probably told you that everything was great, that I was an angel getting good grades and we were living in a great house with a white picket fence and a dog. -Fuck- what she told you because it isn't true! She married an asshole with a vengeance and a sweet spot for cheap beer and a leather belt! Life sucks over there and that isn't the half of it! I hardly ever see her because she's out doing you know what with everyone who's willing, while good ol' Russell sits at home spending all those wads of cash you sent on booze and cigarettes. I hate it there and you can't make me go back! I won't do it! I'll live by myself if I have to! So when I say that she doesn't care where I am, it's the truth. You've got to believe me, you're the only one who will. She leaves Russell home and doesn't look twice at either of us. You wanna see what he did to my back?" Mark asked, his voice dulling into a quiet timidity as he bowed his head, fighting back tears. There was much more he would never tell Brian…the things that happened when all the lights were out and Russell was only sober enough to wander into his bedroom…

Brian's face lost its color, his fingers lightly grazing across the boy's back, recoiling when a sharp hiss escaped the trembling lips of his first-born son. Anger boiled below the surface as his hidden paternal instincts went into overdrive for a son he had never met. "Son of a bitch." He sighed, taking the boy's chin in his hand and turning his small face upwards. He had a million things to say, apologies for too many things he had experienced from his own father, but no words came out.

"I can't go back…" The boy whispered, his eyes pleading to a hazel mirror.

"You're not." Brian stood, holding out his hand and exhaling slowly, his eyes on no one but his son as he led the boy out of the diner and toward his Jeep. Brian didn't know what to do, but he was damned if this kid would go through anything more from his stepfather.

\*

"How is he?" Michael asked over the phone, the shock of the previous hour still running its course through his system. When Brian found time to have another kid without anyone knowing was beyond him. First Sullivan, now Mark…New Orleans must have been bursting with Kinney lineage and the man had never thought to mention it until his family ended up in Pittsburgh.

"Asleep, finally." Brian cradled the phone with his shoulder, staring at the barren remains of his refrigerator. "And I know what you're going to ask, so don't. I was just a stupid kid. It was after graduation, after my first year at Carnegie, when I went to visit Aunt May and the family down south. I did everything I could to avoid Sulli. I met Sue, she asked, I agreed. It was that fast, Mikey, I just…I never thought it would come to this. She's a good girl…"

"I thought you said it was fast, Bri, how did you get to know her enough to make that decision?"

Brian groaned, squeezing the bridge of his nose. "Fine, you got me. But I said I was a stupid kid and as far as I was concerned, I would never hear from her again. But after a couple of years, I get this letter saying I owe her all sorts of child-support and she needed help."

"And you gave it to her?!"

"She sent me a picture, Mike…just this fat little…person, a person that I made. I didn't want to have anything to do with him until I saw him and then it hit me. I wanted everything for him, but I knew I couldn't be the father he needed. She never asked me to. I didn't want to end up like my father…and now it turns out that Mark had to suffer just as much as I did when I could have stopped it. I fucked up, Mikey, but I'm going to fix it."

"How, Brian? Do you really think that you can adopt him? From what I hear, gay adoption isn't exactly openly accepted."

"Fuck what you hear! He's my kid, Mikey, and he's not going back while I'm around!"

"Don't wake him, calm down!" Michael sighed, his cell phone pressed tightly to his ear. No one had left Liberty Diner, all were crowded around to hear the latest information.

"Look," Brian said, though at a much lower decibel now, "if there's anything Melanie can tell me, it would be appreciated, if not, I'd rather not have anyone over quite so soon."

"Gotcha. I'll see what's up on the legal side and have her call you. Boy, when you make news…"

"Bye, Mikey."

Michael shook his head. "Talk to you soon." He said and hung up, facing his friends. "Well, we can never say he makes life boring."

\*

Justin didn't care if Brian said no guests. He lived with the man, and he wanted answers. The blonde thought that his lover had told him a great chunk of his past, but there was so much more!

He entered the code and opened the loft, fearing the glare from Brian's eyes before the man even turned around. Justin was surprised to see relief on Brian's face.

"Hi."

Justin closed the door. "Hey."

"Don't ask. Please, not tonight." Brian sank against the couch. "Can you just…be here?"

Justin smirked, sitting next to the man. "Of course."

"I'm a mess. Always." Brian shook his head and had to laugh. "I really go for broke when I screw things up."

Justin chuckled softly, knowing if he laughed aloud he would never stop. He rest his head on Brian's shoulder and felt the man relax substantially. Justin smoothed a hand over Brian's chest. "It'll be okay. You already have a kid, if you want to keep him I'm sure the courts-"

"I don't even want to think about that right now. I can't. Justin, he's…he's a kid. My kid and I…what am I supposed to do with him? I never wanted to change my lifestyle, my way…Sue convinced me that it would never happen…I don't even know if I can believe him."

Mark sat silently in the dark, straining to listen to his father's voice. The man didn't want him either.

"I believe him." Justin said confidently.

"You do? Why? The Kinney line has spawned more liars and criminals than-"

"I believe him because his face is yours. You get this look when you're lying and I can safely say that I'm convinced. I think more happened to him than he's letting on. He needs you, Brian. We have to help."

Mark smiled. There was a reason he liked Justin from the start. The teenager knew things and he didn't have to say them aloud. He slipped out of bed and silently padded barefoot across the floor.

"Can I talk to you?" Mark asked suddenly, surprising the lovers.

Brian cleared his throat. "Sure."

"Not you." Mark snarled and took Justin's hand, leading him from the couch to the front door. "Can we take a walk?"

"Brian?"

"Take your coats." He said without even thinking about how many years it aged him. He wanted to scream. Brian squeezed the bridge of his nose and fought off the oncoming headache. At least he could say his kid had good taste in confidants.

The door closed behind them and he grabbed a pillow, shouting to his heart's content into the fluffy down feathers. If he had a gray hair in the morning, someone was going to die!

\*

"So you two like…fuck. I mean, you really fuck?" Mark said with amazement.

"Mark, if I knew this was the kind of conversation you wanted to have I would have left you alone. I don't think Brian wants me to teach his kid about the birds and bees from our own personal experiences…however numerous."

"I know all about that shit." Mark looked up ahead on the empty street, deep in thought. He was the oldest eleven year old Justin had ever seen. The boy's eyes had seen more than even Brian's had. They seemed so out of place in his youthful face.

"You do?" Justin pressed gently.

"Russell taught me."

"Shit." Justin hissed.

"It's okay. It only hurt the first time…" Mark admitted, detached.

"It only hurts the first time physically. The rest is emotional damage." Justin said softly. "And it isn't right."

"Don't you think I know that? Russell's into anyone who's too young to defend themselves! He's a sick motherfucker! Anyone who's smaller and younger than him…free range prey. I've seen the kids he brings home…I tried to call the police but he would always…hurt me. Catch me. Why do you think I took off? I got the address off one of mom's letters from Brian. I hoped he would help, but I know he doesn't want me."

"He wants to help, Mark, honest he does! It's just all kind of sudden, you know?" Justin tried to absorb everything this kid was telling him. He couldn't imagine being assaulted at eleven years old…or even younger. This man had to be stopped, but first, Justin had to keep the boy talking and build his trust.

"Yeah." Mark shrugged.

"You know you have a brother?"

"What?"

"His name's Gus. He's almost two. Lindsay, the blonde at the diner, is his mom."

"Fuck."

Justin shook his head. "You curse more than I've heard in all four years of my high school combined."

Mark shrugged again. "I doubt I'll be speaking to any virgin ears around here. Even though you're less experienced than me I know you heard it all before."

Justin laughed. "I guess so." He knew he was going to have to tell Brian what Mark said, even if the boy told him later to keep it private. The sexual and physical abuse had to be acknowledged.

"You can tell when I'm lying. That's what you told Brian."

"Yeah. I've learned to read him pretty well and you…well, you look just like him."

"Then I guess I shouldn't even try, right?"

"That would be a good start."

"I can tell you anything then? You'll be my…friend?"

Justin draped an arm around Mark's shoulders. "I'd like to be your friend. Tell me anything."

Mark leaned into Justin, his hand snaking around the older boy's waist and slipping into his pocket. Brian's son took Justin's wallet in a flash of speed and slipped it into his coat. If things didn't work out with Brian or Justin in Pittsburgh, at least he would have backup funds. "Russell's here somewhere."

"Here in Pittsburgh?" Justin stopped in his tracks.

"Yeah. He's afraid Brian will get me to tell on him and he'll go to jail. He followed me."

"When was the last time you saw him?"

Mark shrugged, as if it didn't bother him. "Yesterday, walking. Looking for me."

"We have to tell the police, Mark. Right now."

"Fuck all we do! That's what he's here to make sure doesn't happen! I'm not determined to see him again!"

"We won't see him. He'd have to be stupid to hang out around the police station."

"You've met him then?"

"Mark, do you really think he'll be waiting there?"

"I know he will!"

"Fine. We have to get back to Brian's." Justin grabbed the boy's arm and dragged him back the way they came.

"You can't tell him what I said! Promise!"

"I have to, Mark! It'll help, honest."

"You're just like everyone else!" Mark pulled away from Justin, glaring with accusing eyes before taking off down the street.

"Mark!" Justin yelled after the boy, running to catch up.

It was dark enough for a kid practiced in hiding to find a safe place from his followers and Mark did a good job masking himself from Justin. He watched the blonde search, peering under parked cars and into the dim lights the streetlamps shed.

"Mark!" Justin called with frustration and worry. "Brian is going to fucking kill me!" He added in a whisper.

A man stopped his car and got out. "Is everything okay?" He asked, headlights flowing over them.

Mark gasped quietly and ducked his head. Russell!!!

"I lost my friend." Justin ran flustered hands through his hair.

"What's his name?"

Justin sighed. "Mark."

"I see. Awfully late to be out on a school night, young man."

"I appreciate your concern, sir, but I'm eighteen and perfectly able to take care of myself."

"I should think so." Russell smiled. "But you look a lot younger than eighteen."

"Most people in my circle would call that a blessing. Now if you'll excuse me-"

Russell grabbed Justin's arm and pulled him back. "Don't you use that tone with me!"

"Let me the fuck go!" Justin hollered.

Russell slammed his fist into Justin's stomach. "Watch your fucking mouth!"

Justin gagged, his knees failing him. Russell's grip on his arm was the only thing that kept him from sprawling on the pavement.

Mark slipped deeper into the shadows. He was too scared to crawl away for help. All he could do was watch.

Tears streamed down Justin's cheeks as the man dragged him to the car. "You're going to learn your lesson boy!"

"Leave me alone you sick fuck!" Justin pleaded with as much bravery as he could. Being this close to the man the teenager could smell the intense blend of liquors on his breath.

Russell hit Justin again, hammering into the boy's mouth and nose. "Shut your mouth!" He hit Justin in the ribs then the stomach again. "Shut your goddamn mouth you little snot!" He turned back to Justin's face and then his throat with a thundering violence.

A gentler demeanor covered the man's face as if the last version of him had been a dream. He stroked Justin's bloody lips. "You want to make things better, don't you boy? You want to make amends for angering me." He bent low and kissed Justin's forehead. "It's your fault I had to hurt you. I know how to make it all better." Russell slid a hand under Justin's shirt and caressed his smooth flesh.

Mark huddled behind trash bags, listening to the too-familiar sound of fists against flesh. The only person in the world who believed him was now suffering. He had to do something!

"Fuck you!" Mark shrieked, shooting to his feet. He took off running without finding out if Russell would follow him. Somehow he knew the man was more interested in him than Justin; he knew the bastard would take the lure away from the teenager. He knew how quickly the anger would return and squander the part of Russell's brain that lived for rape.

"You come back here!" Russell yelled, chasing after the boy.

Justin slid to the pavement from the open front seat, chasing away the nausea smashing like angry fists against his stomach. His head felt like the bones were trying to break free from his skin, sliding out. Something deep and rational told him that this was impossible but the searing agony made every ounce of pain seem to defy wisdom. The blonde rest his face on the cold cement and tried to find himself in the mess of throbbing, aching fire. Distantly he heard Mark scream, but couldn't even decide which way was up and which was down.

Russell had caught up with his stepson, hoisting the boy off his feet and bringing him back in a fireman's carry over the shoulder. He threw Brian's son into the back seat and switched on the childproof locks, slamming the door. The man gathered Justin off the ground and heaved him into the front, again slamming the door. He walked around to his side and got in, glaring at Mark from the rearview mirror.

"Don't you give me trouble, boy! You're in deep enough shit as it is!" He growled and pulled away from the semblance of parking he'd done on the empty street with two prisoners instead of one.

Nobody even knew they were in trouble.

\*

Mark didn't know where they were, but it had been several minutes since the Pittsburgh city limit sign told them to come back any time. He lay in the backseat watching the scenery go by from the adjacent window, knowing that if he cried it would only make Russell more excited. Many nights had gone by before he realized that if he just stayed still it was all over very quickly. As far as he knew, Justin wasn't moving either but a deep wrenching in his gut told him the teenager was still for a much more severe reason.

All he wanted was to find his dad…now someone else was going to die because of him. Brian would never forgive him for getting Justin hurt, or worse. He would never have a dad.

Tears streamed down his face and he couldn't stop them. Mark was angry that he wanted Brian to be part of his life. He had never met the man, never had a true father, and yet here he was trying to wriggle into a life that wouldn't accept him no matter how hard he tried. What made him feel he needed a dad when he never had one before? The boy had been on his own for quite some time and didn't need anyone else to take care of him…so why now?

"Here we go." Russell squinted at the vacancy sign greeting their arrival. "Rising Sun Motel. It comes highly recommended by family."

Mark sat up and looked at the sloppy building, chills running along his spine. He had the sudden feeling of utter abandonment…of sheer isolation from help. The darkened rooms had to have people inside…there were a few cars out front, but that didn't mean the place had an eerie aura of complete desertion.

"By family?" Mark asked quietly, trying to hold onto the somewhat steady emotion Russell had while driving. The man hardly wove outside the lines. Years of practice in police avoidance, but it took a concentration he was proud of.

"Your dad's got a cousin in prison up here. Sullivan Kinney. He tracked us down and wrote to your mom once asking about Brian. I answered him, told him about you and Susie and he told me all about your dad. He told me how to find you when you ran away from me…Mark." Russell stared at his stepson from the mirror as he pulled into a spot in the gravel driveway. "He told me all about your dad's little ones…"

Justin stirred at the name of Sullivan, clawing up through the deep bleary pool of oblivion. He moaned, sliding down on the seat.

"Go in there and get us a room." Russell ordered. "Sullivan said we'd have no problems renting a room here."

"Nobody's going to ask questions?" Mark asked, more to himself than anyone else.

"People mind their own business here, boy! Now get in there before I have to carry the both of you inside!" Russell threw a crumpled wad of money at the boy.

Mark nodded and ran inside. He stepped up to the desk, resting his elbows on the edge of the counter making himself as tall as he could. "Hey, you! I need a room and your phone."

"Phone's for adults only."

"Listen, you poor excuse for evolution! When I say I want to use the phone I mean it! Now hand it over before my dad gets in here and sees that you're in need of a serious beating!" Mark shouted, just loud enough to get his point across and not to leave the building.

"Punk kid." The man grumbled, swinging the phone over the counter. Mark handed the man Russell's money and pointed to a key on the wall. "And make it snappy you sloppy sack of shit."

Mark took out Justin's wallet and thumbed through it, breathing a sigh of relief when he found what he wanted. A list of emergency numbers. The teenager was prepared for anything! Mark looked down the names and didn't recognize them; Debbie, Michael, Lindz and Mel, Ted, Em…there. Brian. The boy dialed.

Brian picked up on the seventh ring and Mark could practically see the clean shower water dripping from his skin. "Hello?"

"Brian? Mark. Rising Sun Motel. Trouble! Russell. Justin's hurt." He added last, hoping that would get Brian to come help. "Gotta go."

"What? Wait!" Brian shouted, but only to empty air.

"Here you fucking snot." The worker tossed a key across the counter.

"Suck my big fat cock, asshole." Mark shot back. "See if you ever get my business again."

\*

Brian slammed the phone down and called Lindsay while pressing the lift button like an impatient child, his pants unbuttoned, shirt sticking to his skin from his wet hair dripping.

"Hello?" Lindsay answered in a blur of sleep.

"Fuck! Mark and Justin are in trouble."

"What?"

"Justin took him out to talk and Mark's step-dad has them. Guess where they're at?"

"I…I don't know, Brian."

"Rising Sun. Call the cops and get them over there. Now."

"Is it a coincidence or do you think Sullivan was involved?"

"I don't know. Right now, I don't care."

"Be careful!"

"If he's hurt them, he's a dead man." Brian vowed and meant it.

\*

Justin awoke with Mark hovering over him, pressing his hand to Justin's forehead. The boy was mumbling something, and slowly Justin began to hear the words.

"…Okay? But…relax…gone…beer…Brian."

"Hmmph?" Justin blinked and shook his head. The bones felt like they had stopped sliding around inside his skin, but a fiery, pulsing misery replaced it. He closed his eyes and saw stars every time his heart beat.

"Are you okay? We're alone but locked in. You can relax for a little while. He's gone to get beer. I called Brian. He's on his way."

Justin groaned. "Gus?"

"No. Mark." The boy said with concern. He had never had to care for anyone else's wounds but his own. He had never…felt enough about another person to need to help them.

"Mark." Justin breathed. "Russ…? Russ…ell?"

"He's gone. I've tried to get out of here but…" Mark held up his left wrist and rattled the handcuff. "We're both stuck."

"Fuck." Justin moaned. He knew he couldn't sit up for fear of losing the contents of both his stomach and head, but the air around him was clearing and he could breath normally again. His ears were ringing, his mouth tasting heavily of copper and bile, and everything above his hips ached. Knowing who had kidnapped them, Justin knew that was a blessing in disguise. Russell hadn't raped him. But Mark? Justin turned worried blue eyes to the boy.

"No, I'm okay." Mark smiled. That look…Justin cared about him! It was a look no one had ever shown him and yet, the boy could feel that he had yearned for the day when someone would.

"We're going to get out of here, Mark. I won't let him hurt you again if I can do anything at all to stop him. Do you understand?"

Mark wrapped his fingers into Justin's. "Yeah. I understand."

\*

Russell came into the room. "Boys…." He slurred, setting a six pack on the dresser. There was a bottle of whiskey, half full, in his other hand.

The man locked the door behind him. He switched off the lights and moved to his prisoners. Mark shuddered and slid behind Justin on the bed. A feeling of relief washed over the boy when Justin moved to shield him. He promised something to Mark and followed through on it.

"Pretty…soft." Russell stroked Justin's face as if Mark weren't even there.

"Just lay there, it won't hurt as much." Mark whispered, his voice wavering. He knew Justin was going to get hurt. He knew Justin would fight and that would make it worse.

"I don't plan on him getting anywhere near as far as he wants to." Justin whispered back behind his shoulder. "Brian's coming."

"I know…not soon enough."

"Get as far onto the floor as the cuffs will let you."

Mark nodded and started to cry softly, sliding off the bed. Justin was doing this for him, but they hadn't known each other for more than a day! He just couldn't fathom why this man was helping him in such a big way.

"Little…" Russell unbuttoned Justin's jeans, trailing the zipper down. Justin squeezed his eyes shut and willed Brian to hurry. He felt a heated hand cup his balls, rubbing them hard, harder. Justin winced.

"Son of a bitch!" He shouted, thrusting his hips away from the man.

"Don't fight, don't fight." Mark whispered in a high voice.

"You! Fuck…" Russell grabbed Justin's throat and held him still. "Come…" He leered at the boy, grabbing Justin's cock as if he would tear it off. "Here."

Justin bit his lip to stifle the yelp of pain Russell was causing him. \*Don't fight\* He reminded himself, his thoughts the only thing keeping him from pulling away.

Russell lowered his mouth to Justin's groin, trailing his tongue along the shaft. Justin winced as the man's hot breath hissed over the tenderness of his dick where he had just been squeezed.

"Please don't, please don't, please don't." Mark whispered, shaking his head, burying his face against the covers.

"Come on, Brian." Justin pleaded softly as Russell ran his teeth over the boy's cock. Thick, clumsy fingers yanked his jeans down and pooled them around his ankles.

Justin squirmed beneath the man, a tiny grunt of protest escaping his lips. He heard a frothy chuckle from Russell as Mark's stepfather kneaded his sore groin. The blonde couldn't help but get hard under the man's increasing pressure. He moaned as the heated warmth of Russell's mouth enveloped his erection. He groaned.

"Likes it." Russell raised his mouth above Justin to whisper in the boy's light pubic hair. He brought his fingers to spread Justin's ass cheeks apart, plunging his tongue into the boy's pulsing hole.

Justin groaned, trying his best to keep the sound from Mark. If he could help it, he would spare the young boy from having to experience anything else Russell had to offer, even if it was through another person's torment. And pleasure.

Russell shoved three fingers into Justin within seconds of removing his tongue, making the boy gasp in pain. Justin bucked against the intrusion, new tears streaming down his face as the fire dug deeper inside.

Mark pressed his eyes closed. He knew what had just happened to make his new friend utter such a sound. This was all his fault…if he had only stayed away…stayed with his own life, knowing from the beginning that Brian wanted nothing to do with him.

Russell clawed his way up Justin's body, yanking his fingers out of the boy as he tangled his hands in the boy's blonde hair. He forced Justin's legs apart with his hips, pressing his erection against the tight hole, the man's filthy whiskey-stained jeans the only thing stopping him from forcing himself completely into the boy.

"No." Mark whispered, feeling from memory as Russell's hands released his raging cock from the binding zipper, smelling fresh alcohol on the stale breath above him, seeing the five o'clock shadow as Russell lowered his face down to scrub at the smooth, young skin.

Justin cringed, nearly gagging on the man's sour breath. He turned his face away, muffling a painful hiss in the pillow next to him as Russell plowed his dick into Justin's unwilling ass.

Russell didn't start moving right away and the blonde prayed that he passed out. The man worked his hips from side to side as if trying to stretch the opening, pushing in, pulling out, inch by inch. He listened to Justin's pitiful whimpering as the boy shook his head from side to side, purposely avoiding the man's hungry lips.

Mark pulled on the cuffs, tucking his thumb into the palm of his hand. He kicked against the near wall and pushed with all his might. His wrists were thin, but his hands had gotten bigger with a summer's growth spurt only a few weeks ago. Slowly, excruciatingly, the metal began to slide against his skin. The bed beside him was rocking quicker now, harder, and he could hear Justin trying with all his might to keep the sobs confined inside. Mark sprawled onto the floor as he was suddenly released, the cuff jingling its way to the carpet. The sound seemed impossibly loud to the young boy, but neither Russell or Justin took the time to notice.

"Please." Justin whispered, glassy eyes turned to the ceiling as Russell thrust into him again and again, grunting heavily. He imagined himself in another place, a peaceful place, with water and sunny beaches. Brian was there, standing just beyond the dry sand, his feet submerged in the sighing waves. His lover turned, smiling welcomingly, holding out his hands for Justin to run to. Brian could keep Justin safe and warm, could hold him in this place forever.

Mark got to his feet, watching Justin's eyes gleam silver in the slivery of moonlight slithering into the room. He watched silent tears slide down the boy's face as his hands clutched the covers. The young boy knew he had to do something to help Justin, even if his legs felt like they were made of stone. Mark walked carefully around the bed, trailing a light dance of fingertips over Justin's toes. He made eye contact with his friend and crouched down to pick up the half full bottle of liquor his stepfather had dropped when he climbed on top of Justin.

The blonde nodded to the younger boy and Mark closed his eyes, raising the heavy bottle over his head with both hands in a death grip around the neck. He threw all his weight into the hit, smashing glass and liquid all over the bed from Russell's skull. And waited.

A monstrous groan seemed to pry itself from Russell's lips as his head fell like a dead weight onto Justin's chest. Justin couldn't hide the sob of relief that echoed his attacker's moan, writhing beneath Russell, the man still inside of him.

"Go, Mark. Get help."

"Help's coming. I won't…leave you." Mark slipped his hands beneath Russell and pulled him out of Justin. He eyed his friend and the look he gave sent chills of pure ice down the young man's spine. Mark had had to do this before. He had pulled an unconscious man out of the places he didn't belong. No words passed between the two as Mark rolled his stepfather to the floor with a weighty thump. The boy searched Russell's discarded jean pockets and found the key to Justin's handcuffs.

"Thank you, Mark." Justin slipped back into his pants carefully, avoiding eye contact with the boy as he did so. He managed to not wince in pain while standing. "I mean it. You really helped me."

Mark sat on the bed as if his legs couldn't hold him any longer. "It's my fault he did that to you."

"It's not your fault. Anything he does is not your fault." Justin sat on the bed and dismissed his pain for Mark's. "You helped me."

"You helped me first." Mark turned pitifully young eyes to Justin's, the hazel irises glittering with refused tears.

"I'll take care of you."

"Promise?"

"I promise. Let's get out of here and wait for that help you called."

"I won't tell."

"Hmm?"

"What happened, I won't tell. If you don't tell what he did to me?" Mark asked quietly, hopefully.

"Mark…" Justin sighed. "I need to. It will help put Russell away."

"But I don't-"

"I'll tell with you. You won't be alone." Justin wrapped a hand across Mark's shoulders. "You'll never be alone again."

"Really?"

"Really." Justin rest his chin on Mark's head and meant every word he said. If it took revealing to the whole world what had happened to him that night to save Mark from ever being tormented by Russell again, then so be it.

\*\*

EPILOGUE

Justin was the first to admit what happened, showing Mark that not only was it not their fault, but it was okay to tell someone. The boy didn't leave Justin's side through the court proceedings except to make a witness statement in court against his mother and stepfather Mark was old enough to choose who he would stay with and at their agreement and Justin's suggestion, the eleven year old was adopted by Melanie and Lindsay, belonging to them as Gus did to Brian. The women were happy to bring Gus' brother into their home. Mark wasn't always the easiest child to get along with, but Justin was only a phone call away if the boy, or his new mothers, needed help.

Brian wished he had the connection that Justin did with his son, but he would never admit it and he kept his distance with the younger boy. He stayed even closer to Justin after what happened, admiring how brave his lover had been. Justin had used himself to spare Mark, and that made him even more a part of what family truly meant to Brian. It wasn't blood that related them, it was courage, survival.

Love.

Justin stayed over at Lindsay and Melanie's house a lot after Russell received his jail sentence, often sleeping in the same bed as Mark, their bodies curled around each other for warmth and protection, for comfort.

But that didn't mean he avoided Brian, or the man's advances. He needed stitches but healed every physical abuse Russell had done to him. Justin needed Brian to go slow for quite some time, his eyes watching the man making love to him to banish every memory of his attacker. The boy demanded the bedroom lights to be left on when they made love.

One night, Justin turned off the lights by himself and used the familiar feel of his lover to know he was safe and sound.

Brian knew that his Sunshine would be alright, given a chance to heal at his own speed. The man had once needed the same thing to heal himself from the wounds his cousin Sullivan had caused him. He just hoped that his young lover would not curl himself into a ball and hide behind a false sense of indifference like he had once done. Justin had brought him out of hiding and one day he would return the favor.

One day.

Brothers Keeper

Justin slid his finger into the tiny sliver of key lime pie and tasted it. "Oh, that's good." He mumbled in a whisper. \*Tastes even better when it's sweetened with revenge.\* He looked around to make sure no one had seen, though there was only one other person left in the diner, and proceeded to cover up the hole, delivering the pie to his last and rudest customer of the night. He didn't know how he ended up with the late shift all by himself, but there he was and it was time to go.

Justin couldn't wait to get to Brian's loft and run to the man's completely naked body. The two of them actually planned the night out. First would be a late dinner, then dessert…a very special dessert on hot, fully exposed flesh. He groaned, waiting for the one last patron to give up and go home. Justin could hear all the noise they would make fucking, now that the neighbors beneath Brian's loft had covered their windows and doors and moved out. Not that Brian took the blame for that one…

He heard the door close and ran to lock it. He switched off all the lights and took a quick swipe of the counter with a rag. The man hadn't left a tip, just the exact change for the pie, which he'd only eaten two bites of. "Asshole." Justin grumbled, leaving the pie and pulling on one arm of his jacket. He headed out the door, quickly locking up and advancing out onto the empty street.

"Help!" He heard the voice before he saw the frantic man. "Help me!"

"What?" Justin jogged over to him as he lay halfway in the gutter. A dark spot was growing on his stomach. Justin gasped, momentary paralysis capturing his body.

"Call an ambulance!" The guy screamed, clutching at his middle.

Justin nodded and ran back to the diner, fumbling with the keys as he saw the reflection of the man coming up quickly behind him in the glass.

Justin turned around in time to dodge a right hook thrown by the completely healthy man, but caught a strong left hand around his throat. The stranger slammed Justin's head against the glass, a spider web break crackling upon impact. A black van screeched onto the curb as Justin's defenses went into instinct. He kicked, he screamed, he bit, he clawed, all to no avail. He struggled as the first man clamped his hand over Justin's mouth and hoisted him up with his other arm around Justin's trim waist. The driver of the getaway car ran to grab Justin's legs, evading them wildly to avoid permanent injury.

"Grab him!" The first man hissed.

Justin didn't recognize the men and ice filled his gut with terror. His blue eyes went wide.

"Hold him still, damn it!" Justin's struggled as panic rushed through his body. The first man was strong. He could feel his ribs protesting with the pressure. Justin's breath came in wild gasps through his nose, one nostril smearing blood over his lip and cheek under the man's tightening hand.

"Hurry up, damn you!" The first man ordered. He was thinner than the other guy, his frame smaller.

"You were supposed to knock him out!" The larger man complained, attempting again to pick Justin up.

"He saw me!"

"Who's fault is that?"

"Shut up you fucking asshole!" The man looked around to make sure no spectators were around. They had staked out the street for a week and knew it to be nearly dead between five and six in the morning.

"Besides, how do you know it's him?"

"It's him you idiot, just do as you're fucking told!"

Justin didn't give up. Whoever these men were, they had a plan designed specifically for him and he wasn't going to find out what it was without a fight. The cold early morning air bit into his flesh and he noticed for the first time that his jacket was laying crumpled on the cement right beside the doorway. The keys were still in the lock, dangling like golden sanctuary. He reached for them hopelessly, fingers stretching in desperation. He clawed upward and pressed his fingernails into the first man's neck, digging into the first cord he found.

The man cried out, losing his grip and releasing his captive. But Justin didn't let go. His nails bit in harder as he swung the yelling man into his partner. Justin let him loose and dashed for the door.

"Help me!" Justin wailed, his fingers slippery with blood as he tried the keys.

The heftier man grabbed Justin by the hair and yanked him backwards, stars spinning into view as the boy's neck protested with an awful crack. Justin groaned, falling toward his attackers. The man cracked the small of Justin's neck with the heel of his hand as if he'd done this before, crumpling the teenager to the ground much like his lonely windbreaker. He scooped Justin from the ground easily and glared at his partner underneath the ski mask.

"Let's get out of here before the morning fairies get here to sprinkle dew all over the land." He muttered.

"Was that called for, Charlie?" The first man bickered. "Did we need that little bit of poetry tonight?"

"Shut up."

"I'll drive." The first man said, oblivious to the fact of who had their hands full and who didn't. "We need to ask more money for this shit." He touched his neck gingerly and came away with blood.

"You can say that again. Should we get the jacket?" Charlie asked, shoving Justin inside the empty van. The back seats had been removed and the only windows were up front.

"Naw. Give the folks around here something to worry about besides their fingernails."

\*

Brian sighed, glancing at the clock. If he had known Justin would be this late then he would never have waited up. He called the diner for the third time and rolled his eyes with boredom as it kept ringing. The first stirrings of concern knotted his stomach but he refused to feel it. Naturally, Justin would be alright. The boy had survived a gay bashing at prom. He had lived through an attack by two evil men who wanted nothing more at the time than to kill his older brother Will, but found Justin more appetizing. His Sunshine was strong and if he was a little late, it was absolutely nothing to worry about. Right?

He dialed Michael's number without even thinking about it.

"Hello?"

"Hmm?"

"Brian?"

"Yeah, what's up Mikey?"

"You called me." The man sighed sleepily.

"Did I?"

"Brian, it's nearly six am…"

"Justin didn't come home."

"What?"

"We…had a whole night planned. And after he closed up the diner…"

"Let me call mom and I'll call you right back."

"It's nothing to worry about…"

"Bullshit it is. He's not as well-off as you want to believe, Brian! He still has relapses, nightmares. He still gets afraid and-"

"Don't you think I fucking know that Michael!" Brian screamed, releasing all his tensions on his best friend. He took a deep breath. "Sorry."

"No, I was wrong. You've taken care of him all this time after the accident and I had no right to assume that you didn't know what he needs and what he goes through." Michael treaded lightly. He didn't mean to offend Brian so badly. The man was so sensitive and there was no telling what would set him off next.

"Call Debbie…I am worried. I should go down to Liberty."

"Want me to meet you there?"

Brian sighed. "Sure, Mikey." He said and added, "Thanks."

\*

Emmett checked his watch, hurrying down the hallway from his apartment. "I can't believe I forgot. Of all the nights!" He groaned, running out onto the street and toward Liberty Avenue. Working at Torso, he had promised to clothe the mannequins with their new line of stock before morning. He had shot up in bed at five thirty in the morning realizing he had not only not done what he was told, but he had left all the clothes he'd gotten from the discount rack hanging on the rack!

"Emmett, you're a piece of work!" He scolded himself, heels of his boots clicking on the empty pavement. The man ran right passed Liberty Diner and onto Torso, but stopped. He caught his breath, backing up suspiciously.

His hands slid down over the door, one tracing over the round, rather large crack and the other following the thin smear of blood. He stood up, eyes open. "What the-?" The blood, the keys still in the door, the…jacket. "Justin's jacket!" He backed away, staring at the glass front door and knew with dread what had to have made that break. He dialed 911 on his cell phone and explained, then immediately called Debbie.

"Mmmph. Hello?" Deb said, her voice still muffled with sleep.

"OhmyGodDebJustin'sSomething'shappenedtoJustinandIdon'tknowwhatbutit'sbadOHMYGOD!!!" Emmett spouted unintelligibly, fanning himself for more air. "HIS HEAD! ITHADTOBE…"

"What? Emmett, honey? Is that you?" She sat up in bed. "Emmett, what is it? Is it Michael?"

"Justin! I don't know…"He breathed. "Something's happened. To. Justin. Calm. Down. Emmett. Deb, there's blood on the door." He paused, turning away from it. "And the keys are in the lock and his jacketisonthefloorand…there's blood. On the sidewalk!" He gasped and turned away from that spot as well. "The…door is cracked." Emmett swallowed. "His head…had to be his head…"

"Oh, Sunshine! I'll be right there." Deb hung up the phone.

Emmett nodded as if she were looking at him. "Shit." He breathed and dialed Brian's number.

Brian moaned into the phone. "Justin, I'm on my way to Liberty and you'd better have your clothes off."

"It's Emmett." He said, terror giving way to pure exhaustion. He sat down on the curb, away from any contaminants of the crime scene.

"Emmett, it's nearly six in the morning, why on earth are you up?"

"I don't know exactly what happened but there's blood outside the diner and since he closed...His jacket is on the floor and there's blood and the keys are in the door and there is a lot of blood and his jacket…the front door is broken…"Emmett explained, taking a deep breath. "The police are on their way and so is Deb and I have to call everyone and…and…and…"

"Calm down. I'm coming." Brian said and hung up. His insides were all jumping into his throat, chocking him with fear. What had happened?

By the time he arrived, the police were there closing off the area with bright yellow tape.

Brian spotted Emmett and Deb and ran over to them. "Do they know what happened?" He asked impatiently. He surveyed the broken door and the blood, although he had expected a pool by the intensity of Emmett's description. There were only a few drops in various places. Except the gutter. There was quite a lot of it there.

Debbie shook her head. "They don't know. They found some fake blood caplets over there in the drainage ditch. They said that maybe the person who did this used a fake injury to lure Justin out of the diner and get his attention away from the normal nightly caution a person uses. Who would..?" Debbie shook her head again. "Poor Sunshine. I've called his mother and they're on their way over."

"They?"

"Both parents, hon." She told him and cupped his chin. "I don't think I need to tell you to behave yourself."

A small crowd was forming as forensic specialists photographed and measured, scouring for hidden, minuscule clues undetectable to the naked eye.

"Brian?" Michael said, pushing his way to the crowd. He had his pajamas on. "What happened!"

Debbie pointed to the door instead of speaking.

Brian interpreted. "The cops think that somebody pretended to be hurt so he'd run back to get help and then grabbed him when his guard was down." The man was numb. How could the boy deserve to go through anything more?

"Christ!" Michael looked over the space enclosed in tape.

Emmett held onto Debbie, tears in his eyes. "Poor Justin." He whispered.

They all turned when they heard a scream. Jennifer Taylor ran up to the tape and ducked beneath it. "I'm his mother." She cried. "I'm his mother."

"Ma'am, you have to wait behind the tape. We need to look around to find things to help us find your son." An officer explained slowly, as if to a child. He held the rope up and guided her back. "You're helping him the most by letting us do our job." He said kindly and went to tell the lead inspector that the parents had arrived.

"What happened?" Craig Taylor demanded in a full business suit. He must have been just about to walk out the door for work. He didn't look at anyone in particular, but his tone indicated that he was ready to place blame.

"They think that somebody kidnapped him." Brian gave the condensed version of the story. "And that's it."

Craig turned cold eyes onto Brian but said nothing. He held onto his ex-wife as if they had never split, watching the police work. There was nothing anyone could say, so they all stood in silence.

\*

Flashes of Chris Hobbs shot through his unconsciousness like liquid fire. The bashing, the bat, the garage…but no. This was not the night of prom, that had happened last June. He had healed, he had his life almost entirely back in order. Justin's head swam, the pressure was incredible. He reached back and gingerly touched the massive welt under his hair, drawing in a sharp breath and wincing. He opened one eye first, testing the room. The light was a single naked bulb hanging from a silver beaded chain, dancing on its long cord as if someone had recently sent it flying. \*Not too bright.\* He decided. \*That's a plus.\* Around him was a large enclosure, though he was chained by his ankle next to one corner. The walls next to him were covered in black paper, though by the cold emanating from them Justin could visualize windows or solid cement on the other side. A door was on the farthest side from him, made of solid metal. Justin lay on a filthy, stained mattress. Emptiness came at him from inside and out. He opened the other eye, squinting. Justin listened for anything to give him a hint about where he was…or why?

The heavy metal door slid open and Justin was amazed at how alike to Brian's it was. And at how much he wished for his true love to be next to him. A slender man stood in the open space. His face was masked in shadows from the swinging bulb, revealing only the most primitive of eyes. He braced himself on the door frame and assessed his victim, as if afraid of the boy.

But he was not afraid. Charlie appeared behind him. The two men entered and Justin backed himself into a corner, still unable to stand on his wobbly legs.

"W-what are you going to do?" Justin sputtered, returning to the helplessness of a childhood mentality. If he had had blankets to hide under until the monsters went away, the boy would have been grateful to be beneath them no matter how young it made him seem.

"Relax, kid. You do as you're told with us and everything will be okay." The first man paused. "But that's just us. When the boss comes it is up to him what happens to you."

Justin's head pulsed in pain. He feared how badly injured he was. Nausea kicked at the back of his tongue. If it was a concussion…if it was worse…his head hurt too badly to think about it. One injury on top of another barely healed was bad enough, but this wasn't the first time it happened after Chris Hobbs' assault. When his estranged brother came to town he brought a man after him who demolished Justin's head to the point that he barely remembered everything that happened. Justin pressed himself closer to the cold cement wall.

"I want to go home."

"Shut up and listen. You're going to rest and wait for our boss. We're going to get paid when he gets here. Then you'll be on your own."

Justin began to cry, his body trembling.

"But it doesn't have to be this way."

"It doesn't?" The blonde sniffled.

"He promised us a great sum. I think your father might pay more."

"He would!" Justin said without waiting to think whether the man would or not.

"Good. My friend is going to dial a phone number that you will give us. It had better be your father's because you will not get a second try. We have a note for you to read from and you'll have fifteen seconds to do it in. Then you hang up." The kidnapper handed Justin a notecard and let him read it over, his eyes widening at its content. "Are we understood?" He continued.

"You've been planning this…whoever your boss is, you wanted to do this from the start." Justin realized. "Who -are- you people!?!"

"The number!" Charlie raised his hand as if to slap Justin. His partner stilled his arm.

"555-7691!" Justin cowered. "It's his cell phone." The boy said and hoped that the man would pick it up.

\*

Craig pulled his cell phone from his jacket pocket, scowling at the limited police work being done. "Hello?"

"Is this Craig Taylor?" The thin man asked.

"Yes. Who's this?"

"Listen up." He handed Justin the phone and reminded him. "Fifteen seconds."

"Dad!"

Craig's stomach sank. "Justin!"

"They want a half million dollars by nine am tomorrow in the dumpster outside of Liberty Diner with no one around or they'll kill me!"

"Who! Justin, where are you?" Craig demanded, his pulse racing. He'd caught the attention of more than one police officer as they surrounded him, trying to listen in.

"Dad, please help me!"

"That's enough, kid!" The first man tried to grab the phone away. Justin folded himself tightly into his corner, protecting the phone. Charlie moved forward and kicked Justin's balled form, aiming for the back, the ribs, the shoulder, anything that was even mildly exposed. Justin screamed in pain.

Brian watched Craig's face pale. "Justin!" The father screamed, feeling the agony his boy was experiencing. "Justin, please tell us where you are!"

"God damn!" The first man growled. "Get the phone you idiot!" "Dad! Like Brian's. Empty. Paper walls. Please help!" Justin yelped, knowing that as soon as he released the phone, his leverage would be taken away and his life would be in his father's hands.

Charlie wrestled his way beneath one of Justin's arms, grabbing firmly around the soft flesh directly beneath his shoulder. He yanked upward violently, a smile gleaming on his jowls. The cracking sound seemed to fill the room as fireworks went off in Justin's aching head. His scream drowned out any other noises and he released his defensive position, his unharmed hand and arm finding the wounded one and pulling it towards his writhing body. Hot tears poured down his face as Charlie switched his grip to one around Justin's neck. He pressed down and Justin immediately stopped crying.

"Half a million. Nine am tomorrow. Dumpster behind Liberty Diner. No cops. We'll leave the boy." He said and hung up. "Christ on a crutch, Stan. Nobody listens anymore." He complained, his fist still clutching Justin's airway. "I really kinda hope that they can't get that money." He stared down at Justin. "I've got some ideas I wanna run over with this kid."

"Remember that Kriegg will be here after eleven tomorrow and he doesn't want the kid too damaged. You already dislocated his shoulder." Stan smiled and left the room, muttering to himself. "Like getting the ransom money has ever stopped you." He snickered. "Like we ever plan to give the parents what they want at all."

\*Craig kept his composure and closed his cell phone. "They want a half million dollars." He whispered. "In the dumpster by the diner by nine am, no police."

"We'll handle this, sir." One officer said.

"But they said no police!" Debbie protested.

"We have done this before, ma'am." The officer assured and ran to get his supervisor.

"Christ." Brian winced. He could hear the screams, even though Craig held the phone tightly to his ear. Whatever the men had done to him must have hurt worse than anything else he had ever felt. Justin had never screamed like that.

"What are you going to do?" Jennifer asked her former husband, leaning against Debbie in a near-faint.

"I don't know. Wait for the police." He shrugged, trying to look as nonchalant as the man his son had fallen in love with.

"No, we get the money. Fuck the cops." Brian said. "Pool our resources, and our bank accounts, and get Justin the fuck out of there."

"Are you nuts?" Craig demanded. "There's no way we can come up with that kind of money so late at night."

"I didn't say it had to be the whole thing. What are they going to do, sit there and count it? Think about it! You heard him screaming, are you going to worry about money at a time like this?"

Craig shook his head. "No." He sighed grudgingly. "Tell me what to do."

\*

"The pie sucked, Stan."

"Everything 'sucks' on that street, Charlie."

Two loud guffaws burst into horrendous laughter.

Justin heard the voices as if waking from a dream that he didn't remember having. Confusion washed away with each rhythmic, shooting pain originating from his left shoulder. He opened his eyes wearily, hoping that he hadn't been out for too long.

"Shh. He's awake." The man who first spoke warned his partner. They had used each other's real names more than once and the finality of Justin ever seeing daylight again was hammered into place.

"Remember me, you little shit?" The larger man asked in a low, weasel voice. He bent close to the ground so his captive could see better.

Justin did. It was his last customer.

"Maybe you should have provided better service." He snickered. "Not that it would have helped your situation."

Justin blinked. What did this guy want? Dimly, the boy remembered them mentioning Kriegg. His brother Will's former pimp and boss…Justin would do anything in the world to never have to see that gruff man again.

"We're going to go get our money. If your father came through."

"I'm not going, am I?" Justin whimpered.

"Afraid not, sweetheart."

Justin squeezed tears from his eyes, resting his pulsing, traumatized head on the mattress. "They'll be waiting there for you."

"If it looks funny we'll keep driving. Easy."

"And what if they ambush you?"

"They can't prove anything. We won't have you with us."

"You said that if I gave you my dad's number you wouldn't hand me over to Kriegg." Justin pulled his knees close to his chest. "But Kriegg is going to kill you if he finds out you went behind his back like this! I'll tell him! He likes me and-"

Stan knelt down and grabbed Justin's dislocated shoulder. "He doesn't give a shit about you, he wants your brother and he's got a man who will track him down for the right kind of currency." He tilted Justin's chin up and smiled.

Justin smiled back despite the pain. Someone else was in the darkened room and the men didn't seem to know it. If the boy played his cards right, or if fate was trying to give him some good luck for a change, Justin knew who was hiding. The former owners had put the paper up, but it didn't seem that anyone would be painting the walls or putting in new floors anytime soon.

"And are you surprised we lied? Come on, faggot, we're career criminals ." Charlie growled, pulling Stan to his feet. "We'll be a half mil richer by the time the boss gets here and you'll go with him as planned."

Justin winced, every movement of his body eliciting more pain than when he passed out. "You're going to be sorry for hurting me. Kriegg will find out. He killed his best man because I wanted him to, and you'll be next!"

"Can it, kid." Stan shook his head and closed the door as they left for their money.

\*

Justin closed his eyes against the nausea and pulled the chain on his ankle taut. He felt the place around him drift into silence, but knew he wasn't alone. The floors below the mattress had been pulled up but not redone, the space vastly decimated. It reminded the boy so much of Brian's loft…Brian's loft! His neighbors! After they had moved out, Stan and Charlie must have taken over the place.

"KRIEGG!!!" Justin bellowed. His lover was living right above him, but it wasn't likely the man was home with Justin missing. The next best thing was waiting somewhere beyond the paper walls. "Hayden!"

"You call my name when you're afraid yet run away with your precious Brian at the first chance of escape and leave me in the desert. Interesting how you treat your lovers, little one." Kriegg said thoughtfully from behind the paper wall. The man walked into the room, smiling. "Hello, Justin."

"Hayden!" Justin sighed. "I…didn't know what was happening I…please, believe me. All I remember is Brian ramming into me and then darkness. I woke up and it was morning. I was in a hospital." The boy rest his head on the flat mattress to emphasize how hurt he got when his head was the target.

"Are you happy to see me?"

"I thought you were gone forever." Justin whimpered, tears glittering in his eyes. The last time Justin had seen Kriegg the man had believed the blonde's vow of devotion, right before killing Lito, his right-hand man. The dark haired man had been Justin's older brother Will's lover, but a good amount of money had changed his mind and sent him fleeing. Kriegg had been eager to bring Justin, who looked almost identical to Will, into his life, convinced that the boy was infatuated with him and with being a protected princess in the man's underground world. He had changed his mind when the blonde disappeared with Brian, but looking now into those wounded blue eyes he wanted so much to care for the youngest Taylor brother that he would have killed a thousand of his most loyal men to make the golden boy's heart his own.

"They hurt you, little one. You told them they would pay and you did not lie." Kriegg knelt beside Justin.

"My shoulder…" The boy said. "My head."

"Shh, shh." Kriegg soothed. "I'll take you away from all of this."

Justin didn't know if he was relieved or not, but anything was better than laying another second on the filthy, stained mattress.

\*

The man laughed so hard tears streamed down his face, his hands clutching at a waist as thin as a bible page, flat and toned to incredible perfection. He threw his head back against the floor, drawing knees wrapped tightly in leather up to his chest. Shaking, the blonde man fell behind a curtain of shoulder-length blonde hair, a beaming white smile revealed under thick lips. He was truly a sight to be seen, but Will Taylor felt nothing sexual toward him.

"Brad, please get off the floor."

"Oh, aye, easy for you to say then!" Brad said in between gasps for breath and uproarious laughter. His Irish accent was much thicker than it should have been, considering he had never been to Ireland. "Boy, you do precede your reputation for trouble!"

Will rolled his eyes. "Get up off the fucking floor, Brad! And cut that damn accent."

Brad turned serious and stood up. "Watch your tongue boy, I'm not above throwing out of my honest establishment."

"You're my brother, you wouldn't throw me out."

"Try me again with that tone." Brad stepped over to the boy and chucked him under the chin. "You come here out of the blue and I have'ne seen you since you were seven or eight, and you're a grown man with demands all his own. Those demands hit my bouncer full-out today when you let yourself in. Then, then! Then you tell me that I have help you. Surprising that any spawn of our pa could get themselves in too deep, eh?"

"God damnit, Brad! Is everything a joke to you?"

"Lord's name!" Brad made the sign of the cross over his chest.

Will had to laugh himself as a smile spread on his older brother's face. "You work in the black market trading of underage boy flesh and you're a devout Catholic, I think not."

"What's a man to do? I'm so busy these days that I accumulate sin-"

"You -bathe- in sin."

"However you put it, with my jolts between peddling twinks to the highest bidder and taking my cut out of locating missing funds for dealers in my own peer group, what's better than absolving my sins once a week and starting anew?"

"Only you would find a way for religion to work in this business. You…and priests."

Brad waved a hand as if clearing the way for his new topic. "Anyway, I'm sorry I laughed at you. Tell me again why you've decided to look me up."

"I have some funds that I know someone in your peer group is going to come looking for. Word says you're the best money can buy."

"I thank you."

"So I want to make sure when my man hires you, you will be well compensated for never finding me."

"You want to pay me to fail?"

"I do."

"And what amount are we talking about, just out of curiosities sake?"

"I can pay you a half million to keep my two mil safe. Brother's cut."

"You can pay me one mil to keep the rest safe and to destroy my name."

"I'll pay you one mil if you kill him."

"And what if he's paid me two million to kill you?"

"He won't."

"He has. Hayden Kriegg the man missing his money, Kid?"

Will backed up, shaking his head. "He already got to you."

"Oh, relax!" Brad stepped to his brother and pulled him into a close hug. "You're safe here. I told him that two mil wasn't enough. He's bringing something more valuable than money to trade for hunting you down."

"Tell me you won't trade me for some mindless twink for your auction."

"I won't trade you, Will. You have my word. But Kriegg does bring the finest ass to sample from. I won't lose my entire name because I can't manage to find you."

"Thanks, Brad."

"Welcome to my family, Kid. Let's hope you have enough sense to live long enough to see the fruits of our labor."

\*

Dark Starr Productions sat in the basement of a large dilapidated building five minutes outside Pittsburgh. It sat next to several other places in a ghost town cluster, but none were as seedy as Brad Taylor's business. The man surveyed his latest layout and beamed with pride.

"I should have asked you to work with me a long time ago, Kid."

"Don't call me that." Will brooded, smoothing out a corner of the bed sheet. He looked up at the camera his brother watched him from behind and frowned. "I'm not Kid anymore, that life is gone."

"Tell me more about Craig and Jennifer. Are they happy?"

"Divorced."

"Damn."

"Why damn?"

"Because if I was married to either of them I would be miserable. They deserve each other."

"Apparently Jennifer has gotten a lot better. Justin seems to think so."

Brad moved away from the lens. "How is Justin?"

"He's happy. Damn good looking too. He has a boyfriend. Kriegg likes him a lot."

"How old is he now?"

"Old enough to be smarter than both of us."

"He won't even recognize me." Brad sighed.

"No, he wouldn't." Will said and walked slowly around the leather-layered set. "I can't believe you kill people here."

"Snuff is snuff, unless it isn't."

"You showed me those movies you directed, I thought-"

"There's more than one reason they say I'm the best in the business, boyo." Brad smiled. "If you'll notice, they all wear my mark. It's not always obvious…a circle of four black stars, size of a quarter. They're my boys and I wouldn't trade them for the world." He said, then turned serious. "I suggest you get that fine white skin to my artist and bear my brand of you'll be open meat to anyone on the auction block Friday night."

"You're not branding me. I can take care of myself."

"It's your funeral, William. I'm only trying to protect you."

"I did fine without you, as Justin did without me, as we all did without dad."

"That still bites you, doesn't it? That Justin's a big boy now."

"What's getting to me is that he isn't a big boy. He's a baby in a big world, Brad. Justin wants to take care of himself but he's a target. Jesus Christ."

"Lord's name!"

Will shook his head, laughing. "Okay, so you can still make me smile."

"I can't make you bear my mark."

"I've got enough stains on the inside, I don't need one on the outside. Even if it means I belong to you and there are dire consequences for touching me. You're strong and you've got more fire power than a good-sized SWAT team, but Kriegg has something you don't."

"Oh, aye? What's that?"

"A reason."

"A reason for what?"

"Killing anyone who gets in his way."

"You're saying we should go back for Justin."

"If we go back for him then we go back for Brian and Michael, Lindsay, Melanie, Gus, and all the rest of his friends…his family."

"Fuck. Stubborn?"

"He's worse than me. When it comes to the people he loves…I tell you, Brad, he's as loyal as I once was, as sex-crazed as you are now, smarter than anyone in this entire family when it comes to tact and cunning, and as totally unaware of the dangers in this life as a child. A young child."

"Well then we'll have to kidnap him."

"I tried that once."

"I'll send someone."

"He'll break their noses…or they'll hurt him. He's…fragile. Fuck. That's something else. This guy smashed his head in with a bat on prom night for bringing Brian in for a dance."

A veil of stone-cold anger washed over Brad's blue-gray eyes. "He hurt Justin."

"Chris Hobbs."

"I'll deal with that later. I've got a couple of guys who'll be gentle. They're stupid as hell but good at following orders."

Will sighed and fixed the angle of the camera, looking through the focus toward the bed. A chill ran through him and it had nothing to do with the temperature. This couldn't end well. Justin did not like being kidnapped.

\*

"All better, little one. Calm down…" Kriegg soothed, rubbing Justin's sore shoulder. Popping it back into place had elicited a scream from the boy so piteous it made Kriegg's heart break, but the fact that the boy nearly passed out afterwards made the man regret what he had to do to Justin in a few hours. He stroked the boy's bangs away from his sweat-beaded brow.

"Don't feel good." He whispered. Justin rubbed his face against the smooth clothe of Kriegg's shirt like a cat marking its scent.

"It's the pain, it'll lessen soon."

"Hospital?"

"Brian will try to take you away from me if I take you there, princess."

"Won't let him…please." Justin closed his eyes, feeling the light brush of his eyelashes tickling his cheeks, every sensation magnified.

"There are people where we're going who will take good care of you. They make sure good boys like you are very healthy before the bidding begins. That's why you weren't supposed to be hurt. Those were very stupid men, weren't they?"

"Bidding?" Justin mumbled.

"Don't you worry about it, little one. We're going to get Will back, and everything will be just fine."

\*

The man slammed into the wall so hard it brought plaster raining down on his shoulders. His head cracked the wall again before his attacker began to scream.

"WHERE IS MY FUCKING SON?" Craig demanded, fists curled into Stan's shirt. Charlie had been smarter and told his partner to go check. He had turned the corner on a rail and kept right on going at the first sign of trouble.

Stan tried to cover his face with shaking hands, his breath gone away and threatening to never return. Brian didn't attempt to dull Justin's father's fury, his eyes settling on the blood speckling the man's shirt and forearms.

"WHERE IS HE YOU PRICK?!?"

"If I tell you, what's in it for me?"

"YOUR DAMNED LIFE!" Craig shouted.

Brian nodded. "Craig."

"WHAT?" He turned on the man.

"Allow me." Brian gently pushed the man aside, his fingers slowly crawling over Stan's neck. "Listen to me, you obtuse slob, I am going to throw you in a river as full of shit as you are if we don't get one thing straight between us." He said, his voice so low it was nothing more than a feral growl. "If anything happens to Justin between the time when you took him and the time you had a chance to tell us where he is, I am going to tear off every inch of your skin from your nuts up so you can feel every pull, every agonizing part. I am going to watch your eyes widen with fear at the simple sight of my intentions because there is no pain in your life that compares to what I plan to do. Now, before I decide to start right fucking now, tell me where he is and I just might let Mr. Taylor here protect you."

"The l-loft! The fucking loft!"

"I'm listening."

"Beneath yours. The loft beneath yours!"

"Thank you. Who told you to do it?"

"Kriegg."

Brian's heart leapt to his throat. Kriegg. This changed matters from urgent to life and death. "Okay then. Now be a good boy and run away." Brian released Stan and watched cruelly as the man scrambled away.

Craig didn't have to say he was impressed, shocked even. There was no time. When they found Justin, he would have to swallow his pride and thank Brian.

"Drive." Brian told him, getting into the passenger side of his Jeep. He searched the number list in his cell phone and clicked a number.

"Who are you calling?"

"Bear."

Craig swerved. "WHAT?!?"

"That fucking asshole said that Kriegg was behind this and that means-"

"I don't want that man around my kid!"

"There's a reason Justin's in trouble and it has nothing to do with Bear. If he can find Justin, then we can find Justin."

"Kriegg has something to do with Will. Where is Will?"

"I don't know. When he left, Bear was the only one of them with a permanent address and phone number, it was where Will went. We're lucky to have it. Turn here, it's quicker." Brian put the phone to his ear and was met with a thick bass of voice.

"Yeah."

"Bear? Brian Kinney."

"Kinney, long time."

"Not long enough, but that's not important. Justin's in trouble. We think Kriegg might have him."

"I heard he was back on the streets…instead of sand." Bear gave a low chuckle.

"You don't sound nearly as upset about this as the rest of us. Justin's hurt."

"I know where he is if Kriegg's got him."

"Where?"

"Boy, you don' wanna know." Bear hung up and dialed Will's cell phone.

"Bear?"

"Bad news, Kid. Your baby's in deep shit."

"When?"

"Kinney just called. Said Kriegg's got him."

"Son of a bitch…"

"Said he's hurt, too."

Will covered the mouth of the phone and looked at Brad. "You're kidnappers are too late. Kriegg's got Justin."

Brad chewed his bottom lip and looked toward the main door leading into the larger part of his building. The bidding room.

"What are we going to do?" Will asked his big brother.

"We don't have to do anything. Kriegg's going to bring him here."

"Oh fuck, you're right." Will winced. "Bear?"

"Yeah?"

"Dark Starr Productions, you know where."

"Big brother meets little brother for littlest brother. On any other occasion I'd have some suggestions…"

"Cut it Bear, just get here."

"Gotcha." Bear said.

Will closed his eyes. "Kriegg won't give him up without a fight."

"He'll give him up for you."

"And you'll deliver me for him, but he'd want to make sure Justin went to the highest bidder. He'd stay to see him get fucked…might even bid on him himself. If you don't put him up there, you'll be ruined forever."

"I have an idea. Fucking Christ! Give me his boyfriend's number."

Will raised an eyebrow. "Hey, Brad?"

"Aye, what?"

"Lord's name."

\*

"They aren't here." Brian sighed. Michael was kneeling by the mattress.

"They were."

Brian swallowed. He would have never thought that Justin would be trapped, hurt, held, just feet beneath where they had planned to fuck all night long the night before. He fought the tears that stung his dry eyes and caught Craig looking at him from across the room.

Craig looked glad to not be alone in hiding his emotions. Brian was a strong man, his equal. But Brian knew the person Justin had grown into much more than Craig ever would. Yet, he knew they both wanted to ensure Justin's safety as quickly and painlessly as possible.

"What do we do now?" Jennifer asked, fingers caressing a smear of blood she only hoped was not her baby's.

Brian started to say something when the room erupted with a cell phone's shrill scream. Everyone but Debbie and Vic went to check their phones. It was Brian's.

"Hello?" He asked quietly, afraid of who would be on the other end.

"Name's Brad Taylor, I'm Justin's brother."

"Ahh…Justin's -other- brother."

"Right."

"Bradley? Brad is on the phone?" Jennifer asked. Brian waved her away.

"Kriegg's bringing Justin here but there's a big problem. You up for any solution, Kinney?"

"Just tell him to get away from all the others. I know he's with his friends, it'll never work if they keep asking questions." Will said from the background. "He's like that."

"Is that Will?" Brian asked.

"Yeah. Look, yes or no. What will you do to save Justin?"

"Anything."

"I thought so…Will thought so."

"What do I need to do?"

"Get in your car and drive, alone." Brad said, leaning down to Will so they could both listen.

"Fine. Where?"

"You know the Rising Sun Motel?"

"Oh, Christ!"

"Lord's name!" Both brothers echoed.

"Huh?"

"Fuck's sake! The motel?"

"Yeah, I know it…I know where it is."

"We're just before that. Dark Starr Productions."

"A snuff film company? Justin's-" Brian stopped, suddenly aware that he was the center of attention.

"Trust me and we'll get Justin out of this." Brad said, the first strain of weariness threading into his voice.

"Keep him safe and I'll trust you."

"Quickly, Kinney. This will never work if you show up after Kriegg."

"On my way." Brian said and hung up, rushing out the door before anyone could think to ask questions. He just hoped he wasn't too late.

\*\*

Brian took a deep breath as he pulled around back of the building. He went to the front door and stepped back as the wide door opened. His eyes didn't adjust right away, but he saw the bouncer and knew automatically that the big man was not the usual doorman.

"Your business, sir?" Bear asked, toothy grin plastered to his face. "I see you've been working that ass…looking' good."

"Where's Justin?" Brian stepped inside.

"Not here yet, lucky for us. And him. Come on."

"What's the plan?"

"You'll see when we get you in your costume."

Brian halted and looked over his shoulder. "Costume?"

Bear gestured to the next door, a padded red vinyl covered entrance to the auction room. "You'll see." He held the door open for Brian. "Inside."

The room was quiet, scrubbed clean and cement from floor to ceiling. To the far side of the room was a bare stage, its center punctured by a large metal 'T'. Dangling from the gallows were a pair of shackles, leather with fur lining. As Bear led the way down a steep set of cement stairs Brian could see that the scaffolding was not only much taller than a normal human being, suggesting the prisoner would be held with their feet above ground, but that the whole damn thing was set to swivel. To turn the victim.

Brian didn't remember saying anything, but Bear answered the unuttered question.

"Merchandise. They pay to see the entire package."

"That's fucking sick."

"You don't know the half of it. Guys bring twinks here to trade forever. The rest of their young lives in slavery."

"That's illegal." Brian said low, glaring at the stage.

"So's what goes on in the back room, but no one bothers to say those things aloud."

"What tells me that this isn't the worst of what you're going to tell me?"

"They go for a pretty penny, the tight ones. A virgin's nearly unheard of here, but some can look so much like the original it's uncanny and-"

"Bear."

The big man sighed. "Fine. Fine. Justin's the main entertainment tonight. Kriegg's description alone has got him set at one and five mil. Or three normal rated twinks."

"This is fucking ridiculous! They are goddamned human beings, Bear!"

"I don't run the place, I just bounce here when Will needs me."

As if on cue, Will came down the stairs trailed closely by his older brother. Bear put a hand on Brian's shoulder, calm and quiet but still holding him back from striking Will. Or Brad.

"You son of a bitch! Hasn't he fucking been through enough?"

"Do you think I wanted this to happen?"

"It's your fault!"

"Justin's not hurt yet, so you can just rela-"

"He is fucking hurt! We heard him scream on the phone when he was taken. That sound is not something forced out with a gun to your head, it was genuine pain! Don't you dare tell me it wasn't because you weren't there. Your father was there. He keeps Justin safer than you do!"

It was Brad's turn to hold onto Will to keep the fight at bay. "Now come on, you two!"

Brian cocked his head. He didn't believe he was hearing the accent right over the phone, but in flesh and blood Brad really did have the act down.

"Fighting aside, we're here for a common good! Now do you want to help us or are we going to have to risk Justin getting killed and do it by ourselves?"

Brian relaxed against Bear. "Talk fast or I'll rip out your tongue and think of my own plan."

"Heh. I like this one. Remind me to tell Baby J I'm a fan of his taste in men." He chuckled. "Little firecracker."

\*

Kriegg watched Justin sit silently in the passenger seat., the boy's eyes gazing at the skyline lazily. He hadn't spoken since being taken from the loft. His skin was pale, lips chattering.

"Look alive, little one, we have a show to put on."

"Can I go home now?" The boy asked, staring up at Kriegg. The undersides of his eyes were the steely bruised gray a concussion brought.

"No. Don't you want to find Will?"

Justin shook his head, and knew it was a mistake when the world kept shaking even after he stopped. "I know where he is."

"Do you love me, Justin? Do you want me to be happy?"

Justin blinked, focusing. It was a trick question, but for the life of him Justin couldn't figure out what the right answer was. He knew he was hurt, and it was only getting worse. "Brian."

"No, little one. You'll never see Brian again. We need to get you into hair and makeup before your new masters get here. I've told them all about you, dear. You're loyal and smart. Very much a hot commodity in every other department. There will be a full house tonight, I can promise you that."

Justin whimpered and started to cry, silent tears. His shoulder still hurt, but what worried him the most was the back of his head and lack of feeling from the base of his neck to the top of his skull.

"I'll stay with you…"

"No, dear. You're not as terribly important to me as my money. And my revenge."

\*

The place filled up faster than Brad had seen the entire duration of his company. Kriegg had done his own advertising. The man had brought Justin inside through the employee entrance, shoving him to Brad's film staff.

"He'll need a little work, but the inside's intact." Kriegg promised.

"For your sake, I'd hope so." Brad said, shaking hands with the man, as flat and emotionless as any good businessman. Behind his eyes was a war of torture massive enough to frighten even the strongest, most ruthless dictator, and it was all directed at Kriegg.

"Give him a popper, he'll be good as new."

"Will do." Brad said. "Care to go out and join the spectators?"

"My pleasure."

"Will you be taking part in the festivities tonight?"

"Most definitely." Kriegg said and gave a small wave to Justin. "You do agree to our arrangement then?"

"I already have the Kid staked out. He'll be here by the end of the night." Brad promised.

"I'll be waiting."

\*

Will stepped back and eyed Brian. "You look like shit."

"A total scum bag." Bear agreed with a frown.

"Great, I'll fit right in." Brian sighed, turning around in the mirror. His hair was slicked back with so much gel it looked blacker than an oil slick. His beautiful eyes were hidden behind mirrored sunglasses. The masculine line of his jaw was sharpened by a strip of dark stubble. A thick scar brandished over Brian's eyebrow and down his cheek. His clothes weren't as expensive to satiate his normal flare, but they did prove he had money to pay for a fine cut of meat.

"Now, you remember what you have to do?" Will said anxiously. It was almost time. He could hear the crowd outside growing and starting to bid on the lesser victims.

"I remember." Brian sighed. "I just have to buy him."

"There's…one more thing." Will exchanged glances with Bear. "To prove you own him."

"I'm listening."

"You have to fuck him up there…show him you're his master. You have to hurt him, make him fear you."

"WHAT!?"

"If you don't they'll overthrow you and the bidding will start all over again! You can't let him know that it's you, Brian."

"He'll be terrified!"

"Would you rather it were someone else?" Will asked quietly, the terror gleaming in his eyes.

Brian's throat clenched painfully with the force to keep tears from exploding. "Fuck. I fucking hate you."

"I don't care, just help him." Will pleaded.

"I won't do it for you."

"I'm not asking you to, damnit Brian!"

"Just so long as you know."

"I know." Will sighed, leaning into Bear, closing his eyes as the man's arm wrapped around him in comfort.

"I have to go." Brian said to his reflection in the mirror. He heard the crowd roar to life, even louder than before. He knew the treasures were getting more extravagant. It was only a matter of time before Justin was put on the auction block and sent off to the slaughter.

\*

Brad brushed his brother's hair, watching the boy flinch every time he ran over the bump on the back of his head. The man tried to be careful, but even with a fresh wash he knew Justin was not as alright on the inside as Kriegg claimed. Justin was traumatized, and the worst was yet to come.

The man leaned over, his lips a hair from the boy's ear. "It'll be alright."

Justin clenched turning away from Brad. He squeezed his eyes shut as a makeup artist usually assigned to fluffing and powdering the porn stars sidled next to his new client. He carefully spotted foundation under the boy's eyes until they were no darker than the rest of his skin. His mouth drew itself into a tight line of concentration, the slightest hint of red tongue peeking out the corner of his lips. Powder dusted the boy's pale cheeks and forehead, his nose and chin.

"Careful, he's been beaten." Brad warned as the makeup artist drifted down Justin's neck.

"Where? They left his face almost clean."

"You can tell by the way he moves." Brad said quietly. Justin seemed to be asleep, the boy's breathing regulated. He wondered if his brother had passed out.

The other man took a pair of scissors and took Justin's shirt and pants off, looking him over. "Yeah. Shoulder." He winced. "It's swelling, we'll never get him out there unscathed. I don't care how much you pay me."

"Don't worry about that. It's Kriegg's name that'll drag through the dirt, not mine. He brought them here looking for a perfect…Sunshine. Do your best." He knew it was better the worse Justin looked so Brian would have less competition…but he couldn't put the boy out the way he was. He looked too near death to not arise suspicion. For the first time in his life, Brad felt bad for peddling the innocents…the boys who would never have their naiveté back all because of the operation he ran. But if he didn't do it, there would be someone else to do it. And someone else after that.

The man turned Justin in his seat. "Back, ribs…he's bruised, but I can handle these."

"Don't forget the ankle."

"I see it, I see it."

"Good." Brad swallowed thickly.

The man covered Justin's wounds the best he could, distracted by his masterpiece as Brian was guided to the room with the other bidders. Will and Bear made sure it was a clear path, and that the man didn't see Justin, and Justin didn't see them. The makeup artist went into brilliant colors, reds and blues, painting the boy's face heavily. He chose a blood-red shade of lipstick, tracing the boy's delicate lips perfectly. He lined Justin's eyes with eyeliner, just enough to draw the fierce blue of the blonde's eyes, following with a bare blink of mascara. A light touch of darker blue marked the boy's eyelids. He drew blush carefully across Justin's cheekbones and stood, finished.

Brad dismissed his staff, save the costume attendant. He nodded as a rack of clothes was rolled out. The finest silks and satins…and nothing would be left of them but tatters as the men bid not only on more exposure, but on the boy himself.

"Go to it, you have ten minutes before next curtain call. Watch his head, Kriegg fucked him up."

"Gotcha." The man nodded, watching his boss leave to watch the show. He leaned close to Justin, tapping the boy on the forehead. Justin moaned and shook his head gently from side to side.

"Mmph."

"Easy now, child, you won't be here long at all." He trailed a finger along Justin's bare chest, around his tiny nipple. "I can see things others never do…I see the boys in all their glory and I don't have to pay a damn cent to do it…to do anything…" He leaned down and inhaled Justin's sweet scent, licking a straight line from his Adam's apple to collar bone.

"Momma…"

"Oh, you -are- young aren't you?" He kissed lightly down to Justin's ribcage, a feral growl low in his throat as the boy winced under the new pressure on one of his wounds. "How young? Young enough to have caught the boss' attention. I saw the way he looked at you. I bet he's going to place a bid himself. You should feel honored, child. It's not often the boss brings a twink to his bed. He likes 'em dark, tall, mysterious. Don't know why he doesn't like a nice taste of twink, but that's not really my problem." The man lowered himself to wrap his mouth around the boy's balls, taking as much of them into his mouth as he could. He smiled, rolling his eyes up to Justin's when the younger man moaned. He bit down, gently, testing how long it took to get the boy erect. It didn't take long, just as he'd hoped. After all, he only had ten minutes.

The man got to his knees, pulling Justin's legs over his shoulders. He stood slowly to a slight crouch, grabbing a travel packet of lube from one of the silk kimonos and squirting it onto Justin's throbbing hole. He ran his dick up and over the crack several times, smearing the KY Jelly. He grinned as Justin moaned.

"Don't worry, child, I'll be quick. I've created an art form." He explained, pushing himself into Justin, curving the boy's back as he pulled him down lower on the makeup chair. "No one." He said, thrusting with each word. "Ever. Finds. Out. That. I. Take. My. Piece. Of. Each. Boy."

Justin's eyes flew open as the new sensations flooded his fuzzy gray mind. He thought at first that the man was Brian, but even as he began to see that he was somewhere and with someone strange, Justin knew he was not with his lover. The man was harsher, rougher, intent on causing pain, and didn't smell like his Brian. His grunts, so close to the end of his ride already, were not the sounds that Brian made.

"No…" Justin whispered, still unsure of how to use his voice. It sounded far away and pitiful, even to his ringing ears.

"Shh. Shh. Nearly. Done." The man pushed himself into Justin a few more times, faster, harder, his body pounding against Justin's smooth, round ass. He came and it was then that Justin closed his eyes and began to weep.

"You'll ruin your makeup." The man said, gently, soothing, as if he hadn't just raped the helpless boy. He dabbed lightly on the boy's eyes, careful not to mess up his coworker's paint job. "And you shouldn't waste your tears on me. You're about to go into a few years of servitude. But not to fear, you'll be thrust out when you're no longer tight, no longer beautiful."

"No." Justin protested, suddenly aware that he was nude and in terrible pain, but couldn't place the direct source. He struggled against the man, who seemed to know exactly how to use his own body to pin Justin in his seat.

"Are you going to let me get you dressed so you can meet your fans?"

"Let me go…" Justin pleaded. He heard the din of the crowd somewhere beyond the room they were in.

"Not an option." The man grabbed Justin's right arm roughly and forced it through the sleeve hole of a red silk shirt. He took the left wrist in his hand but didn't yank it like the other. "You'll cooperate or I'll pull this shoulder out of socket again."

Justin grimaced and obeyed, his head falling forward as the man slipped tiny silk buttons between intricately wrapped gold cord brackets lining the front of the shirt.

"Now stand. And don't run, your ankle is swollen and you'll fall flat on that pretty little face." He threatened, pulling a pair of black silk pants up one leg, then the other. The man stood back a bit and admired the way Justin fit into the pants, a slit of skin exposed on either side of his milky white thighs, barely contained by the same gold cord that held the vest-shirt in place. Tiny red Japanese letters crawled up one leg, but he was damned if he cared what it said. When all was said and done, the clothes would be the last thing on anyone's mind. But damned if he didn't wrap a pretty package.

"Sinclair, you done?" Brad peered into the room. Justin looked the part of auction victim. All his boys were dressed and painted in the same way, it drove the men wild to see little male geishas to serve their every whim. Brian also looked the part he was supposed to play, because Brad couldn't even find him in the massive crowd. He just hoped the other man knew what he was doing, and knew how to do it alone.

"Dressed and pressed, boss."

Justin stared at the man in the doorway with complete disgust, but no recognition. Brad knew he was going to run before even Justin did. But the boy did try to bolt to the nearest exit, despite his swollen ankle. Sinclair wasn't fast enough. He was downright lethargic, and if Brad hadn't caught Justin, the boy would have tasted freedom. Not that he had anywhere to go.

"Not so fast, little treasure. You're next."

"Please let me go! This isn't what I want!"

"Do you think any of the boys before you were willing to give away their youths to the highest bidder?" Brad grabbed Justin's wrists and held them, leading him out onto the stage. He had never been squeamish about forcing anyone onto the auction block, but now a lump was forming in his throat as big as the void a conscience had left years ago.

"This is illegal." Justin whimpered, dragging his bare feet. "You can't do this."

"Watch me. You should bring a very pretty penny. Now behave, do as you're told, and they won't beat you too badly." Brad leaned down low. "I mean it. If they tell you to open your eyes, or show how wide you can drop your jaw, do it or they'll do it for you." He said and brought Justin, still dragging his feet, to stand beneath the shackles.

\*

Brian took a deep breath when he saw his Sunshine. The boy…didn't even look the same. But he was awake, and angrier than Brian had ever seen him. The blue eye shadow and black liner made his radiant eyes seem almost ethereally venomous. He limped a bit in pain, and scowled at his eldest brother, but besides that Justin seemed more than ready to go home.

"And now, the prize you've all been promised: Kriegg's boy." Brad announced as Justin's wrists were raised to the far ends of the metal 'T' and cuffed there. He did a good job at masking the trembling pain in his shoulder behind a vehement glare. "We're going to start the bidding at Twenty g's."

"Twenty one." A shout erupted instantly.

"Twenty one five!"

Brad unlaced Justin's vest and tore it from his shoulders, everything in his body cringing at the wince the customary tearing brought to his baby brother's face. Tears streamed down his blushing cheeks. The men went wild as the barest traces of silk clung to Justin's shoulders.

"Two!"

"Three five!"

"Six five!" Another voice rang, and Brad knew it was Kriegg. Brian had kept silent, waiting.

"Seven!"

"Thirty!" Kriegg bellowed, baiting the men he'd brought to Brad's rally. If he intended on getting any sort of cut from the winnings, Brad knew he was in for a reality check. He couldn't be seriously willing to pay thirty thousand dollars for Justin when he could have had the boy for free. The crowd fell silent then, as Kriegg brought himself over the rest. He let them all know how much he was willing to up the stakes for a challenger.

Will looked on nervously. He knew Brian would win this because he was the only one bidding with imaginary funds. Brad lowered Justin's pants, just slightly, revealing the hint of the boy's thick patch of dark blonde pubic hair.

Brian swallowed in a dry throat, the taste of real fear at the back of his tongue. He had seen four boys meet their fates before Justin was brought out. The twinks…two were younger than Justin, he was sure of it. The men that won them went up on stage and nearly tore them apart. The boys matched their scraps of clothing by the time the men were done. It had horrified him, disgusted him. And yet, he had to do the same to Justin or risk losing the boy forever to some madman who would never think of being gentle.

"Forty thousand dollars!" Brian called over the silence, his voice met with astonishment over the crowd.

"Fifty!" Kriegg matched his cry.

Brian scowled. "Sixty!" He knew he had to make it subtle, yet convincing. He couldn't spend too much in too short a time.

"Seventy!"

"Eighty and a twink!" Brian bellowed.

Will looked at Bear and shrugged.

"Let's see your twink!" One man yelled, and the rest echoed his sentiments.

Brian nodded. "No problem." He said and grabbed Will from the shadows.

The crowd gave a unanimous roar of approval and broke into cheers.

Brad stepped up. It wasn't supposed to be this way! Kriegg had bargained Justin for Will's capture…Will would have to go up on the auction block after Justin if Brian won, and Kriegg wouldn't want to pay for it. He took a deep breath and shredded the silk pants down Justin's smooth thighs. The boy shivered, suddenly exposed to the world. His makeup remained perfect, waterproof against the sobbing tears streaming down his cheeks.

"Eighty thousand, one twink…going once."

"One million, and that's my meat!"

Brad groaned inwardly, rolling his eyes. He never even saw Bear moving through the crowd, and neither did Kriegg. The kidnapper was gagged and thrown to the floor by the big man's strong arms. He didn't even have time to see who his attacker was as Bear's foot came raining down on the man's skull.

"One million…"

"Two!" Brian hollered.

"Two!" Brad said, his eyes scanning the crowd but not seeing the competition. The men had seen who would bid the highest for the coup de grace and they backed off. "Two million going once, twice! SOLD! Two million dollars, one twink. End of auction!" Brad shouted, and added reluctantly. "Come stake your claim."

Brian climbed the steps to the scaffolding, dragging Will behind. He shoved Justin's brother into the man and went to his prize. Justin's eyes were wide with panic and disbelief, staring at his new master with hate and rage. In less than ten minutes he had gone from prisoner to purchased slave, meat for the taking.

A quiet wonder passed over the crowd as they watched Brian turn Justin around roughly. Nothing hung in the air but thick, weighty silence. The man took a deep breath, apologizing to Justin profusely in his own mind. He gripped the boy's hips, pinning him to the scaffolding.

"I'll tear out your throat." Justin hissed.

"You'll be fucking quiet and take what's coming to you." Brian snarled in a feral voice not his own, knowing the crowd was listening to their every word. Justin couldn't know…he had to be afraid.

Justin squeezed his eyes shut, resting his face against the cool steel of the display, his feet not touching the ground. The boy felt his keeper's warm hands spread his exposed legs and drop the slacks he was wearing.

"Get off of me!" Justin bellowed.

Brian grabbed the boy's mouth and held tight. He wasn't sure his voice would come out as strong and commanding as it needed to be, but he had to try. He could feel the blonde's breath in hot, ragged gasps against his hand. "One more word out of you and you won't be able to walk out of here." Brian threatened, sticking two fingers in his mouth and slipping them inside the boy.

Justin trembled, the tears coming again in full force, helpless.

Brian pressed his face against Justin's neck. He removed his fingers and pushed inside the boy with the erection he had to concentrate to keep, one hand still covering Justin's mouth. He felt the blonde tense, tasted his tears as his tongue found Justin's cheek, licking a long line to his clenched jaw. The crowd came to life with a fury, cheering him on. Justin's arms went slack above him, his head rolling against Brian's grip. He was ready to pass out.

Brian shoved himself into Justin, hoping it would wake him up. The boy couldn't pass out now. The crowd wanted to see fear. One of them would nominate themselves to make Justin feel fear if Brian couldn't!

"Wake up." Brian brought Justin's face backwards so the dull, unfocused eyes could see his face. The boy rested his head against Brian's shoulder limply, staring at something no one could see. "Wake up."

"Wake him up!" One man yelled and others followed.

"Fuck." Brian whispered. "Wake up!" He pushed himself deeper into the boy, seeing the first stirrings of pained alertness return to the boy's eyes. Brian had been this far into Justin before without a problem, without hurting him. Someone else had already hurt him tonight.

"Please…" Justin begged softly, his small voice lost in the boisterous audience.

"Quiet." Brian said. "And don't you pass out again." He threatened so the crowd could hear, thrusting into his boy.

"I'll pass out if I want to!" Justin retorted with a newfound fight.

"You'll go when I tell you to!" Brian shouted, leaning in close. "And I'll be here when you wake up." He promised, knowing that no one could hear him over their own shouts of excitement.

Justin tensed in his chains. His breath grew quick as more shock rolled over him. Was it..? Could it be? The man behind him didn't smell like Brian but…that last had not been a warning but a vow.

A familiar vow. Whenever Justin got scared, Brian promised he would be there when the boy woke up…and now? He looked behind him, craning his neck. It WAS Brian!

"Get me out of here." Justin mouthed, relaxing against his lover. The terror washed away and Brian didn't care if anyone knew the boy wasn't afraid anymore. However, everyone else did care and they could take Justin away.

"Play along, I will. Scream."

Justin raised an eyebrow in confusion.

"SCREAM!" Brian shouted, ramming into the boy. Justin did as he was told, his shrill voice ringing against the cold cement room.

Brad held Will against him. "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph…"

"Told you. He's got a voice of his own…"

Brad chuckled. "I was talking more about that Brian's ass but…yeah, sure, you can pay attention to Justin."

Brian reached around Justin's bare hips and pulled the boy closer to him, wrapping one hand around the growing erection. Now that Justin knew who was behind him, he let his pleasure show. The blonde bit back a groan as Brian stroked his cock.

"Beg me." Brian told him, and the men applauded. They had never seen such a rebellious slave grow weak in so little time.

"Please…"

"Master." Brian finished.

Justin used everything he had to not laugh. "Master." He said. It was the first and only time the man would hear those words, and if Justin had anything to do with it, Brian would be uttering it at least once by the time this was over. He had scared the blonde, forced him to think he had been bought and paid for. Justin had a nice idea of what revenge would look like from the top of Brian's head as the man paid him back with unending blowjobs.

"Ughn." Brian groaned, forcing Justin against the scaffold, nearly plowing right through the boy. He couldn't even hear the applause anymore. Brian was back in his bedroom with Justin tucked safely beneath him, comfortable and unexposed, unscathed.

"Master." Justin begged without the strength to stop himself. He was pushed farther up the smooth steel the harder Brian fucked him. He saw stars and it had nothing to do with his head injury.

Brian pulled Justin's dick faster, matching his own thrusts.

"Please!" Justin implored in a sultry voice, hardly over a whisper. "Please fuck me!"

Brian pummeled the boy's ass, harder, harder, quicker, faster, deeper, feeling the cold steel against his legs as he pinned Justin's body against the metal and plowed into him until the world streaked in the explosion. The man nearly lost his footing, his legs going weak, trembling. Both men's climax-screams were drowned out by a monstrous standing ovation, their shouts obviously pleased with the night's main attraction. Brian pulled out of Justin and kissed the boy's mouth passionately, turning the entire display around to cover Justin's body with his own. He tasted Justin's fear and excitement, weariness and pain, drawing the blonde's tongue into his mouth dying for more. Justin returned the kiss, grateful to be safe in the hot darkness of his true love.

Will rolled his eyes. "That's wonderful. I needed to see this in my nightmares. I'm leaving."

"You were put on the auction by Brian. He's paying to see you get fucked."

"You promised you wouldn't put me up there!"

"You said, and I quote: 'Tell me you won't trade me for some mindless twink for your auction'. And I gave my word. Justin isn't a mindless twink, and I'm not trading you. Brian traded you for Justin. Fair's fair."

"You bastard! You would put your own brother up there for the slaughter!"

Brad grabbed Will's arm and pulled him close as the younger man tried to get away. "You're the reason -your- brother is up there, Brian and I think you were paid back for that."

"Son of a-"

Brad burst into a fit of laughter. "Oh boyo! How'd you get so serious?" He released his brother.

Will sagged against the wall. "Fucking prick."

"The only words Brian and I exchanged was a very serious threat…" Brad said through the laughter.

"You threatened him, you crazy son of a bitch?"

"He threatened me…he can be awfully frightening if he wants to be. He said he'd call the police and tell them everything if this wasn't the last night Dark Starr Productions opened. He's made me in a rat, a squealer. I've got to get all the boys back that I had traded here and…use my own damn money to get them help. He's bankrupted me."

"And you let him?"

"I had no choice…what he told me he'd do to me…I believe him. Justin's got himself quite a protector." Brad looked again toward the men onstage and shook his head. "The boy's got to know by now…he's getting into that kiss."

Will pushed passed his brother and out the back door. If Brad needed a place to stay after the snuff films were put to rest, he was sure Bear would open his doors for the eldest Taylor brother. Will wasn't about to stick around to see Justin carried off stage. If Brian got a chance with him alone…Will didn't want to think about what the man said to Brad, or what he planned to exact on Will once Justin was safely away from the auction. He knew the look of fury in Brian's hazel eyes and it scared him more than anything in his entire lifetime. That man's eyes held pure liquid evil.

"Going somewhere?" Justin asked, leaning against his lover. Brian was frowning, but nothing more. His face was blank, and that in itself was more frightening than the living rage Will had seen before.

"Justin…"

Brad stood behind the boy, blood seeping from his lip and nose, a bruise already blackening around each eye. Will swallowed painfully and closed his eyes. "Okay, hit me." He winced, remembering just how hard Brian had punched him last time.

His face exploded in streamers of pain, his arms pin wheeling behind him as he fell flat on his butt. He opened his eyes slowly and stared at Brian. The man had been working out…but Brian hadn't moved. Justin stood before him and Will suddenly knew who had bloodied Bradley's face.

"Justin?"

"You prick! How long were you planning on hiding out here while Kriegg was out grabbing me?"

"Justin…I didn't know what I was doing until I did it. I was trying to get Brad to protect me. Us!"

"Liar." Brad said. "I may be a snuff film entrepreneur and flesh peddler, but I don't lie to my family."

"That's because I beat you up until you told me the truth." Justin said snidely. "You both should be ashamed of yourselves! What did I ever do to you to be brought into your lives like this? Can't you be fucking normal!"

"He's dead, blue eyes." Bear said affectionately, pushing aside the curtain. "Kriegg's no longer in the picture."

"Thanks, Bear-Bear." Justin turned to Brian. "Let's get out of here." He said, and froze, looking at the makeup chair he'd woken up in. He tensed against Brian, and the man knew what had happened.

"I'll get him." Brian said, supporting the boy on Bear as he ducked behind the clothes rack.

"Justin…if there's anything I can do to…" Brad sighed. "I'm sorry."

"Come home with me."

"Huh?"

"I want you and Will to come home with me. Make it better, apologize by coming home."

"We've been away since you were a toddler, Justin…I-"

"I want you to come home and have a dinner with mom and dad." Justin said, voice muffled in Bear's chest, more to hide his smirk than because he was hiding from what Brian was doing to the man in the next room.

"You are evil incarnate." Brad groaned.

Will stood up. "I can't believe this…anything but mom and dad!"

"Fine. Then you can stay here and rot, but don't ever come near me again."

"Justin…" Both brothers protested, but knew it was hopeless. The real master had spoken and they had no choice but to please him however he wanted.

"With all the things I've done, only my brother truly terrifies me." Brad sighed. "My brother…and my brother's boyfriend."

"Tell me about it." Will shook his head.

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EPILOGUE

The hardest people to convince to come to dinner weren't Brad or Will, but Craig and Jennifer. Brian was only too happy to oblige his young lover. He sat smugly next to Justin's father, because no one else would.

Craig said nothing to start a fight with Brian. In fact, the two shared a respectful smile before dinner. No one noticed.

Jennifer sat beside Justin, who was on Brian's left side. Her two other sons sat down the table, Brad closest to her, then Will. Bear sat beside Will, silently holding the boy's hand beneath the table.

The first thing Craig did was order Brad to lose the accent. Jennifer said she liked it. Justin shook his head and sighed.

They were all one big happy family; the snuff film director, the con artist, the beefy assassin and bouncer, the raging mad patriarch, the understanding but naïve mother, the sexy and saucy ad exec who would beat a man to near-death for hurting the blonde before admitting love, and Justin. Just plain Justin, the boy who was the only link between every one in the dining room. The pure, sunshiny smile to protect from the world they were all forced to live in.

He couldn't wait for his sister to come to town.

Rescued

Justin settled himself onto the smooth white carpet, crayons and charcoal spread in an organized artistic flare all around his body. \*I might as well get some homework done while I'm here.\* He figured, tearing a page from his huge sketch book and clipping it to a drawing board.

Behind him, a fire raged in the fireplace, casting rapidly moving shadows over the dimly lit walls. It was the perfect night to tell a ghost story, if only his audience didn't scare so easily. Scanning the living room, Justin prepared himself for a night of frustration.

"Gus?" Justin called, suspicious of the sudden quiet resonating around the house. His mothers had only been gone for five minutes, but that was enough time for the boy to make a mess that would keep Justin busy all night long. Babysitting the youngster was no easy task, but that was why he took charge of the boy as often as possible. If the son could be mastered, it was foreseeable that his father could be as well. With experience, Justin had learned to bring an extra set of dry clothes with him as well as several things to keep the child occupied. Three years had passed since Justin's first encounter with the rest of his life, but so much had happened that stretched the years to infinity. "Gussy, art time!"

Sullivan Kinney had been the first major event that threw Justin's world into a whirl of terror. The man was Brian's cousin come to wreak revenge for destroying his first relationship. He swore to Brian, then only fourteen, that he would make sure no one lived long enough to make Brian happy. He had come to make good on the threat, and nearly destroyed Michael and Justin in his rage.

And then there was Mark. The boy, now twelve, was Brian's first son, cleverly hidden from even Michael until last year. The boy came searching for help from an abusive step-father and negligent mother. The man beating Mark had a fancy for young boys and managed to get his hands on both Mark and Justin, though Justin had sacrificed himself to preserve what little innocence Mark had left. No one victim to these two men liked to think about what had happened, and Justin didn't mind one bit. The boy now lived with Lindsay and Melanie as their adopted son. He was rarely away from Justin's side, but thankfully, Mark was with Brian that night.

Instantly, a burst of three year old energy exploded through the kitchen walkway. Gus crashed down in front of the blank piece of paper left by his favorite babysitter. The boy's small hands clutched the first bright crayon in their reach and took to the paper with intense determination. "Hey, Jussin." His happy voice seemed almost pre-programmed as his mind concentrated on the project below.

Justin smiled warmly at Gus. The baby couldn't blend or shade, or even keep the color confined to the paper most of the time, but the nights were well spent simply watching the pictures take shape. The reckless abandon of a child's artwork was outstandingly fascinating to Justin. Gus was free, and he didn't know how to be anything else. Justin found himself being protective of Gus, mimicking Lindsay and Melanie without even trying. His instincts were his own, and Justin knew that one day Gus would lose his innocence and the rest of his life would change like Mark's and Justin's…and even Brian's, once in his summer youth. It was the blonde's priority to slow the process on Gus as long as possible.

Still, time and experience had yet to take its toll on Justin's features, even slightly. He hated looking like he was twelve at twenty-one, but the guys assured him that being carded would be the highlight of his days when he was their age. Justin didn't want to imagine Gus in his position.

"Let's try to keep the house clean this time, 'kay?" Justin scolded softly, remembering the painstaking process of removing colored wax and pastel from the walls and white carpeting last Friday night.

"'kay." Gus answered, the wavy top of his light brown hair bouncing while he worked. His tone was one Brian used constantly: one of agreeing without really listening.

Justin smoothed down his own paper, tracing his fingers over imaginary lines of possibility. The pencil seemed to know exactly what to do as it mirrored the little boy across from him onto his paper perfectly, nearly capturing the animated shadows which played onto Gus' lucid movements in one frozen frame.

Nearly an hour passed before he smiled at the finished product and got up, stretching. \*If I can keep Gus busy all night just like this, we'll survive.\* Justin thought, standing over his young ward. "I'm gonna go get us some juice, okay?"

Gus nodded. "Gwaype."

Justin went into the kitchen, carelessly missing the explosion of pots and pans by mere inches as they competed for floor space. He went to the fridge and poured Gus' favorite drink into two glasses. Mark had convinced the boy that grape was the best he could have until he could get his hands on wine, though Gus didn't even know what wine was. Justin smiled at the memory, the four of them confined to Brian's loft while everyone else had the flu. It was a mistake to even think trouble wouldn't brew through the Kinney lineage once Justin skipped out to retrieve lunch. When he returned, Gus had taken on the persona of his father, one Mark already had. Brian loved the kids, that much Justin knew. Brian didn't want to treat them like a children, one because Mark wouldn't tolerate it, and two because that would make him the elder, the father, the responsible one. Wanting to be friends with them, Brian tried to make the boys self-reliant. At three and twelve, Brian had very apt pupils even if one didn't know what was being said and the other knew far too much for his own good. Grabbing the glasses, Justin tripped over the metal mess in the doorway, shooting juice all over the living room carpet.

Gus gasped from his seat at the wall, his blue-gray eyes wide. "Uh oh, Jussin!"

Justin closed his eyes. "I'm a dead man." He looked up and groaned. Gus' bright picture had moved from the paper to the walls. "Ohhhh, Gus. Kill me now."

\*

"Can mommy have that one?" Justin asked, scooting over to his young charge after another hour had passed and the boy's hands finally slowed. He had worked at getting the mess up from the carpet and off the walls twice, yet a deep reminder lingered on. It was best to satisfy the boy before he decided that not enough attention had been paid to him and caused any more damage.

Gus shook his head, looking away from Justin. The three year old always seemed to be deep in thought, or at least that's how he appeared to Justin.

"How come?"

Gus stood on two short legs and tried to pull the multi-colored drawing from it's thin wooden base.

"Here, here." Justin gently pulled back the hinges of the clipboard and released the paper.

"Fow you." Gus pushed it toward Justin.

Justin accepted. "Thanks, Gus! I love it!" He ruffled the boy's hair. "Are you sure?"

"I'm shuwah." Gus decided and ran to the stairs, the picture worthy of his apology for the chaos he had created. He stopped and looked back. "Can we pway twucks?"

"Yeah, go get -" Justin began, interrupted by Gus' disappearance. "Them." He finished and sighed. The toddler had already made up his mind and gone upstairs, with or without Justin's permission. Zipping his bag, Justin realized that the boy became more trouble every time he saw him.

\*That's got to be more of Brian and Mark's doing.\* Justin pulled himself up and started cleaning up the art supplies. He wondered when his favorite father and son would stop by, as was usually the case when Lindz and Mel left Justin in charge. The man had a better chance of impressing his views and attitude onto his sons when no one was around to tell him 'no'.

And Justin would certainly never tell Brian no.

Outside, a growing wind groaned in the darkness, followed by a low voice yelling obscenities. Holding his breath, Justin knew that he would be babysitting more than Gus that night as the front door handle clicked.

"Hey, Justin! Open the door!" Mark yelled, banging on the solid wood.

"Okay, okay, hold your horses!" Justin swung the door open and forced it closed once Mark had entered. "What are you doing here? Where's your dad?" Justin demanded, flustered. The boy had yet to stop following him around…the irony of it all was astounding.

"He's busy working, so he sent me to keep you company. Where's the brat?"

"You're brother's upstairs. Why don't you help me clean up this mess?"

Mark surveyed the room and scoffed. "I don't think so."

An angry roll of thunder reminded Justin of his duties as he went to the bottom of the stairs and listened for Gus. If there was one thing that scared the child beyond any of Justin's ghost stories, it was a storm. Moving to the fireplace, Justin made sure the gate was locked in place. Rolling up his new drawing with Gus', Justin stood again at the bottom of the stairs.

"Gus, come downstairs!" Justin called, shivering. The storm brought with it a growing sense of insecurity. When no reply reassured him, Justin closed his eyes tightly to ward of a headache. \*Gus follows orders as well as the rest of the men in his family.\* "Gus!"

Thunder smashed over the house, rattling the windows violently, followed by lightening so close it left a heavy ozone smell. "Gus!" Justin bounded upstairs, his heart in his throat. \*He usually screams! Why didn't he scream?\* "Gus!"

He burst into the boy's room, a smaller pair of footsteps right behind him. As if on cue, every light in the house died. "Gus, baby?" Justin cooed into the blackened room, speaking just as much to locate Gus as to hear the sound of someone's voice. He began to make his way in, though the floor was a disaster area. \*Group hysteria.\* Justin scoffed. \*Without the group.\*

The child sniffled somewhere in the room. "Jussin?"

Justin felt his way to the sound, shuffling his feet until he touched upon the closet door. "I'm here, Gussy. Come on out." Justin stifled a giggle. \*He hides in the closet. I'll have to tell Brian that I had to coax his son out of the closet.\*

"I'm scayawd."

"It's okay, Gus. I'll protect you." Justin reached until he found the child's small form and hoisted him up. "Don't be scared."

"Don't be a baby." Mark scolded the baby.

"Quiet, Mark."

The child sniffled again. "I want mommy."

"She'll be home soon. They're probably stuck in the storm, kiddo. But you know what? I happen to know tons of fun stuff to do in the dark." He snickered as Gus cheered. \*Unfortunately, you're a little young to do most of them.\*

Setting the drawings on the bed, Justin grabbed the handles of a small toy basket and carefully made his way down the stairs. The fire crackled excitedly, casting a faint glow into the room. Justin set Gus down and dumped the tiny toy cars in front of him.

"There. All better?"

The boy nodded as Justin turned on his cell phone and called Brian, keeping an eye on Gus as the boy miraculously forgot his fear. Justin's lover had gotten the boy a cell phone after Russell had kidnapped them, said it made him feel safer to know that Justin would always have a way to reach him…that was until he got the bill from all the times Justin had reached Daphne.

Mark seemed amused at the youngest boy's transformation, but only in dreams of future tormenting and forgiveness.

"Hello?"

"Hey."

"How's Sonny Boy?" Brian looked at his blender, a bright red mixture inside settling.

"Which one?"

"Gus."

"Scayawd." Justin giggled. "He's okay."

"And Mark?"

"Evil, as usual." Justin teased.

Brian stared out his window. "It's really coming down out there."

"And I thought you were beyond stating the obvious." Justin teased.

"Ha. Ha ha. Very funny. You're a funny kid."

"I'm -not- a kid. Why don't you come over?"

Brian smiled. After three years together, Justin's devotion had never waned. "Why? Are you scayawd?"

"Of course not! But your baby is and he misses you. He asked if you were coming over."

Gus looked up and grinned. He thought it was a riot when Justin lied to his dad, especially when he could be a part of it. Mark squatted down, plotting which toy would get Gus riled up the most when he took it.

"Really?"

\*No.\* "Yeah. So why not?"

"I'll think about it."

"Sure." Justin rolled his eyes. "Later, Bri." He said and hung up.

Justin avoided thinking of their relationship too often. He had no idea how close they had truly become, only that something truly special was happening between them. They didn't hold hands in public, but danced closely behind the secrecy of Brian's door. They made love more often than they fucked. They made eye contact and held it. Brian seemed genuinely glad to have Justin around,

The relationship with Michael was another story. He and Justin had grown close as friends, to the point of trusted advisors. Often times they sided up against Brian, and more often than that they got their way.

"Vroom! Eeeeaach!" Gus shouted, ramming the Tonkas into the Hot Wheels, mocking overly dramatic explosions, pulling Justin from his thoughts.

"So violent, Gus. Can't one car survive?"

"Da Jeep!" Gus held up a replica of Brian's prized possession.

"Well, that figures." He sighed, eyeing Mark's new grin. "Mark, be nice." Justin warned cautiously. He didn't need an eruption making a bigger mess in the already destroyed living room.

Justin jumped when his cell phone rang. He smiled at the boys, who were the only witnesses. "That doesn't leave this room." He threatened. He put the phone to his ear, ready to hear Debbie on the other line. "Hello?"

The phrase 'dead air' suddenly came to mind as Justin listened intently for someone to answer. "Hello?"

"He's mine. You'll give him to me." Came a stranger's breathy reply.

Justin felt the color drain from his cheeks. He was hoping for Melanie, Lindsay, or Debbie. "Who is this?"

"Tears really look good on you."

"Michael? Is that you?" Justin ran through the people who had his cell phone number. "Em? Ted?"

"Terror makes me hot-"

"Okay, fuck you guy." Justin said angrily and hung up.

"Who was dat?" Gus inquired, looking up from the massacre in front of him as Mark raised his eyebrows in appreciation. Any time an adult could swear, it gave him permission to do the same.

"Someone playing a joke."

The phone rang again.

"The joke wasn't funny." Justin continued, then: "Hello?"

"I want him. I want you, Justin."

Justin looked around the room as if the person were watching from the sofa. "Who is this?"

"I'm going to ruin you." The man said, the voice familiar but from where, Justin couldn't tell.

"Real nice. Why don't you knock it off? It's juvenile. Trying to scare someone during a rain storm. Grow up. Who is this?" Justin said as bravely as he could.

"You know me, Justin."

"I don't think so. Who is this?" Justin demanded more shrilly, trying to calm himself. \*That's all he wants. It's got to be Michael or Brian, just disguising their voices.\*

"I'm going to get you and the babies. They belong to me."

"Very funny, Michael. I'm hanging up now."

"Go ahead. It'll be less of a warning when I come for you. This is my time."

"Fuck you!" Justin hung up and flung the phone onto the couch.

Gus' face scrunched in towards his nose and a noise erupted from him greater than any thunder. He held his arms up to Justin, wailing. Mark rolled his eyes, stepping away from his brother and examining the juice stains while muttering: "Nice going."

"Oh, I'm sorry Gus." Justin soothed, trying to calm his own fear by squeezing the boy against his chest. He took the baby with him while checking the front and back doors, a task no easier than babysitting the boy, as the back door was masked completely in darkness. Forcing down his fear, Justin felt the lock. "Listen, why don't we make some popcorn like they did in the cowboy days, huh? No electricity, just the fire. That would be fun!" \*It is Brian. It has to be.\* He decided. \*He knows I'm scared.\*

"Yeah!" Gus cheered, once again transforming without the slightest trace left of his latest emotion.

"Oh, please." Mark groaned.

Ignoring the older boy, Justin added: "And then I'll tell you a story, okay?" He carried Gus into the kitchen, practically tripping over the array of pots and pans scattered over the linoleum floor he'd forgotten to clean up with a laugh from the teenager in the living room. "Great, at least we know where the pans are if we ever find the popcorn and butter. Any idea where your moms keep the flashlights?"

"Ova theya!" Gus answered, pointing in the fading firelight from the next room.

Justin pulled open a drawer and clicked on a massive yellow flashlight. "Jesus." Justin looked at it. "Greetings from planet Krypton."

Gus giggled.

"Should have found this before the power went out." Justin thought out loud. "Okay." He reached into the cabinets and pulled down a big bowl, some popping kernels, and salt. The refrigerator offered him the butter. "Ready?"

"Yeah!" He smiled, then frowned. "I need my hat." He looked up hopefully at Justin.

\*Who could resist a face like that?\* Justin groaned. "Okay, kiddo. Let's run upstairs and grab your hat."

Oddly enough, Gus knew exactly where everything was in the mess he'd only recently created once his moms closed the front door. He held it up and waved it excitedly.

"Yee haw!" He yipped, raising his arms so Justin could carry him downstairs. Justin tilted his head at the bedroom window before going to close it. He didn't remember it being open, but with the kind of night he was having, it was a wonder Justin remembered his own name.

Rolling his eyes, Justin thought offhandedly that if he and Brian ever had a kid, it would be brattier than even a thousand Michael's could handle. He set the boy down on the couch and went about making the popcorn. It was easier said than done, that much he knew as one pan slid off the other and most of the butter spilled into the fire itself. None of the kernels were popping.

Gus raised his eyebrows in expectancy, a trick the boy had picked up from either Justin, Mark, or Brian, no one knew who. Mark took Gus from the chair and set him on the floor, vacating the spot. Gus raised a cry in protest.

"I'm working on it." Justin promised, willing the corn to explode. "Just one second!"

The phone rang next to Gus, startling Justin into dropping the pans into the fire. "Shit!" He yelled, reaching in just enough to pull out the singed pans. "Your moms are going to kill me!"

The phone rang again.

"I got it!" Mark announced.

"No, kid, let me." Justin got up and tossed the pans aside. "Hello?"

"Hey." Brian said. "I just wanted to tell you that -"

The fire exploded in a white, puffy fury, shooting popcorn everywhere. Justin and Gus screamed at the top of their lungs.

"What was that! Justin? What happened?"

Justin moaned. "Oh, just another motive for murder from Lindz and Mel." He surveyed the area. Popcorn covering most of the room, grape juice reaching like eager hands towards the front door, Crayola's revenge on the walls, miniature automobiles scattered from the couch to the coffee table…He groaned again. "I've got my hands full."

"I just wanted to let you know that I can't come over. The Jeep won't start."

\*Yeah, we'll just pretend you didn't just try to scare the life out of me. Good strategy.\* "I think it's about time you traded it in for a newer model." Justin sighed. \*Guess I won't get any help in watching Gus while I try to clean this place up." \*But it also means he won't be around to prowl in the bushes.\*

"You've got Mark."

"Great, the lesser of two evils I take it? You for him, that's wonderful."

"If I could get the car started I'd get him out of your hair."

"You probably blew a fuse."

Brian scoffed. "What do you know about cars?"

Justin smiled. "I have plenty of car know-how!"

"Bluff. Why would an art student who's attending a specific school for art take an extra class having nothing to do with art?"

"Don't be biased. I like to expand my knowledge." Justin smiled.

"Yeah, uh huh."

"I guess I'll see you tomorrow?"

"Okay. Tell Gus to behave."

"He's not the one I'm worried about." Justin looked over at Gus, who was picking at each piece of popcorn, tasting it, and dropping it back on the ground. Justin squeezed his eyes closed. "Let me take that back. Later, Bri."

"Bye." Brian hung up and smiled. It was comforting to know that when he wasn't around to do it, his boys could keep Justin on his adorable little toes.

\*

"Gus, you know it's past your bedtime." Justin insisted, trying desperately to get the boy to settle down on the sofa. Gus kept reminding Justin that the clocks had stopped, therefore no time could be told. Mark had started that argument for the younger boy, who wouldn't sleep up in his room, but he wouldn't sleep downstairs either.

"No time, no time!" Gus shouted, throwing the covers and kicking wildly against Justin.

"Please, Gus! I've got a watch and-"

"No, no, no! Mawk doesn't have to!"

Justin gave up with a heavy sigh and slumped against the couch. Gus jumped up and ran to his toys, falling back into the mayhem that he'd left hours before. Justin rubbed his eyes and checked his watch. It had been hours since Lindsay and Melanie had promised to be back, but only a few minutes since they'd called to say that their car wouldn't start, just like Brian's.

Justin sat up and stared at his youngest tormentor, the light of a new tactic alive in his eyes. "You know Gus, if you don't go to sleep and your moms come home, they'll never let me babysit again."

"Nevaw?" Gus looked at him in amazement, a truck in each hand.

"Never. They'd probably ask Mark to babysit!"

"Reawy?" The child's eyes widened.

"Would I lie to you?"

"I don't want Mawk!" Gus ran to the couch and wrapped his arms around Justin. "I'm good!"

Mark scoffed, sitting behind one of the chairs and against the wall. "Gee thanks, kid."

"Well if you'll be good, then okay. First off let's get you in bed." Justin picked him up and carried him upstairs.

"But I'm scayawd."

"There's nothing to worry about, I promise. Darkness makes no difference behind closed eyes, Gus." He set the boy in bed and covered him to the chin. "There are no monsters." Justin swiped the flashlight quickly over the room. "See? None. Now go to sleep and before you know it, your moms will be home and it'll be time for Saturday morning cartoons."

"Yay!"

"Goodnight, Gus." Justin kissed his forehead.

"'night, Jussin."

\*

"Beyond hopeless." Justin sighed, tossing the worn sponge back into the bucket. The only difference he could possibly make in the room would be picking up the pre-chewed popcorn and the hundred car pile-up, and those even looked daunting. Staring at Mark, his suspicions grew about the exact motive the boy had for being quiet the whole time he'd been cleaning.

"What are you doing?"

Looking up suddenly, Mark smiled maliciously and put something in his pocket. "Nothing."

Justin got up and hurried over, a wave of panic washing over his entire body at the chair stuffing accumulating at the pre-teen's feet. "How could you!" He wailed. The damage to the chair was astonishing.

"It was ugly."

"Oh for fuck's sake! It's not yours!"

"I did them a favor! Besides, I live here too and we can just blame it on Gus. Lighten up."

"I'm going to-!"

His cell phone rang, waking him up from the destruction. "Hello?"

"Have you been waiting for me?" The stranger purred, breathing heavily.

"Nice, Bri. I'm really sick of this shit. I just got Gus to sleep and Mark has moved from blowing up small animals to destroying furniture. It's been a crazy night. Is everyone in on this? Your car won't start, and neither will the girls'. I don't buy it, so knock it off."

"I can't wait to taste you."

"I'm tired, Brian." Justin sighed, trying to scoop the toys back into their basket, eager to forget the chair.

"Too tired to put up a struggle?"

Groaning, Justin rolled his eyes. "I'll see you tomorrow."

"You have plenty of time to talk. I made sure no one will come to interrupt."

"Fuck off." He hissed, hanging up. \*I'll have to remember to up my wages.\* He decided, then angrily called Brian. He was ready to catch the man in the act.

"Yeah?"

"What's your damage, Brian?" Justin demanded.

"Excuse me?"

"Why are you trying to scare me?"

"I'm not. What's wrong?"

"I know it was you, Brian, you can quit faking it now."

"Justin, I don't know what you're talking about."

Behind him, the doorbell rang. For the first time that night, he restrained the scream in his chest. "Cute. Are you right outside? You know, you're getting creepy in your old age."

"Justin, I'm at home trying to occupy myself without the use of electricity. Michael's with me. Say hello, Mikey."

"Hey, Justin."

"So who's at the door?" Brian asked.

"Hold on." He sighed, noting that Mark had gone back to his de-fluffing efforts. \* Fine. I'll play into your little joke.\* He thought, swinging the front door open, ready to confront his friends.

Justin's voice froze in his throat, the slightest of gasps squeezing from his throat. The owner to the voice stood before him with a smile of victory plastered to his handsome face. In the man's arms was Gus, unmoving. He had been in the bedroom! The window…it hadn't been opened!

"I suggest you don't wake him, sugah. We have things to do and a screaming kid is the last thing I want." Sullivan Kinney whispered in his deep Southern drawl.

"Give him to me!" Justin demanded in sheer terror, suddenly aware that he had a young protector behind him.

"What the hell is he doing here?" Sulli nodded towards Mark. "No matter, he'll come too. I think it's time to hang up on Brian. He's a waste of time and we have a plane to catch. I suggest some warm clothes for my new son, some toys. We're going to be gone for quite some time."

"Don't do this, Sulli." Justin pleaded, wondering if Brian could hear his cousin's voice.

"You have no room to demand or argue." Sullivan said, his voice disturbingly euphoric. "I'm going to teach everyone a lesson for crossing me and I don't care if Brian hears this or not. At least he gets to hear your voice one last time. Say good bye, boys."

"You have a grudge against me, fine. But leave them, they did nothing to you!"

He nodded at Mark. "My accomplice has a thing for this kid, so we're taking him with us. Lindsay is the reason I ended up on the bottom last round. Gus is my reward and her punishment. I hear you'll do a might pretty thing to keep these kids from pain and I plan on taking full advantage of that."

A chill turned Justin's spine to ice. He knew the things Sullivan could do to a person. The boy would have asked who Sulli's partner in crime was but he already knew who had a sweet spot for Mark. Russell Davis.

"We're not going anywhere with you." Justin scowled, hoping to stall long enough for the police to come that Michael was sure to have called at Brian's beckoning.

"Justin, it'll be okay." Brian coaxed the boy. "Hold on."

"Do you want to protect Gus, Angelface?"

"Yes." Justin whimpered, his voice betraying the level of fear pumping through his veins.

"Then grab a light and MOVE!" The man yelled, taking the cell phone and throwing it into the fire. "We've got three hours to drive to the airport and if we miss the flight there won't be another one out until tomorrow. Let's not imagine what I can do to you until six tomorrow evening." He growled and grabbed Mark's arm, watching Justin run up the stairs in fright.

Gus, wide eyed, squirmed in Sulli's arms. "Jussin!" He screamed.

"Shut up." Sullivan hissed, squeezing the boys tighter. "LET'S GO!"

"Coming!" Justin answered, trying, in panic, to pack things for the baby and things he could use as weapons when the time came, shoving everything into Gus' old diaper bag. There was nothing he could give to Mark but some blankets, which he threw in. Unrolling his drawing of Gus, Justin scribbled a last note down on the paper and let it roll itself back up as he tried desperately not to cry. Running downstairs, he stopped in front of Sullivan, the flashlight still in hand.

"Get in the car." He pointed, already angered at the struggling children in his arms.

Grabbing his own back pack along with the diaper bag, Justin obeyed, trying to soothe Mark with eye contact. \*We'll get out of this.\* He promised himself. \*There's no way Sullivan can get us on a plane without someone helping...I hope.\*

"Ma'am, we're doing everything we can." A weary man assured Lindsay as a swarm of uniforms searched the place. Brian wrapped his arms around her, forcing tears back into the deep recesses of his unconscious. He did a thorough job describing every inch of Sulli's body while providing word for word replays of the conversation with an air of shocked detachment. Nearly an hour had passed and there was no sign of familiarity at the airport or elsewhere. "If there's anything, I'll let you know."

"Thank you." Lindsay managed through trembling breaths.

Debbie sat beside the woman, offering a comfort between mothers. "Justin's smart and Mark is unrelenting, they'll call us as soon as they can."

"What if they can't?" Brian whispered. "You heard the things he said to Justin. I don't think he's about to let him out of this unscathed."

\*

Justin bundled Gus up as they sat in first class, hiding his watery eyes behind determination to get the baby to cooperate. Sulli had held Gus until they were safely in the air, his glances threatening the older boys to keep quiet unless they wanted to lose the boy. Mark was seated across the aisle, ordered to look straight ahead without question or protest. Russell sat beside the boy, a hand drifting to his former step-son's knee whenever the flight attendant would leave them to privacy.

"Florida." Justin muttered. "I've never been." He said, though Sullivan had yet to speak a word since they left the house. Calming him down seemed out of the question. \*I can't believe this is happening. How long is he planning on running this charade?\* Justin wondered, holding Gus on his lap. \*How am I supposed to get these kids out of this?\* Justin heard the sweetened voice of the flight attendant behind him and stroked Gus' hair. The closer they were to the airport the better his chances were.

"Don't even think about it, sugah." Sullivan warned, grabbing Justin's arm and digging his fingers in. He pulled Justin to his face and hid the boy's wince with a powerful kiss. The stewardess decided it was better not to bother the couple and kept moving. "I'm warning you. Don't try anything stupid or I'll take you all down with me."

Justin pushed himself against the window, pressing trembling fingers against his wet lips. "You won't get away with this."

"I already have. Now shut the fuck up." Sulli ordered, covering his erection with a pillow. It wasn't yet time to give the boy a true taste of what was in his near future.

\*

By the time Michael finished explaining the situation to Emmett over the phone, his friend was in hysterics.

"Oh my God! I'll get Ted, we'll come over."

"The police are working on it and it hasn't even been twenty-four hours. We'll find them soon, I just know it. I should go, though. We're trying to keep the lines free on every phone." Michael sighed. "The only thing we can do is be here for them right now."

"I understand. Oh, honey…"

"It's okay. I'll talk to you later, Em."

"Bye, honey."

"Bye." Michael hung up, resting the phone on his stomach. The prison break had been announced only hours before. No one thought it was a bad idea to put Sullivan Kinney and Russell Davis in the same cell block despite their attempts on the same people's lives.

The room had been a disaster when everyone arrived, with obvious signs of struggle both upstairs and down. Juice was spilled, the kitchen was a mess, all Gus' toys were spread around. Even Melanie's favorite armchair was torn to pieces. It looked like violence. It smelled like violence.

Michael had a terrible sinking feeling that this would not end well.

\*

"Jussin, I have to go." Gus whispered into the young man's ear, eyeing Sullivan as if he could sense the man's intentions towards his babysitter.

"Okay. Sulli, he has to go to the bathroom."

"No."

"What's he supposed to do, go right here? If you don't want to cause a scene, then letting a kid pee all over himself is not the direction you want to go. My only concerns are Gus and Mark. I'm not going to try and get away. He'll do it right here but there's going to be a crying fit afterward. Why don't you follow us, stand outside the bathrooms? Please, Sullivan?"

"Fine." Sulli got up and guided Justin with his hands on the boy's shoulders to the back of the plane. "Hurry up."

"Why? It's hours until we land."

"Don't get smart with me, just do as you're told. Remember who you're leaving behind." He said, nodding towards the scowling teenager behind him.

\*Relax, Justin, there'll be cops waiting for us once they read my note. They're smart, they'll track us, find us and grab us as soon as we land.\* He told himself, hurrying down the aisle and leaning against the door once he got in. \*Just bide the time.\*

Adjusting Gus' pants when the boy had finished, Justin carried him back to their seat. "We'll be okay." He whispered, kissing the boy's head. "Don't be scared, Gus, I'm here."

"I'm heyaw, too, Jussin." Gus patted the older man's cheek comfortingly. "Don't be scayawd."

\*

As the plane landed in New Orleans for a stop-over refueling, Justin's hopes deflated. He knew they would not go on to Florida. The men guided Mark and Justin, carrying Gus, through the terminal and out onto the street. They had a car waiting.

The note Justin had left on Gus' drawing had told them the times of flight Sullivan had said once the phone was thrown into the fire. Surely they could figure out where they were going if they narrowed it down to a three hour drive to an airport, with the only other flight being dormant until six tomorrow night. But now, no one would think to look here until it was too late.

"This is ridiculous. Revenge is so last year." Justin snorted and held Gus closer.

"Give him to me." Sullivan ordered viscously. "I won't have you make a scene here."

"Forget it. I don't care what you do to me but I'll be long dead before you get your hands on him!" Justin hissed, suddenly pulling Mark towards him and away from Russell and springing into action. "If either of you get any closer, I'll scream." Justin backed away from the two men. "Now, you can get away from this clean or we'll go the other route, it's really up to you but I suggest a quick decision."

"I think we need to teach him a few things." Sullivan mused, lunging for Justin's sweatshirt and pulling him close. He pushed the boy's face into his chest to muffle the screams, but not fast enough to ward away an airport security guard.

"Relax, Justin." Sullivan soothed, his grip tightening as Russell explained the situation, an arm around Mark's shoulder. It was simple. The boy was too afraid to fly so they were taking him home. He was in hysterics and needed some rest, and everyone was on their way.

\*

The house was old, secluded. It had once been beautiful, the Victorian style well-managed and cared for. Now it was falling apart, shingles falling from the peaked roof, royal purple paint peeling from the trim, the front porch creaking and gray beneath their feet as Sullivan gestured his prisoners into the expansive front hallway.

Justin knew he would bruise from the punches Russell had landed on his shoulders and upper arms, the man wailing on him as soon as they left the airport parking lot. Sullivan had the two boys on either side of him in the back seat, watching his diligent associate remind Justin who was in charge. The only thing he did to stop it was tell the man 'not in the face, I want that part flawless until I get to it.'

Mark had stared out the window in silent tears, listening to the music in his own head to block out the sounds of Justin's beating. A minor beating compared to the future. He was astonished to see that Russell was not only sober, but cleaned up significantly. If only his soul and intentions had been straightened out during his stint in prison…

Justin looked around the house, though it was still dark. "Sullivan…"

"I already know what you're going to say, sugah. Don't you worry your sweet face, I have no interest in fucking children. Russell's the wild card, and I've talked things over with him." The man whispered, his breath and scent bringing heat to Justin's face.

Somehow Justin didn't want to know what kind of 'talk' Sullivan would have had to have with Russell to make the man more interested in Justin than Mark or…even Gus.

Sulli spoke as if he had practiced the speech. He had had enough time in prison to do so. "Now boys. There is no electricity here. We have candles, you don't. We have water and food, you don't. If Justin doesn't piss us off, no harm will come to Mark and Gus. If Mark and Gus piss us off, harm will come to their babysitter. If you pull another stunt like at the airport, Angelface, you'll never see the boys again and I'll make sure you never want to open your eyes at the last vision I leave you with. No matter what you believe, there will never be a time when my face is not in sight. We're going to behave like a family when we go out and you will always have your things packed in case we have to move, unless you want to leave the stuff behind. That goes for you too, Mark. You're old enough to understand what's going on. You're on Justin's watch, so make sure you're good because if you misbehave you know what happens to him. Little Gus throws a fit without you, so he never leaves your sides and you never leave ours. Some things are easy to sacrifice, like all of your lives. We don't want any trouble." Sullivan leaned close and whispered hoarsely to Justin. "We will take you whenever we want, sugah, unless you want it bestowed on your boys. It's up to you whether or not you end up hurt physically and mentally or just the latter. We will never care about what happens to you, so there is really no hope to gain on any angle. No escape attempts. Ever. Or what we do to you won't be limited to open orifices. Mark stays clean as long as you keep us happy. Understood?"

"Yes." Justin muttered. He looked at Mark, pleading with the boy to behave as Justin handed his younger brother over. "Mark?"

"I understand." The boy said, but glared at Sullivan and Russell.

"You promise Russell won't hurt them when you aren't around?"

"That's our agreement. We can be fair." Sulli traced a hand under Justin's chin. "You just worry about your end of the bargain and let me worry about the rest, Angelface."

Mark looked at the rest of the house from what he could see. Dawn had yet to rise and the house was full of black shadows, creeping shapes from the naked trees outside. He swallowed hard and knew that they were going to hurt Justin while he was forced to stay downstairs in this pit of oblivion. He felt Gus clutch him tighter, burying his face in his older brother as he too got wind of where they would be kept.

"Now, this is your room for tonight." Sullivan said, gesturing with his lighter to a narrow door. "Mark, you will go in there and sit. You will make no noise, you will keep Gus quiet, and you will not move until we come to get you. Understand?"

Mark lowered his head. "Yes."

"And as an added incentive, there's a nice padlock to tuck you in." Russell added, tossing Gus' bag at Mark.

Sullivan nodded, gesturing toward the door. "Sweet dreams." He said, shoving the two inside the small room and slamming the lock closed behind them.

"Can't they at least have a light!" Justin begged as Gus began to wail on the other side of the door.

"Why? They have to get used to the dark sometime. In this world, everything eventually strays from the light." Sullivan caressed Justin's cheek. "Even…you."

\*

An early storm flashed through the house, delaying the sweet kiss of dawn. But Justin had no sense of time now. As he followed Sullivan up the stairs, Russell's hot breath prickling the back of his neck, Justin knew they were going to do their best to ruin him. The man leading knew this house well in the dark and Justin had a bad feeling he was walking in places Brian had once stood.

He didn't want to see the barn. Justin begged silently that what they did to him never reached that place where Brian had lost his virginity, had lost the life that loving could bring.

"Here we are, sugah. This is your room, where you and the boys will sleep when we're finished. There are bars on the window, the only thing newer than the padlocks on the doors in this house. So do us all a favor and don't plan an escape."

"What happened to Aunt May?" Justin asked, trying only to make conversation, not draw Sullivan's rage.

The man slapped Justin, knocking the boy to the floor. "That is the last time!"

"I'm sorry!" Justin rubbed his cheek, looking up at the man in a flash of lightening. "Please, I-"

Sullivan yanked Justin to his feet by the shirt collar. "You will speak only when asked a question. You will make no noise unless we order you to. You will cook and clean and cater to our every whim, but you will be silent. If I have to tear out your tongue, by god, you will be silent."

Justin winced, turning his head away from the man as Sullivan pulled the boy's shirt over his head. He knew what was going to happen, but that didn't mean he would ever be prepared. Something sinister told him that this house had no condoms. Or lube.

Russell knelt down, taking Justin's pants with him. The other man paid close attention to Justin's bottom half as Sullivan forced his tongue into Justin's mouth. A quiet sob shook the boy. He couldn't imagine Brian here, growing up, spending his summers. Justin refused to think of Brian at all here. He knew he couldn't taint the man's memory by bringing him into this, if even just in the boy's mind. Justin was alone as Sullivan trailed down his body and Russell found his way up. The men were devouring his body with their mouths and hands, soiling him as they licked him clean. Justin closed his eyes, tears streaming down his face, his hands balled into fists at his sides. Lightening burst against his eyelids and Justin's vision flashed back to the room. Russell's face was staring at him from inches away with a wide, evil grin. Justin yelped with surprise.

"No noise!" Russell ordered, taking pride in Justin breaking the rules. He slapped the boy, holding a tuft of blonde hair with one hand to hold him up as he hit him twice more.

Sullivan's tongue ran along Justin's hips, tasting every inch of him. A throaty moan escaped his thick lips as he licked the head of the boy's cock, teasing the opening. "This is what I was waiting for." He said, more to himself than the other two in the room.

Russell grabbed Justin's chin harshly and shoved his tongue in the boy's mouth, down his throat, as if he could eat him from the inside. The man's fingers wrapped tightly around Justin's neck, forcing him down to the bare, cracking wooden floor. He didn't take his hand away as his victim complied with their physical demands, choking the boy while kissing him. Justin's eyelids fluttered, his hands relaxing as Sullivan parted his legs with an eagerly exploring face.

Like a dream, Mark's voice floated to Justin's ears in a song as light as an angel's. He was singing to Gus to quiet the boy and to ignore the horrible creaking above their heads.

Sullivan tongued Justin's hole greedily, wetting the pulsing opening. He met Justin's bucking hips with faster licks, amazed at how vivacious his young captive was. It was no wonder Brian had found something special in the boy. Now it was Sulli's turn. He lifted himself on top of Justin, watching Russell as the man took Justin's hand and moved it up and down his erection, showing what he wanted done. The boy obeyed. Sullivan forced himself into Justin slowly, reveling in the amazingly unyielding hole. A groan fell from his lips and he stayed still for a moment with a lavish grin lighting his face.

"Russ." Sullivan mouthed, his voice breathy. "Come feel how tight he is."

"In a second." The man replied.

"No, now."

"You're feeling how tight he is now. Later." Russell answered, lowering his face to Justin's lips again.

"I know I am. Come feel." He grinned and Russell got the man's drift. He left Justin's face alone and licked a finger, sliding it along Sullivan's erection and poking at the boy's hole alongside. Both men watched Justin's face grimace in pain as Russell found out just how tight the boy was. Sullivan threw his head back in ecstasy as his partner moved his finger in and out of Justin's opening along Sulli's dick.

"You want this. You deserve nothing better than the best we have to give." Sullivan said. "We will break you, Angelface, and then my dear, we will kill you."

Russell moved away from Sulli's position and straddled Justin's neck, rising up on his knees. "Suck it."

Justin whimpered. "Please, don't-"

Russell inhaled, scenting the air as if a wild beast. "You hear that angel voice? I watched him at choir practice many nights, heard him sing…made him use that voice to cry my name!"

Justin relaxed his jaw, tears streaming down his face. "Alright. Please…just don't hurt him."

Russell brushed Justin's bangs back from his sweat drenched forehead. "I thought you'd say that." He crouched over the boy's open mouth and shoved himself inside. He felt Justin gag at the girth going down his throat and it only made him fuck the boy harder.

Sullivan reached a hand to the man and pulled him close, a deep soul kiss binding them together as they rode their victim.

Justin remembered what it felt like to have Russell inside of him, the smell of liquor stale on the man's heated breath. He was told not to struggle, that it only made the alcoholic more violent. But what was the trigger now that he was sober? What would make him use pain instead of pleasure to get off? Justin begged the heavens above to not let him find out.

At some time between the heavily pounding rain and Russell coming all over his face, Justin passed out. He could see blurry faces as they caused callused pain in the flashing darkness, but it was all a memory, a faded image of what had truly happened to his body while he was out. When he woke up, Justin withheld his tortured screams to save Gus' unassuming childhood.

But Mark knew as he held the baby downstairs, keeping him occupied. Even in the chilling quiet, he knew that they would only hurt his friend enough to dangle him over the edge of death, not completely throw him over. Justin's was an ass too sweet to discard so quickly.

A large hand slapped Justin's face for digging broken nails into tender naked flesh, his throat clogged with panic and a horrible punishment forcing itself inside once more. Brighter memories fought for their place in his consciousness to mask the agony; a park, swimming, any other place but this, a transportation to somewhere that would never let such a thing happen. But never Brian. The glowing God didn't deserve to be dragged back to this horrible place.

Fresh tears burned his tired blue eyes, his body yearning for relief. The torture had ended before he had time to wake up from his secret place and move with anything but pure instinct. Justin groaned, his bottom lip trembling as he pressed himself into the corner of his new, vastly empty room. Silence answered his weakened sobs as he pulled his knees toward his naked body, tremors wracking his trim frame. Fierce lightening illuminated the still figure in the doorway, his silhouette one of unbearable intimidation. Justin cowered, hoping that Gus had no idea of why Justin wasn't put in the room with them.

"Are we satisfied, Angelface?" Sullivan seethed angrily. "Did you do your duty for us?"

"Yes?" Justin muttered, his head falling with weariness onto his knees. He clutched desperately at his underwear and pulled them on. "Please…"

"Good. Now, I don't think you're well enough to go out into that storm, let alone run, so I trust there will not be any problems tonight." Russell left the room and returned seconds later with a whining Gus by the arm and Mark following defensively behind. "Sleep well." He said, releasing Gus and locking the door.

"Jussin?" Gus made his way slowly to the shivering form in the darkness.

Mark picked up the boy and held him at the doorway. "Justin's got to get some sleep, Gus." He explained.

Sniffling but able to hide his tears, Justin wrapped a blanket around his shoulders. "I'm alright, Gussy."

"Weyaw aw we?"

"A long way from home."

"Is it acwoss the stweet?"

"Very much so." Justin rose with shaky legs and wrapped Gus in a second blanket, taking him from Mark, the boy's hazel eyes scrutinizing his every weakened move.

"I want mommy."

"I know, Gussy, but listen, when mommy sees us again, she'll give you so many presents and be so happy to see you that your room will never be clean. Know why?"

"Why?"

"Because we're on vacation here, and it's a surprise for mommy. But we have to act like Sullivan and Russell are our daddy's for a little while so she'll love you even more when we go back across the street."

"But I like my weaw daddy."

"I know, I know. I do too."

"Can we go home if we don't want pwesents?"

"Not quite yet. Come on, Gus. It'll be fun. You can pretend to be a cowboy and the only person who can tell you to go to bed is me. Won't that be fun?"

"Still no time…"

"It's a special place where only I know what time it is and you have to listen to everything I say, okay?"

"'Kay."

"Good. Now tomorrow's going to be a big day so we're going to go to bed now."

"No beds…" Gus observed.

"We'll be all right on the floor." Justin promised, draping an arm over Gus' waist once the boy nestled his back to Justin's chest.

"What's dat?" Gus asked, pointing to a dark spot on the wood.

"That was there when we got here. The people who were here before us were messier than you are."

"Huh uh." Gus protested.

"Well, we can't be messy here, okay? This is a game and we have to be extra good to win. Goodnight Gus." Justin whispered as the boy's breathing grew regulated, using everything he had to hold back the tears that threatened to break free.

"Are you okay?" Mark knelt down and whispered, concern hidden in the darkness.

"No."

"We'll get out of this."

"Don't try anything, Mark. It's my responsibility to make sure this runs smoothly so leave it up to me."

"They can't get away with this!"

"Right now they can do whatever they want, Mark. They have the ball in their court, so all we can do is wait. I mean it. Please lay down."

Mark gritted his teeth, choosing to place himself behind Justin instead of on the other side of Gus, holding the shaking form until they both fell into a restless sleep.

\*

"Get up." Russell ordered, yanking Justin to his feet. "We have plans. You have thirty seconds to be downstairs." He said and slammed the door.

"Come on Gus." Justin said urgently, pulling on the same pair of jeans that had been stripped from his body the night before, slipping into them urgently and trying to ignore the searing pain. The boys didn't need to see what shape his body had been left in. "Gus, get up. Mark, up!"

"I don't feyaw good." Gus complained, coughing for emphasis. "I wanna go home."

"I do too, but if we go home we won't get the prize!" Justin pulled on his shirt before the boy could open his eyes and see the massive bruises lining his mentor's body. Bending slowly, Justin hoisted the boy against one shoulder and grabbed the two bags. Mark scowled and took the bags and headed downstairs before Justin, who stomped down with shooting pain angrily lancing through his body.

"Now remember, be good." Sullivan said, grabbing Justin's chin and examining his face. "You look pretty as a picture, sugah." He said sarcastically. Justin hated to admit it, but Sullivan Kinney was the nicer of their two captors. The man continued. "We'll get you some makeup and some new clothes."

Russell scoffed and shook his head. He could easily hide the marks Justin had made on his flesh from antagonized fingernails, but the black eye Sullivan had given him for marking Justin's face was swelling and overly obvious on his fair Southern skin. The man closed the door behind them and swore that if given the chance, he would make sure Justin paid for that shiner.

\*

"What do you mean 'nothing'?" Melanie asked, almost shrilly, into the phone. "It's been two weeks and all you can give us is 'nothing'? That is unacceptable!"

Brian glared at her from the top of the stairs through reddened eyes. Not much sleep had been passed around since the incident. Glancing towards the dark hallway behind him, Brian wondered if Lindsay would ever come out of Gus' room. If she thought it was bad losing one son, she had no idea what two felt like, let alone the young lover he had chosen to bring into his life.

Michael stared out the front door, as if waiting for the missing boys to come running home. The ringing pulled him back to reality.

"Hello?"

"Michael? It's Ben. How is everything?"

"The same. There were no reports of anyone fitting their descriptions at any bus stations and no plane tickets were bought with Sullivan or Russell's names. They must have taken a car. They could have taken any road."

"Oh, God."

"It's hopeless." He whispered to his lover. "The cops don't think we'll ever find them alive."

"We will. It's just going to take some time. I mean, Justin doesn't give up…Mark is hell on two legs..."

"I know, but sometimes it's hard to have a will when someone's forcing you to let it go."

\*

Justin scrubbed his face in the sink, pausing to look at the stranger staring back at him. His eyes were older, his lips didn't smile. Gus didn't act like he knew what went on during the many hours he'd accumulated in the dark room, but he didn't pretend to believe that beneath the make-up his babysitter was the same person either. Mark was more of a help than Justin ever imagined he could be, not only tending to his wounds but distracting Gus when the inevitable and unavoidable happened.

From what Sullivan told him, it had been a month since they left Pittsburgh. It didn't feel like less than a year. Four weeks of hell and all he had to show for it were scars on the inside and out and the knowledge that his young wards were still unscathed. Justin knew he would see his home again someday and the kids would be with him, but he hated not knowing when someday would be.

The baby got continually crankier, almost to the point that Justin couldn't control him. He missed his family, toys, and comfortable bed. Staying in the same house without television or lights had taken its toll on his young beliefs. The boy couldn't comprehend the meaning of the game they were playing anymore and was fed up looking for one. But Gus listened to Mark when his older brother wanted to spend time with him, a Godsend if Justin had ever known one.

Time never stopped for their tears. The days crawled by, smashing together into one horror after another. The boys knew the nighttime, the mornings, but lost count after so many hours passed by without rewarding their hopes. Mark had gotten taller, but his body was too thin from the oft nights of a lost appetite. Gus had stopped talking, looking to the floor in melancholy if his direct attention wasn't ordered. Nightmares loomed in the times Justin was actually able to close his eyes without feeling like he would rise in the morning to find everything gone or if he would wake at all.

\*

Lindsay rubbed her eyes with one hand, the swelling from countless tears apparent to the touch. A knock on the door had given her reason to get up as Melanie peeked her head inside. Lindsay blinked a few times, aware that as she lay on her stomach, her right arm had gotten wedged between the bed and the wall and was tingling numbly.

"Hey, Lindz." Melanie sat down gently on the bed, her smile hiding the concern for her partner.

Lindsay sighed, her fingers touching something smooth instead of carpet as she forced blood into the appendage.

"Michael called. He says that Debbie's having a birthday party for Vic tonight. It might be fun."

"No." Lindsay said evenly, taking hold of the object and sliding it onto the bed with confusion.

"It might be fun." Mel stopped, staring at the rolled paper. "What's that?"

Lindsay ran her hand over the outside, knowing it had to be one of Gus' drawings. She didn't dare open it, afraid of more tears finding their way to the surface. It was hard enough to wake up in the mornings, let alone go downstairs. "I thought we had all of these hanging up."

Melanie debated her response. "Maybe it's from…that night."

"I know." Lindsay said quietly, slowly unrolling it as if it were a delicate antique threatening to fall apart at any second. She gasped, staring at the middle of the page; her son's face immortalized in Justin's expert movements. "Oh, Mel."

"Lindsay…" Mel sat nearer, pulling the blonde into a tight hug. She took the drawings, glad that Lindsay hadn't seen her son's hiding behind Justin's. Unrolling it completely, Mel admired the artwork. She missed the boys terribly, but was able to be strong for Lindsay. Brian had completely fallen apart, his sons and his lover suddenly whisked away without a clue. He constantly stayed at their house, sleeping on the couch with a pillow clutched to his chest. It devastated everyone, but no one felt it as hard as Brian and Lindsay. "Oh fuck!" She screamed, staring at the small, scribbled writing scrawled at the bottom of the page.

"What?"

"Look!" Mel gasped, reading it aloud. " 'I'm not sure how things will end, but know that I will take care of the boys for as long as I am capable. Sullivan said we had three hours to drive to the airport and I think he meant three hours to drive to another airport, not three to check-in and be settled in Pittsburgh. He also said that if we missed the flight, there wouldn't be another until six tomorrow night. I hope this helps. Love always, Justin.' " Mel held back a sob. "I don't believe this!"

"Another airport. That's why no one's seen them!" Lindsay jumped up, running downstairs and dialing the agents on the case. Brian raised his head curiously from the sofa, staring as Lindsay explained excitedly what they'd found. Melanie raced after her, handing the drawing to Brian.

"After all this time…" Brian sighed, swaying where he sat, fighting the urge to pass out. All this time they'd been looking in the wrong place.

\*

Michael nodded enthusiastically as Brian told him the news over the phone. The detectives had tracked them to Florida, and even had pictures from the terminals to prove where they'd departed. There was even video footage from a security camera of Justin's escape attempt in their stopover in New Orleans.

"But from the stopover point on is a mystery." Brian explained, unable to hide the excitement in his own voice. "They don't know if they boarded the plane or stayed there. Sullivan would have to be an idiot for returning to his home town."

"We'd have to be idiots for not looking there." Lindsay said.

"That's it. I'm going down there." Brian stood.

"They would have moved on already, Bri…" Michael said tensely, his body jittery with excitement. "Maybe he has someone down there that helped hide them…"

"I'm going. Sullivan likes to play games and If they have moved on, then maybe he left a clue where the cops wouldn't look. Fucking weeks of nothing and now this!"

"It must have fallen under the bed when he was leaving." She stood next to him, her skin finally clean willingly instead of Melanie forcing her out of bed. "We always knew he was smart."

"He was protecting the kids." Brian sighed, unsure whether to feel elated or upset. They were so close, but Louisiana was huge and there was a chance that this note was a dead end. If they'd found it at the beginning… he didn't want to think about a different life, one where Justin and his sons were safe. It was far too painful.

\*

Justin sat down cautiously, his aching body protesting with fits of unbearable pain. The barn was empty save discarded, dry mounds of hay. But the view was nice. It was often the only thing that calmed him on days like this. The sunsets in Louisiana were beautiful. Justin sat there, hugging his knees, and wept. There was a lot of pain in this lofty room, more his own than Brian's. Blood stained the floor and hay around his feet, both new and old spots of nightly assaults. They had moved to use the barn after Gus threw up from fright after being locked in the dark, dank room for so much time.

At the beginning of their torture trip, Justin had thought they would move around a lot, but whenever they went outside they took their bags and returned with them at night. It was redundant, but Sullivan and Russell were always ready to run.

But Justin was alone now. It was early, just after the sun fell in orange fire over the horizon. Mark was in the bedroom with Gus, the boys exhausted after swimming all day long in the nearby lake. Sullivan had been the one to make dinner that night after seeing how Justin was barely able to stand at the stove. He'd told the boy to get some air. Russell had taken to raping the boy, even when Sullivan wasn't around, and the violence that streamed from the man proved he needed no alcohol to bring his beast to rage.

Before that evening, Sullivan had proven that the rules he originally put down were set in stone: there was never a time when he was not in Justin's sight. They actually pulled off appearing as a family when Justin was well enough to go outside. Mark and Gus never left his watch and the three of them were always near at least one of their tormentors. If Gus had to go to the bathroom, Justin would take him and Mark stayed. If Mark had to, he would go alone and the others would stay. If there was any sign of trouble, Sullivan and Russell vowed they would take who they had and disappear. If Justin decided to get Gus out of there, which Mark suggested constantly, there would be no hope for the thirteen year old to escape the lifestyle Justin had fallen to.

The kid had no idea what the consequences would be for him if he never returned from the bathroom, no matter what he had experienced before. Mark only knew that he wanted Justin to stop crying at night.

Mark stared at the night ceiling, sprawled on his back. He could here Gus' breathing regulate as the boy fell asleep.

"Do you think they're still looking for us?" He asked the empty air. "I know what Justin would say: they have to be. Even if they are looking, they'll never find us."

"Yes they will. They'll come!" Gus argued, unable to pretend to sleep anymore.

"You believe what you want. All I believe is what I see and all I see is you and me and Justin, withering away. That asshole Russell wants it that way. If Justin dies, then what?"

Gus sniveled. "He won't die, Mawk."

"Yes, Gus, he will. He is. I'm not dumb and neither are you, anymore. We have to get out of here."

"We can't, Mawk!"

"Sulli's smart, Gus, but so are we. Notice how we never move too far away from the original house? Normally people would take off somewhere far away and that's how they get caught! No one is anticipating this. Justin should have taken you and gotten out while he could still walk unaided."

"We won't leave you, Mawk. You'll end up like Jussin."

Mark crawled across the carpet and put his arm around his baby brother. "I know what they do to him, and I don't care if that happens to me. I want Justin to be okay."

Justin's words floated back to the boy during one of the many times Mark had brought up his escape plan. 'I'm not letting them take you. I swore to whoever found my note that I would die taking care of you two and I am prepared to do just that. If I give up, my efforts would have been for nothing. I'm not a quitter, Mark. Don't do anything stupid, okay?'

Mark had countered with: 'Sullivan and Russell are going to use any excuse they need to hurt you, to break you, and sooner or later they're going to figure out that the thing that would hurt you the most is something happening to Gus and me. How long is it going to take?'

Justin had just cried at that, curling into a little ball not even Gus' frightened tears could bring him out of.

\*

Brian tramped through the wild grass, swatting at the stalks that met his head and kept on growing. He hated this place, but only because Sullivan had once lived here. Aunt May had died years ago and his cousin had really let the old Victorian house go. It was obvious that no one lived here, not for years.

He couldn't say that he was surprised. Disappointed, yes, but not surprised. Why did he think coming here would lead him to his boys?

The sun had just set, the early night one of light blue and buzzing insects. He took a deep breath and started to climb the stairs to the barn, warning bells going off through his head. There were far too many bad memories living in this place, but after all that had happened Brian didn't give a damn what bothered him anymore. It had been too long since Justin and the kids had been taken, and though no one admitted it, they all knew the boys were long gone.

Justin heard the creaking on the steps and froze his tears. He was wondering when Sullivan would come to take his piece for making dinner that night. The boy turned around and saw no one. Whoever was on the stairs was taking their time.

The blonde got to his feet, shaking and having to brace himself against a wooden beam. He wondered what it would take to just let go, to throw himself out the massive opening and fall until nothing remained. Suicide had never been an option with the boys under his care, not once had he thought about abandoning them.

Brian came into the room, head down, watching his feet. He stood in a streak of blood long ago soaked into the wood. Justin shook his head, blinking a few times. It had been so long, taken so much effort, to not imagine his lover in this heretical place…now he couldn't even control his daydreams.

"I waited for you." Justin told the man, softly, seriously. "I never thought you would come for me."

Brian stopped and stared. Just stared. Then he lost his footing and the world swam away from him. He landed on the floor in a dead faint.

Justin cocked his head to one side, leaving his post and walking slowly to the man. Dreams didn't faint, did they? He knelt down, wincing, and put a hand on the man's cheek.

The flesh was real! Warm…Brian…

"Bri?" Justin's voice was skeptical at best. "Brian?" He lightly slapped the man's face.

"Hmm?"

"Brian?"

Brian squinted, a hand raising to tentatively touch the boy's ragged and bruised face. It couldn't be! "Justin? Baby?"

The boy backed away from Brian's touch. "Is it really you?" Justin whimpered, tears falling onto Brian's dry face. "It can't…you can't…so long…"

Brian forced himself to sit up, his eyes never leaving Justin's as if the very fabric of time and space would evaporate if he let the boy out of his sight again. "Justin…I…we…" Brian swallowed, trying to form words in his shock. "Are you-?" He stopped. It was painfully obvious that Justin wasn't alright.

Justin turned his face away. He knew an illusion when he saw it, and this was nothing but wishful thinking. The boy forced himself to rise, grunting in pain.

"Where are you going? The boys…"

"I'm dying…I can't see you now." Justin said sadly. "Later I can see you. When you die too." He sniffed back tears.

"You can see me now. I'm here, Justin." Brian stood too.

"I never wanted to bring you to this place, Brian. I tried not to think of you. I just can't help myself sometimes. Late at night when they've left me alone Mark lays behind me and I listen to his breathing and think that it's you…I'm sorry I desecrated your memory."

"Baby, look at me." Brian took the boy's frail shoulders, holding himself back from shaking Justin. The haunted blue eyes stared right through him, confused, helpless. "Justin, look at me. Look at Brian. I'm going to get you out of here."

Justin blinked and nodded. "Sure." He took a deep breath and sighed. "Sure. How many times have you offered me that and then just disappear when Sulli and Russell come to take me again?"

"This time it's real, Justin." Brian took out his cell phone and dialed Lindsay. "I'm calling the girls, you want to hear Lindsay?"

Justin raised an eyebrow. "Lindsay isn't here."

"On the phone. She's on the phone."

"Phone?"

"Look, cell phone. My cell. Do dreams have phones?"

Lindsay picked up, having fallen asleep waiting for Brian to call once his plane landed. She looked around her living room at all the expectant faces. "Brian?"

"Lindsay?"

"How's New Orleans?"

"Justin, talk to Lindsay." Brian offered the boy his phone.

Justin took it reluctantly, the numbness that surrounded him during his dreams slowly fading to reality. "Lindsay?"

"Justin?" She gasped. "Justin, honey? Is that you?" The woman was standing without realizing it. She wasn't alone.

"Lindsay?"

Brian nodded. "It's Lindsay, back home in Pittsburgh."

"Pitts…Lindsay!" Justin screamed, his eyes losing their cloudiness. He turned to stare at his lover, shaking his head. Brian nearly fell to the floor once more at the sight of his Sunshine before him. The boy had not broken. His eyes were bright, alive, as if he had never been away.

"Justin! Oh, my God! JUSTIN! You're safe!"

Brian coaxed the phone away from the boy. "Lindz, we have to get the kids. It's okay. I'll call you when this is all over."

Lindsay collapsed back onto the sofa. She nodded, and knew Brian would be able to tell she agreed. He hung up and studied Justin's face in the growing moonlight.

"You protected them, didn't you." It was a statement.

"I had to."

"I love you, Justin." Brian said the words to keep from crying.

Justin did all the crying for him. He fell against Brian as if his body were made of lead. The familiar warmth, the smell of the man…his senses were on overload. He hugged Brian and let the man hold him and they both wept for what seemed like an eternity. The boy never thought he would be able to let anyone touch him ever again, but the sight of Brian, of safety, sent Justin into the world of his dreams. Happiness washed over him and he knew everything would be alright.

\*

Mark shifted his weight beside Gus as he heard the front door open and close. Relief washed over him, even though he knew Justin would never leave them. The boy made his way upstairs in an airy trot the like Mark hadn't heard since their last night in Pittsburgh. He listened as the bolt was unlocked and the door opened.

"Are you awake?" Justin asked in a whisper.

"Yes."

"Yeah." Gus piped up.

"Good. Get your stuff, it's time to go."

"They want to move? Now?"

"No. We're going home." Justin said excitedly.

"How did you get the lock off?" Mark asked, voice as low as Justin's. They all knew Sullivan and Russell were in the kitchen finishing off dinner.

"I didn't. Brian did."

"Shit! Did you hear that, Gus?" Mark asked, standing up. "BRIAN!"

"DADDY!" Gus chimed.

"Shh!" Justin hushed them both as heavy footsteps were heard on the stairs. "Shit." Justin winced. He closed the door and replaced the lock, whispering to his boys. "Mark had a nightmare, Gus thought it was really Brian when Mark yelled."

Brian slipped into the hallway shadows, hoping that the corner would hide him well enough.

"What the fuck is all the racket!" Russell demanded, slapping Justin's face.

"Enough!" Sulli threw the man against the wall.

Justin kept his eyes closed for fear of the men reading his joy. "I think Mark had a nightmare. I knocked on the door but can't get in…Gus must have heard him shout for Brian and thought…" The boy sniffled.

"Get up, Angelface." Sullivan offered the boy his hand. Justin took it and let the man mold their bodies together. Sulli was angry, Justin could tell by the rigidity of his body. The question was, who his anger was directed at. The boy found out rather quickly as Sullivan spun him to the door and attacked Russell. His fists pounded the other man's face.

"If you ever damage Angel's face again I will pull your stomach out your throat and shove it up your ass!"

Justin looked down the hall in alarm, wondering where Brian had gotten off to. While Sullivan was beating Russell they could have gotten the boys out, but Justin couldn't pick the lock. He needed Brian and the man was gone.

"Sullivan. Sulli." Justin leaned down and gently touched the man's shoulder. "I don't want to bury anyone tonight." He said softly. The older man looked down at his partner and frowned.

"He'll live long enough to regret damaging your face."

"I'll heal." Justin said. He knew by now that Sullivan was in love with the way his captive's face and body looked.

"I know you will, sugah." Sullivan lightly caressed Justin's wounded cheek. He leaned in and kissed the boy deeply on the mouth.

Brian cringed, fingers digging into the wall. He couldn't stand Sullivan advancing on his young lover, but there was nothing he could do. The police were on their way. Russell was already up and limping away and Justin had his hands full. Brian silently begged the boy to hang on for a little longer and to lead his cousin away from Brian's sons.

Justin seemed to read his lover's mind, pushing his body against Sullivan's. He broke the kiss and looked up into the man's deep hazel eyes.

"What are you doing, Angelface?"

"Thinking that maybe I did choose the wrong Kinney. And maybe I'm tired of sharing you with Russell." Justin lowered his face as if embarrassed to admit such a thing. He gazed down the hall and hoped Sullivan would take him to the main bedroom, away from the kids.

Justin knew that as long as Mark and Gus were okay, nothing else mattered. Even his own survival.

\*Mark swallowed, listening to the scene outside. He had slept beside Justin, cleaned the older boy's wounds for long enough to know that his babysitter was about to commit a substantial sacrifice to get them free.

He had no intention of letting Justin die so close to being released. "Help! Help! JUSTIN! OH MY GOD!" Mark shrieked.

Gus began to wail, clinging to his big brother. He didn't know what was happening, but now seemed like a good enough time to cry.

Justin pulled away from Sullivan. "Mark! Baby, what's wrong! Sulli, open the door, please!"

"I don't have the key. Stay here." Sullivan tramped down the stairs yelling for Russell.

Brian slipped toward Justin, picking the lock again and releasing the boys. "Come on. Hurry."

"Not so fucking fast!" Russell seethed through his teeth.

"Go, Justin. Get out of here." Brian said, holding his arms out and standing between his boys and Russell.

"Bri-"

"Go!"

"SULLIVAN!" Russell bellowed. "Your cousin's here!"

"GO, JUSTIN!" Brian shouted. The boy ran for the stairs but was blocked by Sullivan coming up.

"He's coming!" Justin cried out.

"Fuck!" Brian moved closer to his boys, putting them to a corner and covering them with all he could spare of his body.

"Why, cousin, it took you long enough. We had plenty of time to play with your children."

"You never touched them, Sulli." Justin said quietly.

"I'm glad you could join us, Brian, Russell was wondering how much tighter than Justin and Mark you were." Sullivan drawled. "Justin, you and I have something we need to work out."

"I hope you enjoyed touching him, Sulli, because you will never get near him again." Brian growled.

"When we rush you, Brian, you won't be able to take us both. Justin's too weak, Mark's too small. I'm going to grab Justin, Russell's going to get Mark, and you won't be able to protect both of them. Make a choice…NOW!" Sullivan shouted and he and Russell shot forward.

Brian pressed himself back against his boys but found both men taking hold of him instead of trying for Justin and Mark. He struggled, too late to get free of their doubled-strength. He found himself flung into the padlocked bedroom and slammed behind the door. Brian tried for the doorknob but knew he was trapped.

Justin's eyes went wide and he put Mark and Gus behind him. "Please, Sulli…"

"YOU. BEG. NOW???" Sullivan barked at Justin, forcing the boy to jump back.

"We're going to make you pay." Russell smiled evilly. "Welcome to your last night on earth."

\*

Justin bellowed, the pain intense with even a touch, the horror too real. He struggled to get free, screaming.

"You don't know what torture is!" Sullivan hissed, dragging the young man through the hallway.

"JUSTIN!" Brian yelped, his heart in his stomach. He was hurt, or being hurt. "JUSTIN!"

"Fuck!" Russell muttered "Scream all you want, he can't help you."

"Leave him alone!" Mark screamed, his voice breaking with emotion and the emergence of puberty.

"You're next, boy! You're both next!" Russell pointed an angrily quivering finger at the children as Sullivan tore Justin's pants down his hips.

"Come on, Gussy." Mark said, pulling the boy along. "We have to get out of here." He winced as Justin screamed, Sullivan and Russell beating and pounding their fists into his already tender body. It was up to him to get Gus out of there now, no matter how much he wanted to help his father and Justin.

"Daddy!" Gus wailed.

"Justin!" Brian hollered, pounding on the door.

The boy struggled, thrashing beneath the men, shaking his head. Sullivan grabbed a handful of Justin's hair and slammed the boy's head into the wooden floor. Justin's eyes fluttered, stars dancing along his vision. Dimly he heard the stairs creaking as Mark carried his little brother down.

Brian backed against the far wall, running to the door and throwing himself into it. The old wood splintered but didn't break.

"Sounds like someone's getting restless." Russell grinned. "Time to add to the party."

"You grab him and I'll get the door." Sullivan suggested, taking Justin's head one last time and smashing it into the floor to subdue him while they took Brian.

Brian ran into the door again, feeling it nearly give under his pressure. Justin had stopped screaming and ice filled the pit of his stomach. He was so damn close! \*One more time. I'll get it. One more time!\* Brian backed up and ran, throwing himself toward the door when it suddenly burst open and he was met by Russell and Sullivan's waiting arms.

"FUCK!" Brian shouted, spotting Justin's prone body in the hallway before being thrown to the floor. His cousin held him by the arms, pulling Brian's shoulders painfully behind his back.

"You could have forgotten this while you were ahead, cousin. I would have left you alone."

"Liar! You would have destroyed Justin and come back to throw it in my face!"

"You're right, I suppose." Sullivan whispered low in Brian's ear. He grinned as Russell brought Brian's jeans down around his ankles. "But now it doesn't matter. We want to include you, you should feel honored. You can feel a slight portion of what Justin had to suffer every night and many days in our care."

"A very slight portion." Russell echoed. "What I did to your boy was a masterpiece, never duplicated."

Brian scowled. "I'd say there's a much more obvious reason to call it 'slight'." He raised an eyebrow in Russell's direction.

"Are you going to let him get away with that?" Sullivan chuckled.

"Justin and Mark didn't think it was so 'slight'." Russell licked his lips. "And they both have plenty of nights for comparison."

"Son of a bitch." Brian hissed.

Justin moaned from the hallway, shifting on the floor.

"Hurry up and pin him." Sullivan prompted. "I've got another appointment."

Brian knew struggling was futile, but realizing that Sullivan was going to go back after Justin was enough to give him a cause for pointlessness. He bucked against Russell as the man wormed out of his clothes. It threw Russell off, but Sullivan held tight.

"Ah ah ah, cousin. You need to get laid in the worst way."

"This is definitely the worst way." Brian growled.

Russell grinned. "Say that again when I'm finished, I dare you."

"Don't flatter yourself." Brian said in a quiet, angry snarl. It was all he could do to hold down the fear trembling through his veins. He didn't want to experience what his Sunshine had to put up with to save his kids. If it would take the pain away from Justin, he would suffer it a thousand times over. But nothing would take that away from those sweet, horrified eyes.

Russell sunk himself into Brian's reluctant opening, his hands on the man's shoulders for leverage. Brian winced, taking a deep breath in. He squeezed his eyes shut, his cousin still hovering over him with a satisfied smile on his face.

"You were…right." Russell pumped himself into Brian. "Tight…as…hell!"

"Good." Sullivan released Brian's arms. "Now behave, cousin, I have an Angel to tend to."

"NO!" Brian protested, forgetting his pain and the man forcing himself further inside.

"I'm afraid so, Brian. This is my revenge."

\*

Justin coughed, fighting back nausea. His delicate body couldn't take much more torment. All he remembered was Sullivan and Russell on top of him, hurting him, but that happened in a continuous string day and night and the boy couldn't pinpoint exactly why he was lying in the hallway. His arms and legs didn't want to work, no matter how hard his mind screamed orders to go make sure the boys were alright.

Mark stood above him and Justin blinked. He was whispering something about hanging on, about Gus outside. The young boy held a knife from the kitchen, his eyes averted from what was happening to his father in the next room just beyond the half-open door.

Sullivan stood behind the boy, coming close without a sound. Something in his stomach fell when he saw Justin's still body. It was a feeling he hadn't had since…Jeff Reeves, the boy who took Brian's virginity over Sullivan's love. It surprised the man to realize he didn't want Justin hurt, he just wanted -Justin-. Enough! He grabbed Mark's wrist and covered his mouth in one liquid movement. "I am not the person you imagine on the other end of that knife am I, sugah?"

Mark dutifully shook his head, all the while thinking shit, shit, shit! Justin moaned, squinting upwards, his body still paralyzed with shock and weakness.

"I didn't think so." Sullivan leaned down and whispered in the boy's ear. "I think our time together has ended, sugah. Justin needs a nice vacation, don't you think? A little fun and sun, a little recovery time. I'm looking forward to seeing you again when you're a little older, hon, alright?"

Mark nodded, tears streaming down his face.

"Okay. Take care of Justin and Brian for me." He released the boy and bent down over Justin. "Angelface, can you hear me?"

Justin swallowed and managed the barest of nods.

"I'll see you later, baby. Get better for me and we'll see which Kinney's the right one for you."

"Please…" Justin grimaced.

"Yes, sugah?"

"Fuck off." Justin spat blood in the man's face.

Sullivan laughed. "Another day."

Mark scowled at the man and backed him to the stairs. Gus was well hidden, out of the man's sight. As far as the thirteen year old was concerned, if Sullivan wanted to run from the cops speeding toward the house with sirens blaring then that was up to him. "You'd better run fast!"

"You're just like your father. I'll have to correct that one of these days." Sullivan grinned and headed down the stairs at a graceful yet full-out bolt.

Mark gave one last look at Justin and headed into the bedroom. He stood behind Russell, fingers clutching the knife's hilt so tight his knuckles were white.

Brian saw his son and terror widened his eyes. There was no way he was going to let Mark start a body count. He shook his head, staring at the boy, Russell's face buried in the crook of Brian's neck.

Mark closed his eyes, tears sliding down his cheeks. He stood still, the blade trembling at his side. His lips trembled and the last thing he wanted to do was cry in front of his father.

"Police! Get the fuck off of him!" A voice said from the doorway, gun trained on Russell's back. The man froze inside of Brian and from beneath, Brian could feel the man go soft. Somewhere in the back of his mind Brian wondered how often the New Orleans Police Department got to break up this kind of action.

"Put your hands up you filthy son of a bitch!" The man said with authority. Brian had to give him credit, his voice never wavered and neither did his gun. The man was handsome, save for a few scars trailing down his arms and one cheek. His green eyes burned with a passion for his job. The officer stepped into the room with backup following, another man gently guiding Mark out of the room.

"You'd better listen to him." Brian said snidely, covering his embarrassment with sarcasm. This was going to be one of those days where he just shouldn't have gotten out of bed. Except this time, Justin and his sons were coming home and he could leave New Orleans behind him once and for all.

Russell snarled, pulling out but not getting up. "I ain't done yet. You're tighter than your son is…course, I stretched him out good and proper when he was still a baby."

"You'll pay for this. All of this. I promise you that." Brian said through gritted teeth.

"Get up or get shot!" The first officer shouted.

"Shoot him." Brian said calmly, meeting the officer's gaze. Something about the man told Brian he would be sympathetic. "He's a rapist and child molester. Give him a real hole to play with."

"Carlson, Finch, you two mind?" He said to the remaining policemen.

"Not at all, Cap'n." One said and the two left the room without looking back. Brian suddenly remembered how this quiet place mere miles outside of New Orleans managed to keep its dirty little secrets sealed tight.

"You can't do-" Russell groaned, slowly turning in shock as the man put two neat holes in his naked flesh.

The exposed man was flung off of Brian, landing sprawled and panting for breath. Blood spurted from his open mouth as the police captain helped Brian to his feet.

"Are you alright?"

"I'm not worried about me."

"Well maybe I am, Brian."

Brian turned to the man. "I -do- know you, don't I?"

"Once upon a time."

Brian studied the man, falling into the wounded green orbs of his eyes, tracing the scars with his memories. "No…" He breathed. "It can't…you can't!"

The man cupped Brian's chin with a warm smile. "Sullivan came back for me, dug me out of the grave he made you dig."

"I…saw you die!" Brian collapsed to his knees. "I buried you! They dragged the rivers for your body!"

Jeff Reeves sank to Brian's level. "I told you, he came back for me and when he did I was alive. He pulled me up and dressed my wounds, then drove me into town and told me to disappear. That look in his eyes…I didn't argue."

"I thought you were dead."

"I thought you were dead, too." Jeff sighed. "That's what he told me. I believed him because I knew he could do it if he wanted to. He wanted to."

Brian shook his head through the tears. "I have to go."

"Brian…stay with me. At least for a little while. Sullivan is still on the loose."

"All the more reason to take my boys and get the hell out of here."

"In love again." Jeff said, sounding a little more than disappointed. "Flitting child."

"Trust me, it doesn't happen often." Brian got up. Thinking about Justin made saying goodbye easier. There would be more nightmares than ever now, but these just may hold a happy ending. Jeff was alive, it was more than Brian could ever have wished in his wildest dreams. But his love was different now. He was not a child anymore. He had children, and he had Justin. Jeff had faded as pain in a bad memory.

"I see. It was…good to see you again." Jeff said, still on the floor staring not at his former lover but at the man he had just killed for the boy he had once known.

"Catch him. Catch him and make him pay for this." Brian gazed steadily at Jeff, his body and mind unable to process anything more. He was going to do what he did best: run away and hope things worked out without him. "For all of this."

"I will, Brian." Jeff sighed. "I promise. For you, anything."

\*

Justin spent most of the next month drifting in and out of consciousness hooked up to an IV. The boys got out of the hospital sooner, suffering from malnutrition and shock. By the time Justin was released, Gus had seemed to forget everything. He was more than happy to return to his mothers and the wide array of toys brought before him, just like his babysitter had promised.

Mark hadn't spoken to anyone since the rescue, often laying awake at night staring up at the ceiling. He rarely ate unless it was at Justin's side when his friend was awake.

Brian came into his bedroom the night of Justin's release, ready to pick the boy up and finally bring him home. "Mark?"

The boy looked over but continued to frown.

"I'm going to pick up Justin, do you want to come?"

Mark seemed to think about this for a second and then shook his head.

"No? Okay…" Brian leaned against the doorframe. "You know…Justin would have never made it if he didn't have your help."

Mark sighed. "Then you don't know him very well."

"I know him, and I know that he loves you. I know that he was nearly broken, I could see it in his eyes when I went to the barn."

"I wanted to kill him." Mark said quietly, voice almost a whisper of his former childhood.

Brian stepped into the room and sat down on the end of his son's bed. These close and personal bonding experiences were something he had never imagined doing, and yet, with Mark he was eager to heal the hurt.

"For what he did to you and Justin, I wanted to slit his goddamn throat."

"He hurt you, too."

"I don't care about that!" Mark sat up and glared into his father's eyes. "I don't care about me! They nearly killed Justin because he was protecting us. Once was brave, twice was almost martyrdom. If he had died…fuck! I would have never forgiven him!"

"He did it because he wanted to, not because he felt he had to."

"That's what makes it so much worse! He wants to protect me, why?"

"Because you're you. Because he's him. That's just the way things work with Justin. If he cares about you he won't give up no matter what happens." Brian sighed. "If he had given up on me when I told him to I would never have fallen in love with him or found what happiness I had been missing."

"Why didn't you let me kill Russell?"

"Because that's something no one should ever have to do."

"I wanted to!"

"I know, but it would have stayed with you forever."

Mark scoffed. "Unlike everything else he's done to me."

Brian bit his bottom lip. How was Michael so good at talking to kids? How did Justin deal with Mark all this time? The boy was complicated, secretive, and hardened with all the world's hardships. The boy was…Brian.

"I wish there was a way to change the past, to take things back that happened. I wish I would have taken care of you earlier, or let Justin in much sooner, but nothing can change what has already happened. We can only move forward. You can't go back. No one can."

"Not even the impenetrable Brian Kinney?"

Brian tried to smile, soft tears slipping down his cheeks. Mark looked amazed that the man even had such an emotion, let alone felt his son was special enough to share it with. "Not even me."

"You didn't try to save Justin when they rushed you. You tried for all of us."

"It was all of you or none of you. I went in prepared to find nothing but whispers in the dark of horrors trailing from your graves. Losing you three was the worst thing in my life. At first I didn't know whether it was better or worse that all of you had survived. With Justin…even now…I feel selfish for wanting him to keep going."

"Selfish? Why!"

"He's been through so much because of me; the pain and anguish is more than I would ever be able to deal with on my own. I want him to get better but I…what if it's not as much for him living as it is for me losing?"

"That's…how I feel too." Mark scooted closer to his father. "That he would be happier if he had never met me. If he didn't feel the need to protect me than none of what Russell did to him would have happened."

Brian smiled softly. "I hate to tell you, but even if you were a stranger and Justin saw something wrong, he would have died to make it right."

"I don't understand."

"I don't think we're supposed to."

Mark matched the man's gentle smile. "What if he doesn't get better, like he used to be?"

"Than we give him what he needs, space, time, and be there for him like he was for us."

"Having kids has mellowed you. Dad."

Brian chuckled on the outside, but on the inside he screamed with pride. Mark had just calle dhim dad for the first time. "Oh?"

"That's what they say on Liberty."

"They said that being with Justin stopped me from being the hottest stud on Liberty, too."

"Justin thinks you're pretty hot."

"And the rest of Liberty thinks he's pretty hot, so where does that leave me?"

"On top." Mark grinned.

"As always. Come on, kiddo. Let's go get Justin."

\*

Justin sat on the made bed, staring at his suitcases by the door. Any second now Brian would walk through that door and bring him back to life as it should have been. No one told him what had happened after he passed out. He didn't want to know. He couldn't remember anything but waking up in the hospital and knowing that he had done what he set out to do. The boy stared down at his scrawny hands and wanted more than anything else to gain his normal weight back. Normal. The word sounded foreign, surreal. Justin knew the first thing he was going to do when he got to Brian's loft and it involved ice cream and intimate safety. Maybe a cheeseburger, too. And fries. Chicken and dumplings. A massive plate of spaghetti and meatballs…

The boy was nearly drooling when Brian and Mark stood in the doorway. Justin looked up, seeing Mark's eyes alight with something that had never been there since the first time they met. There was life in those young hazel eyes. Innocence. Justin's heart melted and he held his arms out to the men in his life.

Brian came to him only a fraction slower than Mark, wrapping his boys in a tight hug. He rest his chin on Justin's silken blonde hair, breathing in his strawberry scent.

"You're okay." Justin said.

"Of course I am! You're the one in the hospital." Mark sighed happily.

Justin chuckled and felt that Brian knew exactly what he meant. "Well, I'm okay too. I want to get the hell out of here and get some ice cream."

Brian pulled back. "You do?"

"Yeah. But we need to put Mark to bed first." Justin whispered to his lover.

"Ahh. -That- kind of ice cream."

"What kind?" Mark demanded.

"Later." Justin smiled. "Time to go home."

"Wait! What kind?" Mark protested, following the men out and into the parking lot. "Dad! Justin! What kind?!?"

\*

Brian let the door lock behind him, reveling in the peace and safety the sound brought. He watched Justin pry the vanilla ice cream open and stand waiting, expectantly, for his lover to join him.

The man walked cautiously to his Sunshine, wrapping his fingers in the hem of Justin's shirt and slipping it down his shoulders. He gazed into the blue eyes he never thought he would see again. "Are you sure? So soon?"

"I need to." Justin smiled, almost wistfully. He searched Brian's eyes for the first time since getting back to Pittsburgh. "Please?" The young boy brought a finger full of white cream to Brian's lips, the sweetness melting as soon as if fell between their flesh.

"I don't want to hurt you."

"It's been a month, I'm…nearly ready to explode!" Justin smiled then, and washed away any doubts Brian had. He had no intention of letting Sullivan and Russell rule his life and he was damned if he let them rule Brian's either.

"Well then, I had better…call the bomb squad."

"It's too late for them. You'll have to go in alone."

"I don't know if I can detonate such a vast eruption all by myself." Brian closed the slight distance between their bodies, pressing the ice cream container into their chests.

"I know you can." Justin said, voice breathy.

"It may…be earth shattering."

"I'm willing to risk it."

"Life altering…" Brian pressed his sweetened lips to Justin's in a chaste kiss.

"Some things are worth the threat."

"And if…" Brian kissed his boy again, feeling the youth's shiver through his own lips. It had nothing to do with the ice cream. "The world ends because of it?"

"So be it." Justin returned the kiss. "At least we'll go out…shooting."

Brian laughed, the rich, throaty sound belonging solely to a man in the throes of sexual pleasure. "Well then…" He took a finger full of ice cream and trailed it down Justin's bare neck and chest. "We should probably get to it."

"Definitely." Justin gasped, pulling Brian's shirt off and throwing it to the floor. He pressed his chest against the man and giggled when the ice cream dribbled down between them.

"I missed you Justin."

Justin smiled. "I'll make up for lost time." He said and leaned backwards onto the Chaise lounge chair, bringing Brian with him. "No matter how long it takes."

"Works for me." Brian said, though he couldn't tell if it was loud enough for the boy to hear, or even if his lover was paying attention anymore.

Justin moaned as Brian trailed his fingers down the line of his chest, passed his belly button, and under his jeans. The sound was immense, as loud as a thousand guttural voices too long masked behind fear and pain. He had not once been allowed to come while with Sullivan and Russell found their centers again and again, and not once made one noise to alarm his young charges. He writhed beneath Brian's body, the ice cream carton falling to the floor in a thick mess of melted sugar. Brian thumbed open Justin's jeans, sliding the zipper down. The boy didn't have to ask for more from his lover, his body language was all the pleading he needed.

Brian wrapped the boy's hard shaft in his large, hot hand, drawing the organ out between their bodies. He ran a thumb over the head of Justin's cock, sliding in the pre-cum already wetting the tip. Justin groaned, bucking beneath his lover. Brian brought a hand down and retrieved a finger of ice cream, spreading it on his boy's dick. He lowered his mouth in a line of heavy, wet kisses, down Justin's body to lick the sweetness off.

"Brian!" Justin bit his bottom lip, thrusting at Brian's heated mouth.

The man grinned, watching the blonde with one eye while bringing more ice cream to dribble down the boy's shaft. Justin's eyes were squeezed shut in pleasure, his head thrown back over the end of the chair. He knew who was giving him what he needed and he wanted more. The boy was not afraid. He was not damaged. He was ready.

Brian sucked the ice cream away and dripped more on, lapping it up in long, languorous strokes. He was almost afraid to satisfy himself, though the erection still contained in his slacks was more than willing to do it for him.

"Fuck me!" Justin wailed, his hands reaching down to take hold of Brian's face. His blue eyes were clouded with lust, but he was sure of what he asked.

Brian pulled his pants down, yanking Justin's away and throwing them both to the hardwood floor. He reached to the table nearby and held up the condom and lube. Justin frowned.

"No…not like that." His eyes swelled in sadness. "Sullivan and Russell didn't…it's not fair…they did and you won't…I'm not good enough to-"

Brian shushed the boy with a ginger finger to his lips. "You're more than good enough." He threw the condom down. "Anything. Ask me anything and it's yours."

Justin smiled again and relaxed as Brian smeared the lube all over the boy's more than willing hole. The blonde gasped and rolled his head to stare at Brian longingly.

"Come here." Justin begged, lips half-parted waiting for Brian to make the journey back up. He closed his eyes as Brian's tongue filled his mouth and the man's dick sunk into his ass.

"Okay?" Brian pulled away from the kiss to gaze into Justin's eyes.

"Very much so." Justin caressed Brian's jaw line and leaned back into the kiss.

Brian moved slowly, tentatively, in and out. He didn't break their contact again until Justin threw his head back in ecstasy, gasping for air. The man knew just how to please him, his body rubbing against the boy's erection until neither man could stand to hold off the pressure any longer. Brian gave one final thrust and brought them both to an intense orgasm.

Justin panted as Brian's body slid against his with sweat and cum, his tongue wrapping once again around Brian's. The men drank in each other's essence, their breath, their life. Their hearts beat as one, with Brian still inside of his young lover, his dick pulsing along with the spasming muscles of Justin's darkest recesses.

Justin's breath slowed first, the regulation of it a comfort Brain had long ago forgotten. He was asleep, content, and safe.

Brian pushed himself above Justin, watching the boy's face relax into sleep. He sighed a deep breath of relief. When he tried to move from inside the blonde, Justin stirred.

"No…" He mumbled, tracing his fingers lightly along Brian's face. "Stay?"

"Okay." Brian said, leaning back down and resting his face in the crook of his lover's neck. "I'll stay forever if you want me to, Justin." He promised, falling off to the first real sleep he had had since the boy had gone missing.

The morning would come and go, the afternoon a wash of dreams, the evening finally rousing the lovers long enough to take comfort in an embrace of arms and legs. Together. It was all either of them could have asked for.

The night had been relentless on the drive home from New York, the winds and angry clouds making the early evening seem like the darkest of hells. Brian knew he should have just stayed another night in the hotel room, but was eager to get away from the strange room. Even if he had Justin with him, the comforts of home had been calling eagerly to him since the day they left. It was a wonderful vacation, though neither man had left the hotel room for more than a few minutes to refill the ice bucket. Brian had never thought that the scant suitcase he brought would be too much. One extra pair of jeans, a business suit, underwear, a tee-shirt, and socks. The clothes never left the Armani luggage. Justin had kept him busy, and now every inch of him felt the exertion. With a smile, Brian knew he wouldn’t give the weariness up for the world.

He smiled at the boy, who was drifting in and out of a sleep so innocent it made Brian want to weep. After everything that happened, Justin was still unaffected. It was a talent that children had before they found the vast world of maturity. The boy was now legally able to drink, his birthday present the trip to New York. Twenty-one. Brian shook his head. Had they really been together for five years? On and off, true enough…but five years!

Brian laughed, a sound closer to a giggle than he would have ever wanted anyone to hear. Luckily, Justin was still dozing. He ran his tongue over his lips as if he could still taste the cherry Popsicle that he had to rescue Justin from the first day of their trip. The heater was turned up to it’s limit, and both men were completely naked. Justin was trying to show off how deep he could make the frozen juice go by shoving it down his throat. At the base of the icy treat, his warm lips had gotten stuck. As soon as Brian could get up from the floor where he’d landed laughing harder than ever before, he had pulled the boy to him. His tongue swept over the boy’s lips, over the red Popsicle, dancing a teasing flit into the open crevices at either side of the frozen trap. Justin had moaned, his hands grasping at Brian’s already naked skin. He tried to speak around the Popsicle but to no avail. Brian eventually melted the blonde’s lips away, taking the red ice from the boy and trailing it down his throat, his chest, grinning as the boy shivered. He brought it down, down, down, trailing it around Justin’s balls and sliding it between his thighs. Drops of cherry dripped passed his knees onto the rich, crimson carpet. The boy gasped as Brian brought the pop across his pulsing hole. Brian then pushed Justin down on the bed and spread the boy’s legs, tongue lapping at the red juice around the twitching pucker. Justin’s moans filled the room as Brian pushed the icy juice pop against the boy’s opening, bringing the heat of his tongue into the hole and alternating with the ice cold Popsicle.

“Hmm.” Justin shifted in his seat, straining against the seatbelt. Brian lightly pushed the boy against the seat once more and adjusted the seatbelt.

With a sigh, Brian turned back to the road.

The empty highway stretched its long arms into the darkly clouded horizon; yellow lines fading slowly through long seasons atop worn gray asphalt. Rich thunder roared overhead, rolling through darkened skies like an angry warning.

The radio crackled in and out of audibility. “And boy…storm’s head…our way!” A voice announced over the loud radio, barely audible behind dense static. “Here’s…song for…poor souls stuck…night like this…careful. How…a little…‘…ward Bound’ from…Simon…Garf...!” Thunder played a deep, morbid chorus over the radio, now lost completely in dead air.

Brian let out a slow breath, eyes darting from the desolate highway to the silver rails guarding each side of the road. There was a far drop to somewhere Brian didn’t want to even think about beyond those rails.

Behind them, a car pulled up close, its muted headlights masking its presence. The driver nodded along to the beat of music pounding inside the car.

Brian looked over at Justin, watching him breathe silently, a smile spreading over his face. Suddenly, the Jeep was filled with excruciating white light.

Swerving, Brian squinted at the road before him. “FUCK!” He shouted, waking Justin.

“What’s—”

“This asshole is blinding me and…God! I can’t see the damn road!” Brian closed his eyes and slowed the Jeep, sliding the wheel ever so slightly until he felt the guard rail scratch alongside the paintjob. He stopped and waited for the second car to pull around, but the headlights never faltered. Whoever was behind them knew exactly what they were doing.

“Lock your door.” Brian said, slamming his own lock down.

“Who is that?”

“I don’t know. They must have been following for at least an hour, there’s nowhere to pull off.”

“Is it a cop?”

“No. Hell no. They purposely put their brights on.”

“I think they’re backing up.” Justin said as darkness slowly seeped into the Jeep.

The driver put the car into reverse, knowing only the orders given. With a fantastic screech of tires the second car lurched forward and plowed into the back of the Jeep. Brian had only a second’s instinct to pound the brakes, trying to stop from going over the edge.

He tried. He failed.

\*

Abrupt, angry black streaks curved surreally over the hard surface and disappeared into a metal rail, its side torn open in a wide, violent gash. Hours before, screaming tires had echoed through the empty terrain as two passengers prepared futilely for the rushing ground below.

Three sets of headlights hurried through the sudden storm, obliviously sliding over the skid-marks until the scene was left again in brutal isolation.

Damaged, leafless trees groaned under the intense pressure of the accident; shattered glass continuing to fall in glittering squares to the rushing reservoir a hundred yards beneath the motionless vehicle. Weakening ice-capped limbs splintered, shoved violently under the car like a thick spider web. A malicious series of cracks echoed into the growing storm as several branches snapped and released their burden three feet closer to instant death. With a violent jolt, the car slammed downward into the next group of boughs and halted once more. Inside the scraped black Jeep, a soft whimper escaped from a shallow breath.

“Oh…God.” The words were muted, uttered through a painful exhalation.

Chilled rain poured in obtuse rivulets over the warped metal of the Jeep, coaxing the vehicle downward mockingly as disgruntled creaks from the trees pleaded for sanctuary.

Justin groaned, pressed firmly between his seat and the rigid dashboard, his head smashed towards Brian. Opening his eyes, he winced uncontrollably at the stabbing pain all down his right side. His arm and leg jutted pointedly into the jagged metal of the door, his foot twisted violently under the seat. Struggling, Justin inhaled sharply as he reached his left fingers from the locked hand-brake towards the older man.

“Bri…an.” He whispered, fogged vision blurring the lines of the body he knew so well. \*Is he breathing?\* Justin wondered helplessly, shivering from the chilling cold and a loss of blood. Bony, bare branches crossed their way between the two men, further blocking Justin’s stunted sight. Closing his eyes once more, Justin tried with faintly gathered strength to push himself out of the Jeep, unaware of the environment surrounding him. “Ohhh.” He groaned miserably and gave up without the least bit of leeway. Little of what he recalled from the hours passed presented themselves clearly: Sleeping, silent radio, light, cursing…falling, screaming…blackness. Dimly, Justin could feel the limp arm of his lover pressed against his chest in dashed hopes of protection.

Icy wooden cries wailed around them, bitterly holding onto the slick black metal sides with sliding fingers. Justin’s eyes snapped open, the outside coming into focus as, inch by crawling inch, the Jeep made its way downward.

“No!” He shouted, despite the rueful agony burning in his lungs. “Please!” He felt the extended dizziness of a man trapped beneath the ocean surface for too long.

\*Justin?\* Brian’s mind slowly cleared to the boy’s screams. “Just..?”

“Brian?” He whimpered urgently, coughing fluidly as hot blood splattered onto his blue-tinted lips. “Falling.” He managed and coughed again, closing his eyes.

Brian stared into the darkness as much as the swelling allowed. An intense ache prevented him from turning his head to see the younger man, his neck and head prisoners against the steering wheel column. \*Must have hit a patch of ice…\* Brian rationalized, ordering his right hand to caress Justin, to soothe his fear, to move from the cold object it rested upon to stroke the boy’s baby-face. He gasped aloud. The cold object -was- Justin.

“Hang on.” Brian urged, though he had no way of being a hero this time.

“What?” Justin blurted, giving in to the satisfying warmth of sleep.

“Stay awake!” Brian shouted in a panic. “Don’t you leave me!”

Justin opened his eyes and stared blankly at Brian, tears running warmly over his nose and onto the dashboard. “Bri –”

“I mean it, Justin! You can’t leave me now!” Brian sobbed, fear gripping his sluggishly beating heart. “I need you to stay with me!” After the bashing at prom, after recovering, after meeting Will and Brad Taylor—Justin’s big brothers—and their equally damaging lives, Justin had stayed alive. He did not give up. Now…Brian could see the white puffs of air drifting from Justin’s lips, fading, slower, slower.

Sighing delicately, Justin listened to Brian cry. He worked words of comfort from his pale lips without sound. He attempted to move, his memory refusing to remind him that all previous efforts had been in vain and only served to worsen his injuries.

“Don’t move, just stay awake. Talk to me.” Brian ordered, gently working his head backwards. “Tell me about the hottest guy you’ve ever been with…”

Justin smiled. “So vain.” His voice traced on the edge of nothingness.

“Come on, Justin. Is he tall?”

“And smart.” He murmured dreamily.

“Sexy?”

“And rich.”

“Brown hair?” Brian grunted with effort and settled in to try again.

“Hazel eyes.”

“Is he nice?”

“Sometimes…” Justin sighed. “Yeah.”

“Great in bed?”

“Mmmhmm.” Justin purred quietly. “And skinny.”

“Skinny?!”

A soft chuckle behind the protruding branches gave Brian hope. “Yeah, skinny…” Justin breathed. “Good job, too.”

“Huge cock?”

“Mmmhmm. Can’t remember his name…” Another light giggle floated on the ebbing breeze.

Brian snorted, mock-hurt as he squeezed his eyes closed against the increasing pain that throbbed through his body and pulled once more, to no avail. He knew there would be no one on this dangerous road as the storm raged on. He knew they were going to die down there.

\*

“Justin?”

The boy mumbled, gritting his teeth. He didn’t want to come back to the cold place.

“Justin?”

Coughing, Justin groaned. “Ye…” Justin inhaled sharply, fluidly.

“Justin, we have to get out of here. It’s falling. We’re falling.”

“I dun…ple…Bri…sleep.”

“Don’t you fucking dare Justin Gregory Taylor!” Brian shouted, pushing against the branches shooting between them through the windshield. The Jeep slid down another inch and Brian stopped breathing, stopped moving. Justin was crying, a child’s cry after waking up from a bad dream. Only the bad dream was what he awoke to.

\*

The leggy blonde slipped a high leather boot up her thigh and strung the laces. She turned full blue eyes to the long mirror and smirked. Lethal sex on legs and well-aware of the effects she had on the people around her. The people she was hired to kill. Pulling on a long leather jacket, the woman smiled as her slender frame molded itself beneath the coat. None of her weapons were visible. She left the shoddy motel and pulled out onto the road, the roar of a V-10 engine echoing in the gentle rain.

The storm was almost over as the blonde found the highway and cranked the radio, her cherry red Dodge Viper screaming into the night.

The man she was assigned to kill was somewhere on this isolated road, within an hour’s drive if she broke every speed law in the state. She had no problem with that.

Her headlights spilled over a dangerous curve and the woman slowed, eyeing the space before her. The guard rail was severely torn apart, black skid marks pulling over the highway.

Was she too late? Had her victim taken his own life by carelessness? The woman got out of her car, emergency lights flashing. She walked tentatively to the road’s edge and peered over.

No. It was not the man she was sent to assassinate. The Jeep below was an innocent, but the woman was sure who had killed the people inside. She was too late, at least for these people. This only strengthened her determination to make this man pay for the lives he took for no reason.

Then she heard the voice. Down below, floating up to her with desperate fingers on a breeze so cold it chilled her to the marrow of her bones.

“…fucking dare Justin Gregory Taylor!”

“No. No. Oh, fuck.” The woman shook her head. The people were still alive. More importantly…

“I’m coming! Don’t move!” She called, slipping down with lean-muscled arms and legs. The trees welcomed her weight compared to the sliding Jeep below.

Brian lifted his head at the new sound, a woman’s voice. Help! Help was coming!

“Justin, we’re going to be alright. Answer me, baby. Answer me. Please, please God, let him answer!” Silence. Nothing but the dim groans of branches. Brian moaned softly, focusing every effort on staying still. “Justin?” He called into the inky black void, receiving only more silence from the still, dimly silhouetted form of his lover. “No. No, no, no. Come on!”

With a rocket-thrust of cracking branches, Brian’s head snapped back into the headrest, shaking the Jeep violently. An electric shock of misery forced itself from his numb toes to the free-flowing blood from his head. With a horrific, panic-filled scream, Brian shook his head. The sudden rattling had furthered their descent, pushing snarling limbs against Justin’s face and crushing against his chest.

“Hang on! Don’t move! Whatever you do, don’t move!”

“Help us! Fucking help us! He’s dying…dead.” Brian shouted, ending the last with a whisper.

“Mmm..?”

“Get up! Wake up! Justin!” Brian fidgeted in his seat, noticing for the first time that his door his was hanging onto the barest fibers of its bigger counterpart. His head lolled back and forth across the headrest, eyes squeezed shut to ward off the dizziness. It was possible to leave the Jeep, but could he leave Justin alone? “Hey. HEY!”

“Huh?”

“Look at me. I know it’s hard, but you have to look at me. Can you do that? Come back to me.”

“Y-yeah.” Justin mumbled, his face a dark outline, crushed beneath the seat-cushion as if in a vise.

“Justin, I’m going to get out of the car so there’s less weight, okay?”

“No!”

“Listen to me. I can’t help you if I’m still in the car. I’m going to get out and—”

“Don’t go!” The boy started to sob in a sudden fright.

“I’m going to come around to the other side as quick as I can. I promise I’ll be right here.”

“I’m scared.” Justin said and gasped roughly, sobbing weakly.

“I know. Just hold on and I’m going to get us out.”

“Don’t move you stupid fuck!” The woman shouted as she watched the silent Jeep sway on the unstable branches. Still, she made her way down. Artfully, swiftly.

Brian reached over and squeezed Justin’s cold left hand. “I’m going to protect you.” He said and gently pulled his arm from between his injured passenger and the dashboard. Moving cautiously, Brian eased himself out of the door, shoving the pain from his mind and replacing it with an image of Justin: scared, but not alone. In pain.

“Stay right there! You’re on the last branch! ”

He stopped as the trees beneath him gave a massive jerk, punctuating the woman’s point, throwing the Jeep forward at a crashing speed, taking everything and everyone down with it.

Brian screamed, dragged downward into a snowy mess.

And then: silence.

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The woman didn’t let the new position of the Jeep falter her descent.

When the Jeep decided to fall, it did so until they were fifty feet from the ground before stopping, with Brian clinging as best he could to the driver’s side door. Hitting a main trunk head-on, the impact was enough to send Justin and his seat half-way through the missing windshield. Brian lie pinned between the left back wheel and the parallel trunk to the Jeep’s front end, his ribcage wedged against the shredded rubber.

“Okay, fellas. Time to get out of here.” She said softly.

“Justin?” Brian blinked through the haze of his vision, watching the pale woman drift toward him like an angel. She passed over the empty innards of his Jeep. “Justin!” Brian reminded her, spotting the boy hanging on limply by the frayed seatbelt. It didn’t look like a person, much less like Justin Taylor.

“I know. I’ll get you both out of here if you listen to me. Okay?”

Weakness sent tremors through Brian’s limbs, the healthy tan so clear on his skin any other day had vanished into a sickly pallor. He groaned, staring at the body of his young passenger. “Justin!” He gurgled, trying desperately to slip his fingers between himself and the black rubber captor at his chest.

The car moved, groaning slowly at first and then in a wicked scream, inching further down the tree trunk. Brian slipped along with it, though not incapacitated like before. With his breathing regulated and no apparent injuries to his ribs, Brian slithered over the nearest bared branch. Gripping the closest part of his Jeep, he righted his body and slipped into the driver’s side door.

“Get out of there!” She commanded, fearful that the vehicle would give at any time and neither victim would survive.

“I have to get Justin!” Came Brian’s valiant reply.

“Stupid son of a bitch! I’ll get him!”

Brian closed his eyes against the prying branches that had made their home inside his company car, pushing past them with amazement at how easily he was navigating through the mess. Adrenaline coursed through his aching body, pure and sinfully sweet, offering the much needed strength and release from his serious injuries.

“Justin!” He cried, seeing the boy up-close for the first time. Forcing the nausea away, Brian shook his head and continued onward, swiping at the quickly unraveling belt which so courageously clung to the blonde. Inching closer still, Brian took hold of the limp boy’s torn shirt, yanking him up the hood just in time to keep him from falling. “Come on!” He begged, able to carry both Justin and the seat into the Jeep. “We’re almost there.” He told himself more than anyone else, carefully edging everything back towards the open door. “I’ve got you.” He whispered.

Justin gagged, spurted, and inhaled in Brian’s strong touch, seemingly revived from the dead. “Ohhh.” He moaned, his eyes fluttering open to look at his savior.

“It’s okay. I’ve kept us up.” He told Justin with a smile, relief pouring over his face.

“Okay, back up, doing good.” The woman said, holding out a hand to grab Brian’s shirt.

“Take him first.” He ordered, handing the semi-conscious boy upwards into the safety of help’s arms and watching as the woman crawled slowly back to the highway.

“Fuck.” Brian gasped, suddenly aware of his throbbing head and ribcage. \*How on earth did I manage to..?\* He wondered crazily, staring at the gnarled Jeep. He set himself down on the nearest complete branch and closed his eyes, clinging to the tree trunk. Brian could remember tales of old women lifting cars off their grandchildren. This strength was the same, one made of love and the refusal to live life without Justin.

Like a giant explosion, splintering wood flew everywhere as the Jeep crashed angrily into the waiting ground below. Brian kept his desperate grip on the thick trunk and stared down at what would have been certain death.

“Are you still down there?” The woman called.

“Yes.”

“Can you make it up?”

As much as Brian didn’t like it, he knew there was no way he was moving without help. “No.”

“Let me get him warm and I’ll be right there!” She called, lightly caressing the boy’s face. Wrapping her jacket around Justin, the woman clicked the heater on. “Can you hear me?”

“Hunh?”

“Justin? It’s me. It’s Cam.”

Justin squinted at the woman. “Cam?”

“Yeah. Hey, Jus. I’m going to get you out of here, okay?”

“Brian?”

“Him too.”

Justin swallowed. “…kay. Sis.”

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“I hope it’s alright for you to buddy up in the front seat.” Cameron gestured to her car. “It’s only a two-seater.”

“You don’t seem the kind of girl who takes on many passengers.” Brian admitted, once both feet were on solid ground.

“My kind of passengers usually don’t mind being crammed in the trunk.” Cameron said.

Brian raised an eyebrow but kept silent. He wasn’t above a free ride and helping hand in the middle of nowhere. The woman didn’t give her name, just opened the door for Brian and went around to her side.

The man didn’t notice how excruciatingly close Cam studied him as he lifted Justin lightly off the seat and sat in his place, bringing the boy protectively against his chest. He nestled in the blonde’s hair, the happiness tight in his chest, threatening to tear out of his chest if he didn’t touch Justin with every part of his body. His lover was warmer now, his breathing less labored.

“How far to the nearest hospital?”

Cam put the car in gear and sped away. “Not far if I’m driving.” She said.

Brian blinked softly, drearily. His head was pounding now, as if knowing Justin was safe in his arms and they were on their way to the hospital finally allowed him to feel the pain, the creeping darkness swimming over him until there was nothing left but oblivion.

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The kiss was long, their mouths sealed against one another, skin fresh from the shower. Hands slid over slick flesh, exploring, reveling in the warmth of their bodies, in the steamy bathroom. Blonde and brunette hair fell in sopping chunks over their foreheads, meshing together. Hot water dribbled down their entangled arms and legs. Justin moaned and Brian swallowed the sound, rubbing his erection against the boy’s soft belly, against his lover’s own throbbing, pulsing cock.

Brian raked his fingers through Justin’s hair, pulling the boy away from his lips so he could gaze at the molten fire lighting the fierce blue eyes. He yanked back until the boy winced in pain, his breath shaking as it slipped raggedly from his swollen, red lips.

“Fuck me.” Justin moaned, trembling lips begging. “Fuck me.”

Brian savagely turned Justin around, slamming the boy into the wall just hard enough to rattle the mirror above the sink. “You want it?”

“Yes…”

“You want…” He shoved his cock against the wet curve of Justin’s ass. “This?”

“Yes!”

“This?” Brian pulled the tube of KY from the medicine cabinet and smeared it slowly around the boy’s tight, puckering hole.

“Yes! Yes!” Justin breathed, voice husky with pleasure. He felt Brian’s fingers slide inside him and moaned, fingers grating across the flowered wallpaper until plaster streaked in his wake. “YES!”

Brian moved his fingers, scissoring them up and down, back and forth, deeper, farther in the hot closeness of his lover. His tongue jutted from his mouth, tasting the boy’s clean skin. The man licked along the back of Justin’s earlobe and then blew a cold whisper against the new line feeling the lithe body tense in goosebumps.

“Please, Brian, please. Please!”

Brian left his boy for a heartbeat to retrieve a condom, slipping the latex sheath on. He pressed his head against the blonde, groaning as his hard, twitching cock pushed into the heated core of his young lover. Justin gasped as Brian entered him, one hand flying back to pull the man’s hips deeper into him.

“Oh, God. God.” Justin nodded, face pressed against the wall. He felt Brian moving their joined bodies, then the cold mirror under his face. His eyes fluttered open and he raised his face from the steam streaked glass. Brian was watching him, watching himself. Justin grinned at the man, a breath torn from his lips as the man furthered his ascent into the boy’s deep caverns.

“More?” Brian asked. “Do you want mor—”

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“—phine? Sir?”

“Hmm?” Brian’s eyes slowly opened and a pain shot behind his eyes. He was dimly aware of the tent pitched over his crotch. The male nurse didn’t seem to notice the aftereffects of the dream, or at least if he did notice, he stayed quiet about it.

“Are you in any pain? How are you feeling? You were moaning in your sleep, so we came to see if you were awake. Are you—”

“Justin—” Brian tried to sit up and hissed in pain, suddenly aware of where he was.

“He’ll be alright. You need to stay in bed, Mr. Kinney.”

“Where’s Justin?”

The nurse pulled the curtain back bisecting the rooms, revealing the boy fast asleep in the next bed. His face was fine, the bruises and cuts completely healed. But…the boy’s face had been shredded…so much blood, bruising…

“You’ve been in a coma for three weeks.” The nurse answered his unasked question.

“What?”

“Shh. Don’t wake him.”

“Is he alright? Am I…does he remember who he is? Where he is?”

“Yes. He’s been awake much longer than you. You had a very serious concussion.”

“But he’s alright?”

“Yes.”

“Have you called—”

“Your friends have been here, yes.” The tall man nodded to the corner of the room, where Michael sat propped in a chair, fast asleep. “Some of them still are.”

Brian smiled. “Three weeks…where’s the girl?”

“The girl?”

“The woman, she brought us here.”

“I don’t know of any woman.” The nurse said, adjusting Brian’s IV. “You need to settle down.”

“I’m fine. Go get a doctor, tell him I’m awake and I want to sign out of here.”

The nurse stood. “Of course.” He said, watching Brian for just a moment while the man dipped his fingers in the water pitcher and shook his hand first across the room at Michael, then to the next bed at Justin. The man left, heading down the hallway and to the nearest payphone. He dialed a number and waited.

“Yeah.” The voice said surely, as if the faceless man knew what news was about to be delivered to him.

The nurse shuddered. He had only heard his boss’ voice over the phone and that was enough to give him nightmares for the rest of his life. “Kinney is awake.”

“How many are with him?”

“Just the brunette and Justin, but the boy’s family will be here soon, and so will his friends.”

“Don’t let him leave. We’re on our way.”

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Michael shook his head, wiping his hand dismissively over the water speckling his cheeks. He went back to sleep without completely waking up.

Brian rolled his eyes. “Christ.” He sighed, turning all his attention on Justin.

The boy rolled over taking the sheets with him to the front, his gown gaping down the back to give Brian the full view he’d come to know and love. Brian sprayed water over the smooth expansion of Justin’s ass, stifling the urge to giggle with wickedness.

Justin moaned and slowly turned around, squinting at the source of his disturbance. A smile lit his face instantly once he saw the beloved hazel of Brian’s eyes. He got out of bed and jumped into Brian’s arms, nuzzling under the covers.

“You’re awake.” The boy whispered with glee. “We were getting worried. You broke my record.”

“So I’ve been told.” Brian caressed Justin’s cheek. “I thought you would be scarred for life.”

“Please, no god is cruel enough to do that.” Justin batted his eyelashes. “They made me stay in bed this whole time.”

“Are you okay?”

“I was released but I passed out. I couldn’t eat or sleep. They said I kept going into shock worrying about you. So they made me stay here. Your insurance is going to drop us like a bad habit.”

“Nobody drops bad habits anymore, it’s faux pas.” Brian waved his hand in the air. “Much better to drop good habits and—”

“Don’t you start filling my head with that. Some people need to keep the balance of good to match you!” Justin tweaked Brian’s nipple.

“If you dropped your bad habit…”

“Than I wouldn’t be here with you.” Justin finished.

“Right.” Brian leaned down and kissed Justin delicately. Despite being the one with the more serious injury, the man still worried about his boy.

Justin laughed and pushed Brian away. “Coma breath.”

“Little shit.” Brian pushed back, lightly. “Go get me a toothbrush and toothpaste before anyone else sees me like this.”

“Oh, heaven forbid anyone know you have bad breath when you’ve been out for three weeks.” Justin crawled closer to Brian and kissed him thoroughly, making it a point to ignore his more natural shortfalls.

“You spoil me.” Brian moaned, letting the boy devour the skin of his jaw and neck, rubbing against the facial hair someone had shaved once, but not for a few days.

“I try.” Justin said, tongue flicking to the man’s Adam’s apple.

“Yes, you’re very trying.”

“Cut that out!” Michael protested, getting off his chair. “Good to know you’re feeling better.”

“I -tried- to wake you, Mikey.” Brian smiled.

Michael rolled his eyes. “I haven’t slept well for the entire time since your accident and you have to wake up when I’m finally dead to the world?”

“Someone needs to keep life interesting.” Brian shrugged, Justin nestled in the crook of his neck with a relieved smile.

“I’m not leaving you two alone, by the way.” Michael sat on a chair nearer the bed. “Mom’s getting off her shift in ten minutes and everyone’s meeting here.”

“Even my parents. Ick.” Justin stuck out his tongue.

“Your brothers aren’t coming, are they?”

“Yes. Bear too. He missed you.”

“I bet. Is there any way I can climb out the window and survive a fall?”

Justin giggled. “No.” He playfully slapped Brian’s chest.

The man threw back the covers. “I think I’ll take my chances.”

“Oh, you love us.” Will said suddenly. No one knew how long he had been in the doorway. It was even harder to believe that Bear had been able to sneak up on them, his entire frame nearly matching the door in width and height.

“I thought we had ten minutes to prepare.” Brian sighed.

“I said mom would be off in ten, I don’t know their schedule.” Michael nodded at Will. “Sorry. They don’t have an itinerary.”

“How’re you feeling, Kinney?” Will asked, coming into the room. He wrapped an arm around his little brother and tugged him away from Brian, settling the boy against his own body. “Better I hope.”

“Gee, didn’t know you cared.”

“Justin couldn’t be released until you were okay, doctor’s orders.” Will turned to Bear. “If I ever fall in love, shoot me.”

“Will do.” Bear said, sitting on the bed Justin had been sleeping on.

“Where’s Brad?”

“Fighting with Craig in the lobby.”

“Oh. Those two…”

“Yeah. He’s driving Craig and Jennifer together. I think they spent the night together.”

Justin gagged. “Eww! Will!”

“Just thought you’d like to know so you can mark your calendars for the next wedding date.”

“I’ll remind them why they got divorced.” Justin shook his head. “What a mockery that marriage was.”

“He’s not such a bad guy.” Brian said.

“Oh, my God! You’re delirious! We need to get a doctor!” Justin pulled from Will and kissed Brian’s forehead. “What do you mean my dad isn’t a bad guy? He hates you more than…almost more than my brothers!”

“Maybe not.” Brian smiled that secret smile that could mean everything and nothing at the same time.

“The day you stop surprising me I’ll die of shock.” Justin sighed.

“Then I had better keep you on your toes, shouldn’t I?” Brian leaned his forehead against Justin’s and took a deep, comfortable breath. “Let’s get the fuck out of here.” He said, then softly so no one else heard him but his lover. “So I can fuck you for the three weeks I’ve missed.”

“Yes please.” Justin smiled. He still hadn’t told anyone about Cameron, hoping that she would come around on her own. Saying Brad hated Craig, or Craig hated Will, was like saying the men were the closest-knit family ever compared to the rage Cam held for the Taylor’s. She’d even gone so far as to change her last name. Justin was the only one she kept in slight contact with, and even then he wasn’t allowed to ask the why’s and what’s behind her hatred. He wasn’t supposed to bring up the family with her, and after awhile, the limited phone calls stopped completely. It had been good to see her alive and well, strong…saving their lives. But she didn’t stick around to see if he was alright. Justin couldn’t help thinking she hated him, too, for whatever reasons she hated the others. She didn’t want him dead, but she wouldn’t weep at his funeral.

If she would even go.

Justin sniffled, a tear dropping on Brian’s cheek from above. He tilted his head so their foreheads were separated and he could look at the boy. Glittering blue eyes watched him and Brian mouthed ‘Are you okay?’

“Yeah. I’m just glad you’re awake.” He smiled softly.

“Come on, we have to sign out of here before—”

“OH, you’re awake! Little asshole.”

Brian groaned. “Too late. Hi, Deb.”

“Hi, honey. Look who I brought.” Debbie said, turning piteous eyes to Brian as his mother walked into the room. “She was in the lobby on her way up. The hospital called her that you woke up.” The woman said in a form of apology.

“My day is made.” Brian sighed, wondering how quickly he could get his mother to leave by holding Justin close. He hoped it was sooner than later.

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Brad came into the room last, waiting for Craig and Jennifer to crowd to the back of the room, farthest from him. He had no shame in what he did for a living, or rather, what he used to do thanks to Brian’s involvement. But his parents did find things wrong with it when he told them. Brad had never especially cared for their acceptance. They were assholes growing up, but it seemed that they had finally made it right after ruining three of their kids. Brad had been the first born, then their sister Cameron who had found a way to disappear better than her big brother. Will, the third born, had managed to find him. Then came Justin, then Molly, who neither Craig nor Jennifer had any qualms about keeping away from all three of her eldest siblings.

A fit of jealousy simmered Brad’s blood as he watched their parents dote over Justin…and even over Brian. He settled himself and sighed. It wasn’t worth it. None of them were worth getting worked up over. His lifetime had been alone, helping himself, growing up by learning what others around him did. He had been rich. He had been the closest to happy he could ever have imagined. Yet, he had to help out the brothers he never really knew, the back of his mind hoping for some sense of security, of welcome from the family that had shunned him when he was young, and again now. Helping Will and Justin had got him back into the family workings, the semblance of what a family was, but they would never accept him. What he did, what he still wanted to do, how his mind worked. He liked the kids; Justin and Will were fun. Will was smart, sharp as a tack, witty. Justin’s smile was something like a treasure, a gleaming light of what he could have had if he was young again, pure. But Brad knew he had never been innocent like Justin. He was not a victim like Justin. He was not naïve like Justin.

Of course, he was not loved like Justin. Brian was devoted to the boy, and Justin…Justin went into shock being separated from his lover.

No one knew how they were saved from the perilous journey down the snowy abyss. Justin didn’t say, claimed he didn’t remember anything but falling and waking up in the hospital.

Brad knew a liar when he saw one, but if the boy didn’t want to say then that was his business.

“Right, Brad?” Will was saying.

“Hmm?”

“I said that we’ll get to the bottom of this. We’ll find out who rammed into them, pushed them off the cliff.”

“Right.” Brad nodded. “We’ll get them.”

“The police can handle it, boys.” Craig said. “They already have paint scrapings off the bumper and—”

“The cops are for shit!” Brad spat, his voice still tinged with the Irish accent he rarely used anymore. It seemed futile to be someone else when so many people knew he was faking.

“Just because you take the law into your own hands doesn’t mean I’ll stand here and accept it!”

“News flash for ya, pa! I don’t give a damn about your acceptance!”

Justin closed his eyes and rest his head against Brian’s chest, craning his neck to whisper in the man’s ear. “Do you think they’ll shut up if I fake a seizure?”

“That’s a tough call…” Brian raised an eyebrow at the arguing men. He wasn’t sure if there had ever been any abuse between the two besides verbal, but their fights made his and Jack Kinney’s pale in comparison. But these two were about to get the lashing of Kinney fire from Joan as the woman stood up. No one had even remembered she was still there, a silent prayer for her son’s soul.

“Such disrespect for your parents! What is wrong with you!”

“Stay out of it!” Brad yelled.

“If you think you can handle anything that happens in this world with lawlessness and filth you’ve got another thing coming!” Craig continued, ignoring the woman.

“And if you believe that your authority as half my genetic makeup gives you the power to judge above God for what I choose to do with my life, may you burn in the deepest pit of Hell!”

Joan gasped. “Sanctimonious man!”

“Bradley, please, this is a hospi—” Jennifer cried out.

“Don’t speak to me, ma! If I wanted a tag team match I’d have brought a friend.”

“Do you even have friends? People would have to be deranged!” Craig shouted.

“He’s got me!” Will stood next to his brother.

“I’ve made my point then!”

“Fuck you!” Will snarled.

“William, don’t get involved in this!” Jennifer pleaded.

“Stay out of it, Jennifer!” Will bellowed.

Justin shook his head and gave a pillow to Brian, pressing it against one of the man’s ears as he sat up and cleared his throat.

“WE HAVE SOMEONE HERE WHO JUST WOKE UP FROM A COMA! WILL EVERYONE PLEASE SHUT THE FUCK UP BEFORE I START BREAKING SOME GODDAMN NECKS???” He shrieked.

“I couldn’t have said it better myself.” Cameron smiled, leaning against the doorway. “How ya feeling, kid?”

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“You look good, Cameron. Well fed. Healthy.” Craig said for lack of anything else to say. His ex-wife was spellbound, his eldest sons gaping. His daughter was a beautiful young woman.

Cameron sneered, but the acknowledgement went only that far. “I see you’re alive enough to join in the squabbling.”

“On my last breath I’d be able to scream at them.” Justin grinned.

“You clean up pretty.” She said to Brian.

“Thanks. I think.”

“Cameron, how have you been?” Jennifer finally asked, quietly.

The young woman took a deep breath. “Fine, mother.”

“You’re not into porn are you?” Craig blurted.

Cameron laughed, loud and monstrous, as if daring anyone to tell her to be quiet. “What?”

“He’s not happy with my business choices.” Brad said.

Cameron raised an eyebrow. “Irish accent?”

“He’s not happy with that choice, either.”

She nodded. “Right.”

Brian leaned into Justin and whispered. “One, how many other estranged siblings do you have and two, is there a reason your family seems to be skirting around making her mad?”

Justin smiled gently. “Cameron’s the last one you have to meet, I promise. She nearly…killed my dad once when he made her mad.”

“What?” Brian choked.

“He grounded her for skipping curfew by three days. She attacked him and tried to tear out his heart. Nobody really got along after that. Brad was already gone, Will left after her six years ago.”

“Have I ever told you that your family is more fucked up than my own?”

“I think it’s why we get along so well.” Justin kissed the man’s jaw and turned back to the show. “But I don’t think your mother’s finished. She fits right in with my family…”

Brian laughed, hiding his mouth against the boy so he wouldn’t make a sound and draw attention to them. “My mother can’t get a word in. I think it’s a first…” He said, barely making the sentence without laughing.

“So you hate that your first son is a porn king and you hate that your second son is a con artist and petty thief? What about Justin? What did he do?” Cameron trumpeted.

“I’m an artist.” Justin said proudly. “And I’m gay.”

“So are they, dear.” Jennifer said. “Try not to get involved in this, please.”

“And you, mother, you agree with your husband?”

Will smirked. “They got a divorce.”

“Pity, I would have wished you on each other.” Cameron glared.

“How did she pop out five kids and still look like that?” Debbie said to Michael, not entirely trying to hide it.

“Plastic surgery.” Justin, Will, Brad, and Cameron said in unison. Jennifer pressed her lips together in silence.

“Oh, sorry I asked.” Debbie said.

Cameron rolled her eyes. “Justin, come with me for a second, I have to talk to you.”

“You’re not going anywhere with him!” Craig bellowed.

“Stuff a sock in it, old man!” Brad yelled.

“I don’t need you to defend me, Bradley!” Cameron countered.

“He has a right to defend his son, Cameron. Bradley, please. Everyone just—”

“Shut UP, mother!” Cameron shrieked.

“Don’t tell her to shut up! Have some Goddamn respect!”

“Lord’s name!” Brad and Will yelled over the screaming, bursting into fits of laughter.

“You think this sacrilege is funny?” Joan Kinney asked, astonished. “You’re all going to Hell!”

Brad and Will only laughed harder, the two leaning against each other for support.

Cameron went to the bed and held out a hand to her littlest brother. “Justin, please.”

“Can Brian come to?”

“I only have two seats.” She rolled her eyes.

“Please don’t leave him here with them.” Justin begged in a whisper.

Cameron looked away, trying to avoid the boy’s pleading eyes. She didn’t know why she was so strong with any other damned man but like warm putty in the face of her youngest brother. It made her mad to know she couldn’t, wouldn’t, refuse him.

“Fine, let’s just go.”

Justin took her hand and got out of bed, the three of them sneaking out of the hospital while everyone else was busy with the ring-side seats to the show between the Taylor’s and Ms. Kinney.

Brian grabbed the back of Justin’s gown with one hand and his own with the other, running down the hall. He didn’t want anyone else privy to a private show of his boy’s greatest…assets.

Cameron started the Viper and pulled out of the parking lot. She turned the radio up so she wouldn’t have to hear anything Justin had to say.

Brian cocked an eyebrow at the woman, then looked at Justin, the boy sitting comfortably on his lap. It was all Brian could do to stay soft, to not get an erection and puncture Justin’s unprotected ass. He swore to buy stock in the thin, convenient little backless gowns one of these days.

A smile curled his lips as he drifted to sleep. He could do that…but there was always the tiny apron Justin had brought on the trip. The boy had roused himself early, before dawn one morning, and tied the thin straps tight at the small of his back, the ruffled lace barely enough to cover his groin. Brian woke smelling pancakes, eggs, bacon…and boy meat, coming from the neat little kitchenette in their room. The boy was flustered, trying to not burn the eggs and to keep the grease from splattering his naked chest. Brian snuck up behind his Sunshine and stood there expectantly in the early-morning lit room. The curtains were wide open, revealing the spectacular view high above ground. He told himself not to touch the boy, to let Justin see him standing there, but the apron string dangling between his alabaster-white thighs was too tempting. Brian took the last step to close the distance between the two and pulled the ties, his eyes devouring the body before him as the lace slipped to the floor. Justin moaned, part excitement, part disappointment at his surprise being spoiled.

“Good morning.” He had said in a voice reserved for the bedroom, intimate, lusty.

“Mmm.” Brian answered, fingers sliding down the exposed hips in front of him, burying themselves in the curly mass of pubic hair, fingertips tracing around the base of Justin’s cock.

“Brian, I’ll burn breakfast.” The boy protested, throwing his head back against Brian’s collarbone.

“We wouldn’t want that.” Brian said softly, one hand going to the burner to turn off the heat. He turned Justin around, forcing him against the counter right next to the stove. The counter was still hot, but not enough to burn. Brian pushed Justin to sit on the counter. “I think it’s done, Sunshine.” He smiled, bringing a pancake up between them and trailing it over one of the boy’s nipples.

Justin winced, gasping at the sensation as Brian bent down and pulled the nipple into his mouth, sucking, teasing it with his wild tongue until the heat from the pancake was washed away with a heated tingling of their own. The boy felt himself stiffen, his body rigid upon the hot counter. Brian went to the other nipple, tracing the hotcake over the tense pebble of flesh before consuming it with his warm, wet mouth. The boy arched his back to meet the man, groaning with pleasure. Brian took the carton of milk from beside the stove and slid it over the boy’s chest, taking a mouthful to cool his mouth before licking along the boy’s neck and jaw, tickling behind Justin’s earlobes with quick shots of his cold tongue. He grabbed Justin’s hard dick with the hand that had been holding the milk, sending shivers from his lover’s fingers to the tips of his curling toes. Brian kissed the boy’s mouth, eating him from the outside in. He dipped his finger in the remaining raw pancake batter, slipping his finger between their lips, tongues wrapping around the Bisquik with delight. It surprised him that they both loved batter and cookie dough better uncooked than fresh from the oven. Justin pulled away and dipped his fingers in the batter, dribbling it down his hand and arm, making Brian’s mouth clean him up. Brian lowered his mouth, smeared with the white mix, onto Justin’s ready cock. He moved his tongue over the head, flicking it across the slit, sucking, tasting. He felt the boy’s fingers dig into his shoulders, a loud scream erupting from his thick lips.

“Brian!” The boy yelled, bucking against the man’s willing mouth. The brunette took Justin into his mouth, sliding down the shaft, up, down, up. He released the boy and went lower, down to the blonde’s balls, taking first one, then the other into his mouth. Justin wrapped his legs around Brian’s back, crossing his ankles.

Brian pulled the boy farther off the counter, resting him on the edge of it and rocking the boy back against the wall. He rose from his meal and moved to stand, Justin’s legs falling around the man’s hips.

“Fuck me!” Justin ordered viciously, grabbing the silken locks of his lover and pulling the man close for a kiss. “Fuck me!” He said, voice muffled inside of Brian’s kiss.

Brian took the boy, holding him under the ass and lifting him, walking with the boy’s legs wrapped around his hips, their mouths locked as one. He put the boy down on the sheets, grabbing a condom and lube from the nightstand.

The boy was already moaning as Brian sheathed his dick, lubing Justin’s twitching hole. He stuck his fingers inside the blonde, groaning as Justin mumbled his name incoherently. Brian pushed himself inside his lover, knowing without having to turn that Justin’s toes were curling and his fingers were clutching at empty air against the bed.

“Please. Please. Please.” Justin begged.

“Look at me.” Brian said, titling the blonde’s head and watching as the sparking blue eyes fluttered open. “I want to see your eyes when you cum.” He smiled.

Justin nodded, gazing up at the man as he plunged in deeper, deeper, finding the point of impact that made chills of pleasure storm through his veins like tingling fire. The boy gasped, throwing his head back. It took everything he had to keep from closing his eyes. He watched Brian plow into him, the exalted frost over his hazel eyes had turned the irises a deep forest green. And the look was all for Justin.

Brian gazed down at his lover, the sweet salty taste in his mouth mingling with the raw pancake batter until he couldn’t distinguish between the flavors. He watched Justin’s pupils contract, pulling into themselves until the blue was all but complete. The sun had risen in the pale blue sky, shining tendrils of pure white light over their faces. Justin arched his back, catching the sun in his smiling face. His eyes looked nearly white in the morning glow.

Seeing the boy brought him close to the edge, his dick swelling inside the boy even more. He grunted, matching the sounds his boy was making, pushing in, his thrusts faster, harder. Brian knew how much the boy could take, how delightfully hard and quick his tight hole could bear.

“Brian!” Justin’s voice, thick with lust.

“Justin.”

“Brian!”

“Oh, God!” He thrust into the blonde, more, more, nearing his breaking point.

“BRIAN!” It was a harsh whisper, but the boy beneath him didn’t move. Brian shook his head, looking at Justin in the speeding car.

“Hmm? What?” He breathed.

Justin grinned, whispering in his lover’s ear even though Cameron was involved solely in her thumping music. “You’re hard.”

“Are you complaining?” Brian asked, feeling his cheeks flush red.

“Nope.” The boy relaxed against him. “But Cameron might.”

Brian looked at the driver with a sigh. “Sorry.”

Justin nodded, grinding his ass against Brian’s erection. The man swallowed a groan, his eyes rolling to the back of his head. He fell back into the dream.

“BRIAN!” Justin groaned beneath him, his eyes straining to watch the man above him as his leaking cock was taken in Brian’s hand and jerked along with the increasing pressure. The boy felt an eruption shoot through his body starting with his mind and numbing his limbs. He came as Brian thrust harder, stronger, faster, faster, his breath heaving, sweat gleaming over his skin. The man could hardly contain himself against the building explosion, his cock throbbing with need.

Justin pulled him closer with his legs, licking his lips. That was all the man needed to fall into the dwindling oblivion of ecstasy, his vision dotted with stars. Justin was looking up at him, watching the tremble of bliss shake him to the core.

“Oh, fuck.” Brian groaned.

“I’d say.” Justin answered as his lover collapsed on top of him. The man slipped a finger between them, sliding in the boy’s seed. He brought it up to his lips and tasted the tip of his finger with a scant kiss.

“Better than batter.” He smiled, and kissed Justin as if it was their last day on Earth.

\*

“Cam?” Justin asked, turning down the music.

“Don’t touch the radio, Jus.”

“For one second? Please?”

“What?”

“Where are we going?”

“Away from them.”

“That much is obvious. You’ve been going away from them for most of your life.”

“Look, Jus, we have to take a breather here okay? I let you bring your guy, and that seemed to make you happy so I was okay with it. I need to think.”

“Why did you come to the hospital?”

“Because.”

“Not good enough.”

“Because the man who ran you two off the road may not have been doing it for just pleasure. I was hired to kill him and I think he was paid to do the same to you.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. Maybe because you’re my brother but maybe not.” Cameron shook her head. “I’ve been an assassin for most of my life and no one has ever gone after you or anyone else from this family. It doesn’t make sense. The man likes causing innocent people pain but this time it wreaks of personal hit. I don’t think he’s finished trying.”

“Do you know who it is?”

“I know the code name of the hitter, the alias. I know the car that went after you. But the man who hired your attacker is an obsolete, an enigma. That’s who I’m trying to find: The Boss Man. He’s duped everyone in my inner circle for years. Nobody’s been able to track him and it’s pissing us off all to hell.”

“Oh.”

“Are we done for a little while? I have to concentrate. I didn’t take into effect that I’d have bodyguard work to do.”

“Yeah, we’re done. I’m…sorry to be in the way.”

“It’s my choice to protect you, Jus. I wouldn’t do it if I didn’t want to. You know that.”

“I know.” Justin rest his head on Brian’s shoulder, the man still asleep. “But I…Will and Brad ended up bringing trouble to me and if this is me bringing trouble to you…I’m sorry.”

“Trouble is fun, Justin. If you end up being more than I can handle than I hope I’m on my deathbed because I’ll be no good to my crew. I’m a hired killer. Trouble is what gets me paid.”

“Okay.” Justin turned up the radio.

Cameron turned it down again. “You’re not like them. Brad and Will, Craig and Jennifer. You’re different. Jus, you have emotions. You have a soul.”

“They aren’t that bad.”

“You’re not like them. I can call you family and not feel like it’s just a word. I can say I care about you and not feel like a liar. In my heart I know that there’s a little bit of home in you that I can come back to and not feel like I have to leave part of myself behind.”

Justin smiled. “Thanks.”

“And your boyfriend is really fucking hot. Bring him along and you can pack all the trouble into your overnight bag. I can deal with that later.” Cameron smiled.

“Sure.” Justin smiled again and rest his head against the window as Cameron turned up the radio. But not loud enough that she couldn’t hear her brother if he needed to say something again.

\*

The man crossed his legs at the ankles up on his desk, watching his most praise-worthy thugs sit before him.

“You failed me.” He said softly, the anger simmering just under the surface. “You ran them off of a GODDAMN CLIFF AND THEY SURVIVED!” The boss stood up, slamming his fists down on the blotter. “This isn’t the kind of work I have come to expect from you boys.”

“Permission to speak, sir? We can’t control what happens once we shove them off the cliff.”

“This from the man who was paid to ensure they left this plane of existence.” He snarled. “Boyd, you’re out of my organization, out of my protection. You’re on your own. Now GET OUT!” The man bellowed, turning to the others. “One of you will kill Brian Kinney. Justin Taylor too if he gets in the way, I don’t care. I’ll double what I was paying Boyd to anyone who brings me Kinney’s pretty little head!”

\*

Will drove along the highway, hoping he could trail Cameron without her noticing. It wouldn’t last long. The girl had a good idea about how to keep a lead. He hoped Brad would have better luck in finding the man who tried to kill their brother.

“She’s breaking the law.” Bear said with a chuckle. “How did blue eyes get to be the good son?”

“He stayed with our folks. Imagine that! They raised him and the only thing he did wrong was be our brother…and that wasn’t even his choice. Maybe it’s good that Cam has him. Maybe she doesn’t have a fuck-thirsty ex-pimp who wants to fuck him.”

“Or a room-full of flesh traders and a snuff film company.” Bear added.

“Yeah.” Will smiled. “That too.”

“Maybe what she has is worse.”

“I don’t want to know if it is.” Will sighed. “I really don’t want to know.”

\*

Brian woke as he was moved, Justin at his head and Cameron at his feet. He let his head fall back, following the line from Justin’s groin to his face.

“I can walk.” He said and the boy nearly dropped him on the dirt.

“We tried to wake you for five minutes. You didn’t stir. I thought you had…that you needed to be back at the hospital.” Justin said as Cam aborted her carry and walked forward.

“Did I do something to piss her off?” Brian jerked a thumb in Cameron’s direction.

Justin laughed. “Not in general, just our species. And mom.”

“Great, a nice mountain resort in the middle of nowhere and we’re stuck here with a man-hating dyke.”

“She’s not a dyke. She doesn’t like women either.”

“Oh that’s even better. At least we have something in common. I think I’ve found the bug up her ass though…if she doesn’t like anyone, she just needs to get laid.”

“That’s your answer for everything, no matter what the person’s sexual preferences!”

“Hey, when something works…”

“Will you two get moving? I don’t want to be out in the open right now!”

“Cam’s hunting the guy who tried to kill us.” Justin explained as the couple went inside her cabin.

“I thought that’s what your brother’s were doing.”

“If left up to them you would both be dead.” Cameron glared at the man.

“Brian, how about we leave the inane comments until later okay? That way Cam won’t be forced to kill us before the other guys get to us.”

“Sure.” Brian shrugged. “Anything’s better than another minute with our families.”

\*

Justin snuggled against Brian in their room, the covers insubstantial for the mountain chill. He shivered, curling fingers around Brian’s arms and pulling the man’s sleeping limbs over him.

“Brian, leave it up to you to sleep your deepest as soon as we’re alone.” Justin sighed. He got out of bed and tucked the thin blankets under his lover’s chin. The brunette didn’t seem to be cold, but then, he was a top. They always seemed to have enough warmth for themselves and the bottoms they took to bed. But not tonight, Brian had warmth to heal himself for now. Justin went down the short hall and peered into Cam’s room, the door slightly ajar.

He thought his sister would be asleep, her room basking in a silvery moonlight. But the sounds coming from her room were not those of a person asleep. Cameron was talking to herself, sitting at a desk surrounded by a soft lamplight.

“Cam?” Justin whispered. He remembered walking into her room like this when he had had a nightmare. His brothers and sister used to be a complete family. For a short while, they had the dream life.

The woman started, swinging to the door with her gun trained on Justin. The boy jumped back and ducked behind the doorframe.

“Jesus, Jus!” Cam sighed, lowering her gun. “You’ve got great instincts.”

“I learned to duck a long time ago. Well…not that long ago. Only when the shit started hitting the fan.” Justin crawled into the room and sat on his haunches. “Can I have another blanket? It’s cold.”

“I don’t have any spares. Not many guests.”

“Yeah.” Justin sighed. “Cam?”

“Hmm?”

“Are you unhappy? Like this, out in the middle of nowhere with no one around?”

“Sometimes.”

“But not other times?”

“Are you always happy where you are?” She asked. Justin shook his head. “Nobody is. There are no absolutes in life. No always. No never.”

“But that doesn’t mean you have to be unhappy during your lifetime! Because there’s a risk of being unhappy once or twice, every now and then.”

“I’d rather not taste the dessert and have it taken away than to eat half of it, really enjoy it, and find out it’s made of dirt and blood.”

Justin giggled. “You’d eat half a dessert made of dirt and blood?”

Cameron threw a crumpled piece of paper at her brother. “That’s not the point, Justin!”

“I know the point. You’re afraid of being happy. I know the type. I’m in love with one.”

“I am NOT afraid, Justin. My lifestyle can’t afford to bring a person in. Why bother caring if they’re just going to die?”

“The fun is in the journey, not the destination.”

“Time to keep the kids away from the philosophy section.”

“Listen, sis, I’m not going to tell you that if you fall in love the person won’t die or dump you or cheat on you or murder you in your bed. You never know, but that’s part of life. I could never have known that Will would come into town dragging a whole lifetime of problems, but I dealt with it. I didn’t know that Brad would be a snuff film director and twink trader, but we worked that out, too. Brian made him give it up and now he’s got a nice legitimate job. He says he’s happier than ever. It can happen for you too. You don’t have to kill people.”

“Justin, you’re ideals are as unscathed as I’ve ever heard. You’re pure, untouched. When you start living like the rest of us you’ll see how hard it really is. I don’t want you to grow up, but it’ll happen and all this preaching about love and family is going to seem silly to you too.”

Justin leapt to his feet, pointing an accusatory finger at her. “You have no fucking idea what I’ve been through! You left when I was little, all of you did. You claimed that our folks were assholes but you left me with them! And I think they’re a lot nicer than all three of you! They’re honest and care about me and don’t drag me into their crap. Sure, they have problems, but nothing compared to what you and Will and Brad are forcing on me! I have been beat up, raped, tortured, kidnapped, hurt, strangled, threatened, fucking AUCTIONED OFF to the highest bidder, scared, tormented, put into shock, pulled out of shock, run off the road, put back into shock…and before there was icing on the family cake, I was hit with a mother fucking baseball bat because I wanted to dance with my lover at prom. After that, my family didn’t come together. You and Will and Brad weren’t even there. Only mom gave a damn. Nothing is sweet and nice about what I’ve gone through, but damnit, Cameron, I deal. I will always deal. I am stronger than you because I won’t let them keep me fearing what will happen next! What I say isn’t silly! I believe in love because I choose to, because to me it is real. Fuck you! If Brian wasn’t asleep, we’d walk out of here.” Justin spun and walked out of the room, yelling behind him. “Thanks for warming me up you frigid bitch.”

\*

Will called Brad half a mile from Cam’s cabin as Bear watched the darkened house with binoculars. “They stopped. We’re forty-five minutes outside of town.”

“Great. What are they doing?”

“Sleeping, looks like.”

“Okay, they’re safe than. Keep watching the house and I’ll be up there as soon as I can.”

“Sure thing. As long as our sister doesn’t catch me.”

“Just keep them there.”

“I think that’s what they’re planning to do.”

“I know, but make sure.”

“Don’t worry, Brad, they’re sleeping like little angels.”

Brad rubbed his temple. “Good night, Will.” He said and hung up.

\*

Justin put on his jeans and shoes and slipped outside through an open window, cupping his fingers beneath the ledge and pulling down so Brian wouldn’t catch a chill. He trekked through the wildflowers and weeds toward the front of the house, hoping his sister wouldn’t jump the gun again and shoot him on site. The blonde wrapped his arms in a tight hug, angrily stomping through the brush. Here he was stuck in the middle of nowhere, all alone with a man intent on taking his life somewhere out there, and he was too pissed at Cameron to give a good goddamn.

Bear cleared his throat inside the car. “Blue eyes at ten o’clock.”

“Oh, fuck, she’s supposed to be watching him!”

“Relax, we’re watching him. That’s why Brad told us to do it, because your sister isn’t as concerned with the kid as you are.”

Will opened his door. “Stay here, Bear. I’m bringing him home.” He said and got out, charging across the dirt field.

Justin closed his eyes, bitter tears shining in the moonlight. When he stopped watching, his ears picked up on the snapping of dry grass. Running. Someone was running toward him and it was not from the house. The boy turned and ran back, his voice caught in his throat, his breath too thick to scream.

Will caught up with his brother easily, jumping on the boy’s back and riding him to the ground. He turned Justin over and clamped a hand over his mouth.

“Don’t scream, don’t scream. It’s Will. You’re fine.”

Justin opened his eyes, looking up at his brother. Will removed his hand. “You scared me.” Justin whimpered, his unvoiced screams turning into heavy sobbing tears.

“It’s okay, it’s okay.” Will leaned down and kissed both of Justin’s cheeks. “I’m sorry, Justin. Christ, I’m sorry. Did I hurt you?”

“Just scared me.” Justin sniffled.

“You’re the only person I’ve ever known who got scared enough to cry.” Will got off the boy and helped him to his feet.

Justin hung his head. “I just had a fight with Cam and I’m fucking cold. You want to incur some rage? I’m positive I have plenty more.” The boy said nastily.

“No, no, no. I’m sorry, okay? Come back to the car with me, we’ve got the heater on.”

“Bear’s with you?”

“Course!”

“Okay.” Justin agreed and took his brother’s hand. It was easy for him to tell Cam how brave he was but it was harder than hell to not let his protector lead him to warmth and comfort, no matter how small and helpless it made him look.

“Come ‘ere, blue eyes.” Bear opened his door and pulled the boy beside him.

“Come on, Justin, we’re going back into town.”

“Not without Brian William Eric Taylor!”

“Justin, we are not going inside to get your sleeping boyfriend.”

“Then we’re not going anywhere.”

“Justin, we—” Will tried. With one glare from the boy he knew it was a futile argument. Whatever Cameron had stirred up in Justin made the boy ready to lash out at anyone who got in his way. “Fine. We’ll just stay here all night.”

“Works for me.” Justin said. “Promise?”

“I promise.”

Justin nodded and settled against Bear’s warmth. He wanted to cry but wouldn’t allow himself any more tears that night.

Will shrugged at Bear, who looked down at the boy compassionately. “He’s alright.” Bear said softly, as Justin drifted off to sleep.

\*

Brad pulled up beside Will’s car at the crack of dawn, getting out and knocking on the window. Will unrolled the window and smiled as his brother offered a cup of steaming coffee.

“Thanks.”

“He okay?” Brad asked, passing another cup to Bear.

“Yeah, he’s fine. Fast asleep.”

“Good, get him in the car.” Brad nodded to his black Isuzu.

“We promised we wouldn’t take him anywhere.”

“You won’t, I’m taking him. I need you to stay here and keep Cameron away. She was in the car, Will. She tried to kill them.”

“Oh, fuck.”

“I know. Don’t wake him when you move him, I’m going to get Brian.”

“Right. Fuck.” Will got out and ran around to open Bear’s door, the bigger man lifting Justin easily. Brad jogged to the cabin and peered into the first, then second bedroom at Brian.

He opened the window, careful to not wake Cameron who looked ravaged, like she’d cried herself to sleep. Brad climbed inside and wrapped Brian in the blanket, carrying him out the door and to the front of the house. He unlocked the door and left Cam to her bed.

“Hurry up, the sun’s going to shine in her window any minute.” Will said. “If she sleeps at all like she lives, she’ll get up with the sun.”

Brad secured Brian in the backseat beside Justin and got in. “Don’t listen to her, whatever she says. She’s fucking nuts, Will.”

“Okay, keep them safe.”

“I’ll call you when I get out of here.”

“Great.” Will nodded.

Bear was watching Cameron’s window. “Something’s wrong.” He said, squatting behind the driver’s door. “I don’t think she’s in there, Kid.”

“Fuck.”

“Go around the side, I got your back.” He said. “If you can, disable her ride.” Bear whispered, gun trained over the hood at the girl’s window.

“Okay.” Will ducked low, running through the dry grass.

Bear grinned wide and waited until Will disappeared around the house before getting into the car. He put it into drive and kicked up a cloud of dust as he turned to follow Brad, a dark expression in his even darker eyes.

\*

Dark Starr Productions had been shut down for nearly three months but the building was still up and ready, sitting in the early morning sunshine like an obedient pet waiting for its master. Its master was home at long last.

Brad got out of the car and went around to Justin’s side. He opened the door. Bear pulled up silently next to him and watched the brothers interact.

Justin stirred, sitting up suddenly when he realized he was moving.

“Shh. Brian’s here.” Brad soothed.

The boy relaxed. “What about Will?”

“He’s watching Cam. She’s the one who ran you off the road. That’s how she found you so soon.”

“If she wanted to kill us, why did she help us?”

“She is totally and completely gone, Justin. She’s crazier than a shithouse rat.”

“I have to go to the bathroom.”

“When we get inside.”

“But I really have to go! And I don’t wanna go in there!” Justin whined.

“Look, we’re not going somewhere else, we are safer here than anywhere else. I’m sorry. But you have nothing to be afraid of, the man who hurt you is gone. All the men who hurt you are gone. Now don’t wake Brian.”

“He’s been sleeping long enough.” Justin rolled his eyes, lifting a leg across the seat and pressing it into his lover’s groin. “Brian.”

“I said, don’t wake him, Justin!” Brad hissed. “He’s going to need his strength.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s not you she’s after, it’s Brian. She’s jealous that so many people dote over you and she wants to dwindle the numbers of your beloved circle. Starting with the adorable boyfriend.”

“This is too confusing, Cam’s always liked me.”

Brad set his jaw in stubbornness. “Maybe a little too much, okay? Will followed you because we had our suspicions.”

“But if she wanted Brian, why didn’t she just kill him when she pulled me up? I was practically unconscious, I couldn’t have stopped her.”

“I told you, she’s crazy. Who knows why she does what she does? She thinks she’s a hired hitter, did you know that? I looked her up and she’s wanted in nineteen states here in the U.S, and another five in Europe.”

“I think you’re wrong. So what if she has a record, it doesn’t explain why she would be jealous of me. She could have stayed, same as you. She didn’t even know that I had stayed, or that our parents took care of me until—” Justin gaped at his brother. “Brad! Get away from me.”

“Justin, calm down. You’re rationalizing and it’s spinning you around.”

“Get. Away.” Justin breathed evenly.

“Settle down, Justin. Easy. Nice and easy.”

“Brad…don’t do anything stupid.”

“Justin, sit back and relax, we’ll all be fine. I promise.”

The boy unbuckled his seatbelt and scooted next to Brian, lightly slapping the man’s face. “Brian.”

“Hmm?”

“Damnit, Justin, I said leave him alone!”

“Shut up, Brad. He’s my boyfriend, I know what’s good for him.”

“Justin? What’s…going on?”

“We’re in trouble.”

“Oh, Justin please don’t do this. I’m your brother.” Brad sighed, exasperated. “Brian, reason with him would you? Cameron’s the one who tried to kill you and Justin doesn’t believe me.”

“Come ‘ere, blue eyes.” Bear said calmly.

“Bear!” Justin slipped passed Brad and ran to the man.

Brian slid out of the car and stood next to Brad, a wide grin on both men’s faces. “Shouldn’t he be back at the cabin with Will?”

“You just let us worry about that. Let’s go inside.” Brad encouraged, nodding to Bear who started walking with Justin.

“But I don’t want to go in there, Bear!” Justin protested.

“I’m positive you won’t want things to go down in the middle of the daylight, blue eyes.”

“Huh?”

“Move it, Kinney.” Brad said.

“What’s going on?” Brian demanded.

“Oh, smarten up! You destroyed me and now it’s my turn to return the favor. I know now that if I want the work done, I have to do it myself. Fucking idiot slobs.”

“You’re the Boss!” Justin shrieked. “You can’t be!”

“You’ve had too much of the care intended for me. It’s made you soft.”

“Bear, do something!”

“Sorry, blue eyes. I’ve wanted a piece of your sweet ass for a long time. One brother said no, one said yes. Who do you think I’d pick?”

“NO!” Brian bellowed, pushing against Brad and running for Bear. The big man held Justin with one hand and lifted Brian by the jaw with the other.

“Careful, not the fucking face! Either of them! I want them perfect for their screen debut!”

Justin fell to his knees, fingers prying against the tight flesh binding on his wrist with nimble fingers. “Please, please no! Bear, you’re the good guy!”

“No one’s a good guy anymore, baby doll. Not even family.” Brad sneered. “Get them inside.” He ordered. “There’s only one thing to do to people who didn’t die when they were supposed to.”

“Make them wish they had.” Bear nodded and dragged his prisoners into the dark building.

\*

Brad removed the dust cover on his camera and threw it to the floor, much like the clothing he and Bear had taken from their new stars, adjusting the machine to stare at the circular bed cornered in the room. He checked the new film as he had done for a hundred other films. Perfect. The furniture was next to be uncovered, and the sheets were taken behind the camera’s eye. Will had set up this room in good faith his artistic flare would be used for legal porn, but the Kid had been paid and he had no say in what went on after that. The blonde nodded to Bear and the man tied Brian to a chair, then moved to cuff Justin face-down on the sapphire blue bedspread.

“Sound test.” Brad said. Bear leaned over Justin and slapped the boy’s soft, round ass. Justin yelped. His brother adjusted a few settings and said again. “Sound test.”

Justin screamed before his tormentor could hit him again, casting a glare at the dark man who used to be his friend. “Brad, this is insane.” The boy said, his eyes never leaving Bear.

“Color check.”

Bear grabbed Justin’s hair and turned the boy to face the camera. “Open your eyes. Wide.” He said in a growl that would have made a rabid dog run for cover.

Justin obeyed without having to be told. He was scared and it showed. His brother seemed so far away, messing with contrast and brightness. Somehow Justin knew that the man was saturating everything with rich, surreal colors leaving only the blue, blue reality of the youngest Taylor boy’s eyes untouched. When Brad turned the viewing screen to face the bed, Justin saw he was right. His body was an odd golden beige, the color of an old photograph. But his eyes were astonishing azure, the bright brilliance of cerulean blue scribbled on paper right from the box of Crayola’s. That used to be Justin’s favorite color.

“Okay, now Brian.” Brad said, turning the monitor back to himself.

Bear stalked over to Brian and dragged him from the chair, laying him over Justin and cuffing him to the boy’s ankles and wrists. He was now the one exposed to the camera, his body protecting Justin’s.

“Sound.”

Bear punched Brian in the side, forcing a gasping moan from the brunette.

“Sound.”

Bear nodded, licking his fingers and trailing them along Brian’s bowed spine. The younger man shouted.

“Stick those in me and you’ll pull back a nub!”

Brad laughed. “Good enough. Costume.” He told Bear, who disappeared behind a curtain. The blonde walked gracefully over to the bed, turning the monitor as he went so he could see himself. He traced a hand along the swell of Brian’s ass and smiled. “You’re going to be my finest production. Enough to get me back on top…no pun intended.” He laughed at his own joke because neither shackled man thought he was the least bit funny.

“Brad, you don’t want to—”

“If I could do everything I wanted to you would already be dead, but seeing this newest development, I am very glad that you two survived.”

Bear entered the room once more, a leather strap from collarbone to groin fastened by a metal ring around his neck and massive, hard cock. Another strap surrounded his wide stomach, not so much for decoration as to hold the whips that brushed his deep chocolate colored leg. His big hand lightly lifted the Cat O Nine Tails, letting the leather slip through his fingers like water. Bear then toyed with the leather Herrschaft Flogger as if it were his most prized possession, letting the knots on all eighteen ends catch between his fingers. His eyes glittered with excitement as he stepped to the bed and loomed over the blonde and brunette.

“Here.” Brad said, tossing Bear a hooked leather strap from beneath the bed.

Justin couldn’t see what it was, but Brian knew it was a flat gag; the mouth piece was thin instead of balled so the screamer’s tongue was pressed down to the bottom of their mouths. A tremor ran through his body as he wondered who would be screaming so badly they would need such a deliberate gag. He got his answer.

Bear leaned down and lifted Brian’s head to get to the boy beneath, fitting the gag around his shaggy blonde hair. The big man had to pry Justin’s clenched jaws apart to slid the leather piece in, but he had the strength. When he was done, Justin didn’t dare try to speak around it for fear of triggering his gag reflex and choking on his fear and vomit. Small whimpering sounds came from the back of his throat, tears streaming down his face. He felt Brian above him, but that comfort was soon becoming a distant one. They were both trapped.

“And for our other guest.” Brad said with a wicked grin. “A special prize. I had this made with you in mind, Mr. Kinney.” He held the device up for Bear and Brian to see.

It was a cock sheath that Brian had never seen before, a leather coat with tiny sharpened studs on the inside of three wide buckles. Not enough to draw blood on the victim’s dick, but enough to cause pain if tightened enough. Brad intended to tighten it within an inch of its life.

He tossed it to Bear, who flipped both men over and fitted the sheath onto Brian’s cock; one strap behind his balls, one at the base of his shaft, and the other close to the head. He allowed enough room for the man to get hard and press himself right into the studs. Bear turned Justin’s face back into the pillow and waited with Brian prone to the open air on top of his boy.

“Okay, gentlemen. Are we ready for our screen debut?” Brad said, his Irish accent now completely returned.

“Son of a bitch!” Brian shouted.

“Shut the fuck up, Kinney. You’ll scream when we tell you to or we‘ll put Justin on top instead.” Brad said nastily, nodding to Bear who grabbed the braided handle of his Herrschaft whip and brought it whistling down on Brian’s tanned flesh. The man screamed despite all attempts otherwise. “Good. Now we’re ready to roll. Kinney, you give us any vocal trouble and I’ll take you myself and give Bear what he wants.”

“Let us go.” Brian pleaded one last time, tears slipping down his cheeks as Brad checked the screen once more so they could watch themselves torturing the bound men.

“Shh. Not another word. You’ve been warned.” Brad said. He took off his own clothes except a pair of heavy construction boots, cock already stiff and thrumming with the beat of his heart. Brad tossed a zippered leather mask to Bear and put one on himself. “Everyone, positions!” The man yelled to the otherwise empty room. “Quiet on the set! Lights!” He shouted, laughing wildly and switching on a string of bright glowing bulbs. “And action!” He pressed the recorder, letting it roll on the silent victims for a moment before nodding to Bear and coming into the picture himself. He straddled Brian’s legs, fingers reaching between the victims to massage the brunette’s squeezed testicles.

Brian closed his eyes and Bear thumbed one eyelid open, pointing to the camera. He wanted Brian to watching himself as Brad coaxed him into an erection. He bit his bottom lip as the sheath poked his swollen flesh like a thousand fire ants breaking the skin. More tears fell into Justin’s blonde hair as Bear turned the boy’s head to the camera.

Justin breathed heavily through his nose, his eyes mind straining to absorb what he saw on the monitor.

Brad lowered his mouth and took Brian’s balls into his mouth, pulling lightly with his teeth, jostling the prick sheath this way and that to scrape against the man’s skin. He rose, stroking his own cock over Brian’s ass. The blonde pushed the head of his dick into Brian’s tight opening, a low chuckle escaping his mouth as Brian’s eyes widened with the intrusion. The muscles convulsed against Brad’s cock as Brian struggled to let him in, to relax and not struggle. Something told the eldest Taylor brother that Brian had been raped before and he made a note to ask when it happened if the man survived long enough to answer him.

“Ugnh.” Brian moaned painfully, unprepared for Brad to enter him. He didn’t think about the pain, or what kind of diseases a snuff film director carried around, or that after the men were done with him they would likely turn the video into a best-selling true to its name snuff film. Brian didn’t think about his impending death. He thought of Justin, the boy beneath him silenced with a flat gag and pinned, helpless. The boy had his whole life ahead of him, and his big brother was going to take it away, let another man take it away. Even if he did survive, his mind wouldn’t. His heart, his innocence, his youth. None of that would make it out of this alive if his true love was snatched away. Brian knew that he was the reason Justin made it through everything he had thus far. He also knew that Justin was his reason for living.

Brad forced himself deeper, groaning with pleasure as his pulsing cock disappeared inch by inch into Brian Kinney. Once inside to the hilt, he nodded to Bear.

The big man raised his arm and Brian felt Justin tense under him, the lovers watching what was about to happen on the screen. Brian clenched every muscle in his body and felt Brad quiver inside him with bliss. He braced himself for the blow, prepared his body for the shock it had already witnessed once. But Bear had no intention of mimicking his first swing. That had been practice. This…this was real.

He swung his arm with the ferocity of a sharp-toothed trap snapping down, sealing the helpless animal’s fate. His dark eyes burned with ecstasy as Brian shrieked in pain, the welts turning instantly to tears of blood dribbling over his panting sides. Bear reared back to strike again and Brad grunted, shaking his head ’no’.

Brian shook, waiting for the next strike, eyes no longer watching his fate play out in slow, sickly-colored detail. Nothing happened. Bear had drawn blood and it wasn’t yet time for blood.

Brad pulled out of the man and pitched himself back in, grabbing Brian’s hair and arching the man backwards. Justin rose with his lover, tears shining on his flushed cheeks. He saw Bear watching each tear with the look of a starved, vicious wild animal and knew Brian’s torment would not end their ordeal. Bear would have his treasure, too. It was only a matter of time. The boy felt his lover’s masked cock scraping against his backside as Brad thrust into the man time and time again, pulling Brian farther and farther back. Justin’s wrists ached against the gleaming silver shackles as he, too, was forced backwards with his boyfriend. He watched in wide-eyed terror as Bear moved to kneel on the bed where Justin used to be, his huge cock twitching with readiness, pre-cum bubbling at the head. The big man brought his mouth against Justin’s gag in a crushing blow as if he could eat right through the leather. Dissuaded by the guard, Bear went to devouring the blonde’s jaw and earlobes, the areas that sent shivers of glee through him when Brian was the aggressor but now only brought disgust. He worked passionately on the boy, tasting every part of the sweet flesh he could pull into his mouth, going down, down, nibbling Justin’s shoulders and nipples, stomach and hips, and finally, he feast his eyes on his delight between the blonde’s trembling thighs.

Brad had Brian up on his knees, Justin’s body pressing his lover harder onto his brother as Bear took Justin’s entire form into his greedy mouth. The big man sucked on Justin eagerly, having finally acquired the treasure he had wanted since the boy first arrived on the streets holding his big brother Will’s still virginal hand. Justin was shaking his head, his eyes diverted from the screen by the dark man’s hungry growls around his cock. He tried to stay soft by thinking of anything his mind could bring forward: His mother…any woman, cleaning his room, broccoli, his father, the disgusting rubbery taste of rum, doctors offices…Chris Hobbs. Pain. Prom. Pain. Hobbs. Pain. Prom.

Pain!

Justin drove his fingernails into the palms of his hands until bright half-moons of blood welled under his touch. The boy concentrated on his skin, the blood, the way it looked nearly purple under the coloring Brad pictured them in.

Bear lifted his head and brought his full height above Justin, intimidating the smaller man until his blue eyes traveled up his attacker’s body to meet the dark gaze. The big man took Justin by the throat and cut off his air supply, grabbing his dick with the other hand and pulling it roughly toward his massive body. The blonde gasped, a tiny whisper of sound. He forgot about his hands and concentrated on not passing out. All his efforts left him with nothing but an unwilling hardon and no oxygen.

Brian shivered at the way Bear handled Justin, the bigger man’s fingers wrapping easily around the boy’s neck and stealing his breath. He felt Brad behind him, felt the man’s fingers trailing over the whipping wounds with awe. Brian knew the blonde behind him was having fun staving off his climax until the appropriate time. This was -his- greatest film, after all. Wouldn’t want to cum too soon.

Brad reached around Brian to stroke Justin’s chest, teasing the nipples with the faintest of touches. Brian shuddered as the man victimized his little brother with grasping, searching fingers. But the older blonde found what he was looking for and touched Bear’s giant hand, wordlessly warning him to take his time and keep Justin awake. Bear released the boy, who would have toppled over if the wide man hadn’t caught him. Rapid breaths shot through Justin’s nose as Bear pushed him back against Brian and wrapped his lips around the boy’s cock once more.

Brian sighed with as much relief as he could find as Brad’s hand curled around the leather masking his dick and squeezed until Brian thought the pain would surpass what was happening to his aching hole. His hazel eyes fluttered, his head burning with the overwhelming sensations. Justin rest his head on Brian’s shoulder, leaning back against the man and nuzzling his lover with his gagged mouth. Brian came out of his delirium and inhaled his boy’s scent. He placed a chaste kiss on Justin’s cheek and tasted the salty fright in his tears.

“Don’t worry, baby.” He whispered, hoping he had been quiet enough to avoid punishment. Neither Brad nor Bear were concerned with noises other than their own as they tended to opposite sides of their victims.

Justin turned pleading eyes to Brian, his nostrils flaring for breath beneath the gag. He watched Brian, saw the pain in his eyes barely masked behind a wall of strength Justin knew only existed to soothe his young lover. Brian was the least selfish person he knew, despite what others thought of him. As a lover he was gentle and thorough, as a boyfriend he was considerate, a friend: loyal if not misunderstood.

Brad silently yanked Brian’s hair toward him, away from Justin. He didn’t want anything to mess up his recording and if the lovers got together they would ruin everything! Bear seemed to feel Brad’s distress and came to the rescue by pulling away from the boy’s dick and pinching the head. Justin inhaled sharply through his nose, turning all his attention on the big man.

Bear reached under the bed and pulled something out, dangling it in front of Justin so the camera could see. It was a 15 centimeter cock ring; a ball separator and metal ring that went around the base of the shaft. The man jingled the metal and snapped it around Justin’s cock. He dove for the boy’s ear and snarled.

“I’m through with this shit, time to take what’s mine.” He said and released the boy, grabbing the victims’ bound ankles and separating them, lifting the blonde’s feet to the wall and shackling him there. Justin hung away from Brian except at the wrists, his ass in the air.

Bear grabbed lube from the floor. He knew there was no way any amount of force would gain him access to the boy without help. The big man used two hands to slather the jelly on his hard, twelve inch cock.

When Brian saw what Bear was about to do he had no choice. He had to scream. “NO! You son of a bitch! Don’t you even—”

Brad covered Brian’s mouth and jerked his head back to meet angry blue eyes. He whispered heatedly. “If you ruin this film I will fucking kill you!” He threatened, each word accompanied by a harder thrust until tears streaked over Brian’s cheeks. Brad’s balls slapped against the wounded ass faster, harder, more determined to torture the man to death.

“You’ll do it anyway!” Brian protested behind Brad’s fingers.

Justin was shaking his head as lube smeared into his hole with first one wide finger, than two. He winced, not wanting this to happen. The fingers worked their way around inside of him, stretching him, preparing him. The boy didn’t want it to feel good.

Bear grew impatient, thrusting his fingers inside the boy over and over, in out, in out. He didn’t care how hard he had to push, he was getting in no matter what. He rose on his knees between Justin’s legs and guided his dick to the opening. Justin tried to close his legs, his thighs straining with the work it took to shield himself from the massive erection. Bear pulled the boy’s legs apart roughly, using his hips for leverage as the tip of his cock touched the tight pink pucker.

Justin tried to scream behind his gag as the dick forced itself against him, slowly, looming like a bad dream. The blonde felt himself stretch, tear, the first trickle of blood hot against his crack as it rolled down and dotted the bedspread. He shook his head until he thought the world would never stop spinning. The big man reached a hand under the pillow and shoved a popper under his victim’s nose.

Brian was sobbing as the meaty man crawled slowly inside of Justin, slow centimeters at a time. He felt Brad pull out but paid no attention until a sharp pain screamed through his insides. He thought at first the man had found a dildo the size of Bear to equal Brian’s torment to Justin’s, but as his pained eyes traveled slowly to the video screen he saw what was really at the root of his suffering.

Brad was working his fist inside of his victim, the only lube the pre-cum he had already leaked into Brian’s ass. The initial thrust had buried his fist and wrist, but now it was harder to get in. Brad had a wide, determined grimace on his face. This was no longer as much pleasure for him as it was competition for the master of pain.

Justin was crying so hard he was choking on the flat gag, the drugs numbing only part of the terror and pain. Bear went under the pillow again and gave him another popper, his dick only half-way into the boy. He thrust again, pulled out, went in, not getting much farther. He saw the boy’s eyes fluttering, rolling to the back of his head. If Justin passed out, Brad would not bother with preliminaries, he would just shoot him.

Bear pulled out of Justin in one fell swoop, leaving the boy dangling from his ankles as he went in search of cold water. The blonde felt like he was flying, the hot tingling in his ass a drugged, faint reminder that there had just been something filling him to the brim. He heard the slow drip, drip of his blood hitting the blankets and wondered when it had started to rain. He felt Brian behind him but couldn’t quite see the man. Justin’s head lolled to the monitor and through hazy eyes he saw Brian on the wrong end of Brad’s arm. The boy wanted to scream, but his mouth was a void of black leather.

The big black man came back and doused Justin with a bucket of ice water. The boy bucked under the wave of shock, his eyes shooting open with awareness. The pain was real, the fear was real, though both were still distant after two doses of weak amyl nitrate.

“What did you do!” Brad roared, yanking out of Brian and letting the man collapse on top of Justin, so the only thing still raised was the boy’s feet on the wall. “He’s prone to shock you dumb ape!”

“You’re ruining your movie!” Bear yelled.

Brad scowled. “I can be editor too. You, go and watch the door. Will might come looking for us.”

Bear glared at the man. “So you can have all the fun?”

Brad took a gun from his boot and pointed it at Bear’s head. “You already had your fun! When it’s time to bleed them, I’ll let you know.”

Bear stormed out of the room in a rage of thunder. Brad went back to his post, plunging his dick back into Brian. He felt the man shiver and looked to see the pained face on the monitor. The hazel eyes were desperate to close, their surface glossy with numbness. Brad fucked the man harder, his pounding growing faster as he tried to beat the shock settling over his victim. Bear had used both poppers on Justin, and now Brian was going to pass out before he had time to finish.

But not if he had something to say about it. He closed his eyes, ready for the building eruption. Brad trembled against Brian, his cock working double time, rocking against the man’s ass, shoving, bumping against him. Brad grabbed the man’s hips and stabbed deeper still, the entire bed slamming against the wall with loud bangs. He turned his brother’s face to the camera with one hand, though the boy had passed out once Brian fell on top of him. Brad pushed Brian’s face to the camera and brushed the hair away from his forehead. It was time. It was time.

The blonde convulsed, his body trying to cave in on itself while at the same time throwing everything into the far reaches of the universe. It was the best orgasm he had ever had, his body falling in a crumpled heap to the floor.

He didn’t even bother getting up to stop the camera. Even if he wanted to, his legs would not have held him up. Killing the two would have to wait. Now, the victims had the right idea. Sleep was a welcome thought.

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Will took a handful of wires and pulled. He didn’t know anything about cars except that if one thing was wrong the whole damn thing would be useless. As soon as he disabled the Viper, the blonde heard a car racing away and it was only after running and waving his arms that he realized Bear was not going to stop.

“What the fuck.” Will sighed. He trusted the big man. He trusted Brad. But why had his friend taken off? Was there something wrong with Jus— “No.” Will dropped to the ground searching for Bear’s blood, or any sign that Cameron was driving their car. “FUCK!”

“Get up. Slowly. What the fuck are you doing here?” Cameron asked, gun barrel pressed to the back of his skull.

Will stood, hands outstretched in front of him. “We’re taking care of Justin.”

“You prick. Just because I’m a girl I can’t protect my little brother?”

“It’s not that…besides, you’re ready to kill your other little brother.”

“You’re not my brother. You’re a mistake.”

“Thanks, dad.”

Cameron slammed her gun across the back of Will’s head, knocking him to his knees. “Fuck him!”

“Brad said you were crazy and he’s right!”

“He said what?”

“That you were jealous of Justin and wanted to kill him!” Will moved away in a backwards crawl.

“And you believed him.” She said, shaking her head but never taking her gun off him.

“How else would you have known where they were when the Jeep fell?”

“I was chasing the guy who did it you fucking idiot! Why would I save them if I wanted to kill them?”

Will opened his mouth, closed it, looking for the self-righteousness that was quickly fleeting.

“Why would I openly ask them to come with me? Away from the potential threat? My group intercepted a call from a nurse to the man in charge of running Justin off the road. He said he was on his way. I had to get there! But I was too late apparently.”

“What do you mean? They’re safe with Brad, and now Bear.”

Cameron closed her eyes, lifting the gun. She laughed in disbelief. “How did you end up with absolutely no brains whatsoever, you naïve child? I was too late because Brad and Bear were already there!”

“No way!”

“If Brad wasn’t his brother, I would never have clued him. He has the ability to get close without suspicion and a sick mind to do anything to anyone. If he’s the one who took Justin and Brian, than he’s our man. All he needed was motive, though maybe there isn’t a reason for hurting your family.”

“Fuck! FUCK! He does have motive! Brian ruined his business, forced him to leave it behind or he’d tell the cops everything.”

“And you thought a man, any man, would let that go? Just give up without resentment or revenge? I used to think Justin was the harmless one, but you’re no smarter than a box of hair.” She turned and walked away.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Will got up and followed her.

“After them!”

Will grabbed her arm and turned her around, blocking the swing of her right arm. “I know how to defend myself.” He hissed at the surprise on her face. Will released her. “Cameron, I think I know where they’re going. If Bear…he always joked around about fucking Justin. I never thought he was serious. Justin slept on his lap all night.”

Cameron lowered her head. She had forced Justin right into the thick of his enemies. Just let him walk out. Will had a good reason to be here guarding the boy from outside, because she didn’t do such a great job. “You couldn’t have known. He was your friend. Unless he figured all this out before us and followed Brad to stop him…” She said, almost compassionately. Will wasn’t as tough as he pretended to be. He had a soft center and he was exposing that side to his sister. She started walking to her Viper once more, trying desperately to avoid any emotional garbage that would complicate her life even more. Who was she becoming? Caring for not only Justin, but for Brian because the man loved him? And now Will…no. She wasn’t going to do this. She had enough trouble protecting herself and the ones she swore to love.

“I…wish that were true. He told me to—” Will winced. “Put your car out of commission while he guarded your window. When I was too far to catch up he took off.”

Cam stopped and turned around. “What did you do to my car?” She asked, forcing calm into her voice.

“Pulled wires.”

“Oohh.” Cameron nodded. “Is that all?”

“Um…yeah?” Will shrank before her with dread.

“If I wasn’t prepared, you would have killed your baby brother. You do realize that? Unless, of course, he’s already dead, but I‘m betting there are worse things than death planned.”

Will swallowed the fear of what Justin might be going through. “You’re prepared?”

“Of course I am! I’m an assassin. Do you think I’d go around without a backup plan? A second way to escape if my targets come after me? Don’t be a fool.”

“Great! Let’s go!”

“I’m going alone.”

“Like fuck you are! I’m the only one who knows where they might have even -remotely- taken Justin and Brian, and if I don’t come you’ll be up shit creek without a paddle. I’m going with you.”

“Asshole.”

“Bitch.”

Cameron rolled her eyes. She could have argued with Will until the sun went down but it wasn’t helping their brother. She also could have shot the other blonde until he gave the information…but if he was anything like her, he would die with the secret. She was betting he was more like her than she would like to admit.

Damn.

“Fine. But don’t try to play hero. I’ve got the firepower and if you don’t duck and cover I’m going to make sure you get caught in the crossfire.”

“Aye aye, sir!” Will said, mock-saluting her.

“Go ahead and make me regret this, dickhead.” She scowled, heading inside.

Will shrugged, talking to himself as he followed. “I’m supposed to drive you crazy, we’re related.”

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Bear reached the front door and kept right on going. He knew for a fact that Will would find a way to get to them, and he wasn’t sticking around to see what the boy did to Brad. Bear was a big man, and it took him a very long time to hide no matter where he went. He got into Brad’s Isuzu and took off at lightening speed, passing the old Dark Starr Productions building, the Rising Sun Motel, and all the other dilapidated shacks this side of Pittsburgh’s outskirts. A red blur was coming his way and Bear had to swerve and skid off the dirt road to miss it, the driver disregarding all other life besides his own.

The big man shook his head. He could have sworn the driver was Brian, though he knew Brian was inside with Brad. The rearview mirror caught only a glimpse of the red Jeep heading towards the back parking lot of the Rising Sun Motel.

“Fucking loony!” Bear shouted and drove away.

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Justin’s shivering woke him and he lifted his head slowly, the pain in his lower body like nothing he had ever felt before. The world came back into focus, bright lights blinding him to most of the room. But it looked like he and Brian were alone. The boy tried to rouse his lover, nudging the man with his head. Their wrists were still bound and Justin couldn’t feel his arms because they had been pinned beneath him for so long. He kissed Brian’s forehead. The man was bitterly cold and soaked to the bone.

A tremor of fear ran through the boy like ice. Justin rolled his head back and watched for movement in his lover’s chest. Nothing. Was Brian breathing? Was he dead!?

Justin moaned behind the gag, his mouth aching under the leather. How long had he been out?

“Mmunuh?” Brian whispered, voice raw with screaming.

“Mmph!” Justin answered, nudging Brian again. Tears slipped down his cheeks in relief as first one eye, then the other opened and fixed on Justin.

“Jus…tin?”

The boy squeezed his eyes closed, pressing his own chillingly cold forehead to Brian’s. He sobbed, laying on the bed with his ankles shackled to the wall and his arms beneath both bodies. Brian’s arms were arched painfully behind him, twisting, his shoulder blades meeting at his back. He had never thought his body was capable of such contortion, but since his front was tied to Justin’s back they had no choice. Brian struggled, pushing himself up onto his knees so Justin was pulled off his arms and lifted in the air by his legs.

“Do you know where you are?” He whispered, noticing Brad on the floor fast asleep. Justin nodded. “It’s okay, baby. We’re leaving.” The man promised, edging his way along the bed, bending Justin’s knees. He tried to get closer to inspect the wall where the men were held in place, but Justin winced, his breath coming in ragged gasps through his nose. Brian backed up. “I’m sorry, Justin.” He whimpered to the boy. Bear had…Brad had…Brian didn’t feel the pain and that worried him. He knew he should have been reeling, or at least in as much pain as Justin. His body was numb. His head…dizzy. The exertion of moving so quickly was too much for him to handle.

“Mm mumph!” Justin watched his lover go from aware to wavering, the man’s usually tan skin waken with sweat and shock.

Brian fell backwards in a dead faint, his knees bent beneath him and Justin’s body on top.

“Mm!” Justin struggled to pull away from Brian to spare the man’s legs the extra weight. He noticed Brad on the floor and stopped moving. His brother stirred, but did not wake. Justin sighed and started to move again when he heard footsteps in the front room. He froze.

The curtains waved as if a small breeze wafted through them. Justin watched the silhouette of a tall women appear in the doorway, gun trained on the still room. He swallowed hard in a dry mouth as Cameron stepped into the space, eyes cautious for their enemies. She stepped to the bed and turned Justin’s head to look at her.

The boy’s eyes were wide with fright and pain, but he was alive. “Are they here?” She whispered.

Justin nodded, jerking his head to the other side of the bed.

Cameron stalked to Brad, putting her spiked boot heel on his groin. She slammed her foot as close to the floor as she could, forcing a scream from her brother that reverberated along the cement walls. The shotgun shoved into Brad’s mouth as soon as he opened it, his eyes round and staring up at his face. His hands struggled to remain at his sides, though they really wanted to cradle his punctured balls.

Will came into the room and ignored his older siblings, going to Brad’s safe. He cracked it without thinking, the skills he had learned on the streets in his youth proving their worth. The contents inside were exactly what he planned to find: keys to the cuffs.

“Mother fucker.” Will snarled, walking over the man’s legs to reach Justin, releasing the boy’s legs and lowering him gently to the bed. Even so, Justin started to sob with searing pain. “I know, I’ll take care of you.” The blonde promised, carefully unhooking the gag. He pried it tenderly from his brother’s dry tongue and cringed at the sticking sound it made leaving Justin’s mouth. How long had he been gagged?

Justin screamed. Loud, long, and as blood-curdling as his fear would allow. He shrieked as fast as he could draw breath, wordlessly, painfully. His throat protested the sudden work, but even that didn’t stop him.

“Baby! Justin!” Will tried to quiet him. “It’s Will. It’s me.”

Justin turned away from his brother, pressing his face against Brian’s shoulder. He screamed at Brian, his voice unable to carry any other tone.

Will raced to release their wrists so Justin wouldn’t break his arms trying to push against Brian. He let the boy wrap his arms around the man as soon as he was free, checking the brunette’s pulse and surprised to find one. He nodded at Cam and ran to the supply closet, glad that Brad had showed the place off like it was a new home. The blonde ran back to the bed and laid a blanket on the floor, taking Brian and putting him on top of the cover. He knew Justin would follow wherever his lover was placed, and he was right. Will draped a heavy blanket on top of the bodies and tucked it around every curve of the victims.

“Christ.” Will stared at the shivering, screaming form of his little brother, his heart breaking with the boy’s agony. He didn’t want to touch Justin, but Brian wasn’t waking up. The boy needed to be held, warmed. The bed had been so drenched that Will hoped it was water and not sweat. They would be more than dehydrated if it was all sweat.

“Open your mouth wider you cutthroat shit!” Cameron ordered, pressing the gun barrel down his throat whether the man complied or not. “Your own brother! I thought it was bad enough you did it to me, but now Justin! You sick fuck!!!” Her voice rose an octave with rage.

Will turned to the pair. That was why she hated her family? Because Brad… “Fuck.” Will whispered. “Sick fuck.”

“You don’t deserve death! You would figure out a way to sneak through hell you fucking asshole!” Her voice rose again and she shoved the gun farther into his mouth.

“Cameron.” Will went to them. “Cam.” He said again when she didn’t even look at him. “CAM!”

“What!” She shrieked, tears running down her cheeks.

Will shook his head. “Calm down. Don’t fall apart on me now, okay? I need you with me.”

The woman sobered up, sniffling. “You need me.”

“I need you. Justin needs you. Brad has to pay for what he did to you and Justin, okay? Make him pay.” Will put a tender hand on his sister’s shoulder. She didn’t pull away. He knew saying he was sorry would do no good, so he didn’t say anything more.

“Okay.” She said, anger returning to her eyes like blue fire. “I’ll make him pay.”

Will searched Brad’s pants for his cell phone and called an ambulance. He reported two injured. Brad would be nowhere in sight by the time help arrived. At least, not enough of him to require medical attention.

“Where’s Bear?” Cam asked.

“He’s gone. There’s no way he’d stick around. With all that bulk, he’s nothing but a coward. He…did his part.” Will knelt down and stroked Brian’s hair because his brother didn’t want to be touched. The brunette sighed, slowly registering his baby’s helpless screams.

“Just…Justin?”

“Brian.” The boy whispered, his screaming stopping as if the man flipped a switch. “I thought you were dead.” He whimpered.

“Immortal…” Brian chuckled softly.

“You are not.” Justin chided, seeming to forget all his troubles as he gazed into the deep hazel pools of Brian’s eyes.

“We both are.”

Justin smiled softly. “We’re immortal like you’re still thirty.”

Brian answered the boy’s smile. “You’re going to pay for that one.”

“Will I?” Justin asked coyly, resting his cheek on the man’s chest. He listened to the steady breathing and echoed it, calming down completely. They were together, un-cuffed, and warming up. Safe.

Brian cleared his throat and craned his neck to reach Justin’s ear. The boy met him half way. “Take it off? Please?”

Justin nodded and Brian lay back down. The boy’s fingers pried open the clasps of Brian’s cock sheath, gently slipping it to the floor. No one but them knew what had just been done, but Brian’s body lost every last ounce of tension as Justin’s cool hand wrapped protectively around the limp shaft. He rubbed his lover’s cock, but not in a sexual way. It was soothing.

But Brian still rose to the occasion. Justin grinned. “Brian.” He whispered.

“Hmm?” The man answered dreamily, though as his eyes looked to his lover the boy knew Brian was well aware of his reaction.

“Can you give us a minute?” Justin asked the room, not looking at Will. He did his best impression of a crumpled, detached, lost child and hoped that his brother and sister would give them space to regroup.

“Sure.” Will said and went to Cam, the woman letting her worry show on her face.

“Is he okay?”

Will smiled. “He’ll be fine. If we give them room to…” He cleared his throat.

“You’re kidding?”

“It’s comfort. To them, it’s comfort.”

“But they can’t…they’re hurt.” She whispered.

“Not all sex is anal with gay men, Cam.”

“I know that.” She glared at her brother. But she had to admit, she was curious as to exactly what comfort they could derive from fucking after being raped. Maybe one day she would ask Will. If the Kid didn’t piss her off too badly by then.

Will helped lift Brad while Cam held the gun in his mouth. They took him to a room deeper in the bowels of the building where no light dared permeate the inky blackness. This room was meant to mirror a tortured hell, and Brad was about to find out what his many victims had seen right before they met their own fate.

“They’re gone?”

“Yes.” Brian said, his fingers running through the wet tendrils of blonde hair. “Are you in pain?”

“A little.”

“Me too.”

Justin looked up at the man slowly, as if afraid of what he might see. “I…hate him. Them.”

“I know. They’ll get theirs.”

Justin nodded, looking away, resting his cheek back on Brian’s chest. His fingers played lightly with his lover’s erection as if it was expected of him.

“Justin.” Brian summoned the boy to gaze back at him. “Come here.” Brian lowered his hand and unwrapped Justin’s fingers from his shaft. He brought the hand up and kissed the boy’s fingers softly. “Come here.” He said again, gently pulling Justin to eye-level.

“Brian…”

“Shh.” Brian soothed, kissing the boy’s dry lips.

Justin melted into the kiss, his muscles releasing their strain as the man’s hands smoothed over his trembling body to erase the trouble. He felt his own cock rub against Brian’s, growing hard. He gasped as Brian took him in one hand and pulled their cocks together.

“Brian.” The boy moaned, a whisper of a sound.

The man shushed his boy with another kiss, deeper, searching for permission to help heal the fear. His eyes stayed open and he watched Justin, saw the boy let go of his apprehension. The blue eyes opened and met Brian’s gaze, the sparkling sky returning to the dull stare. Brian could tell his lover was smiling, even if their lips were locked so closely that he couldn’t see it. The boy’s eyes said all he ever needed to know.

Brian let his dick go and concentrated on Justin’s, and Justin’s grip returned to take Brian’s place. They stroked each other in unison, meeting and matching each other perfectly, their mouths sealed over one another.

The curtain fluttered as tanned fingers drew it to one side. The man smiled and stepped quietly into the room, his thigh-high leather boots making no sound as he walked to the camera. The Southern stranger switched off the camera and flipped the 8mm reel into his hands, eying Justin’s slightly exposed backside while he did it. He saluted the men on the floor in thanks and left as quickly as he’d entered.

Sullivan Kinney had plans of his own. Later.

Justin groaned, his head flying backwards as his man touched all the right spots. Brian pressed his face into Justin’s neck, the boy’s nimble fingers working their magic. He matched Justin’s shout, rubbing his thumb over the slick head of his lover’s dick as the boy squeezed Brian’s balls. Justin pushed his hips against Brian’s, their hands jerking faster and faster. Both men groaned, frozen in two simultaneous orgasms. They lay covered in each other’s cum, slick, sliding against the stickiness as Brian pulled Justin in for a hug. He let the boy sob and didn’t bother to quiet him or soothe him with more than a warm, welcoming, safe embrace. The tears welled up in his eyes, blurring his vision, but Brian didn’t cry. It wouldn’t help anything, it would only make him feel more vulnerable than he already was.

A gunshot exploded into the cement enclosure and Justin shrieked. Brian laid his hands over the boy’s head, pressing the blonde head against his chest. Justin went back to sobbing, though quieter this time as if afraid of being sought out by the new sound. By the time the sirens surrounded the building, Justin had stopped crying altogether and rest silently in the strength of his lover’s arms.

Brian didn’t mention that there were other people in the building. He never said what happened to any of the EMT’s loading the men into the ambulance. All he said was that if he and Justin were separated than they would walk to the hospital.

They weren’t separated.

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Cameron sat in the corner, head on her knees. Will stood by the remains of his big brother, covered in more of the man’s head than was left on the body. He finally let out the breath he hadn’t realized he’d been holding and wiped at his eyes with both hands. His sister had decided to remove the shotgun from one opening and shove it in another…lower area.

Will had covered the man’s mouth so Justin wouldn’t hear Brad’s screaming grunt while Cameron plunged her weapon up his ass. Her face was one of detached delirium, her eyes only for revenge on this stranger. He wasn’t her brother, he wasn’t a man, he was just so much meat to destroy. And destroy him, she did. The gun went off before she had time to brace herself to shoot. It knocked her on her ass and covered Will in the aftershock.

The boy thought his sister was crying, sobbing, in shock with her arms dangling at her sides and knees brought up to her chest. She held the gun loosely in her right hand.

“Cam?”

She turned a smile, a laugh, to greet him. “Oops.”

“Oops? Do assassins say ‘oops’?”

“Oops.” She repeated, shaking her head, as if she couldn’t say anything else.

“I’m glad I’m on your good side.” Will paused. “I -am- on your good side, right?”

Cam raised an eyebrow. “I don’t have a good side.”

“But if you did?”

“Then you’d probably be there.” She got to her feet. “How are you with dead bodies?”

“I’m not freaking out, if that’s what you mean.”

“Good. You can get rid of him. I’m going to the hospital.”

“But—”

“You want to get on my good side? Bury your brother.”

Will scoffed. “He’s not my brother.”

“That’s what I like to hear. Now get rid of him.”

“You’re helping, Cameron. You shot him. Just because you’re a girl doesn’t afford you the right to leave messes for the men to clean up.”

Cameron smiled. She would have to construct a good side for Will to be on one of these days. He wasn’t afraid of talking back to her, or treating her like some waif. “Fine, asshole.”

“Get moving, bitch.”

“Will.” She nodded, approvingly.

“Cameron.” He smiled and they both bent down to hoist Bradley out the door.

EPILOGUE

With stitches and bruises where Bear and Brad had done their worst, Brian and Justin were stuck in the hospital for another week. In the same room, they couldn’t have cared less. In the same bed for most of the stay, they could have stayed there forever. On their request, only Michael was allowed to visit, and only after an advance warning of interruption.

Brian settled back against the pillows listening to his boy sleep, the gentle breathing like a soft music that soothed even the most troubled souls. And he knew troubled souls. The man let his thoughts drift away, sleep dulling the edges of his consciousness. Memories flooded to him and he didn’t try to stop them. They weren’t recollections of Brad or Bear, pain, shock, suffering…

Daddy's girl

The hotel room was dark, marred only by a thin line of silver moonlight from the open balcony. The heavy drapes were drawn to the side, the thin gossamer curtains beneath dancing to their own melody with the cold night breeze. Two shadows stood as one, their bodies intertwined in a maze of arms and legs, lips molded into a shadow. Brian held Justin, kissing him deliriously as if it were something natural; breathing, speaking. Living. The boy pulled away, millions of stars overhead glittering in his deep blue eyes as he gazed at his lover. When he spoke, his voice was a hushed whisper afraid of disturbing their last peaceful night of vacation.

“This is the best birthday present ever.” He said, caressing his boyfriend’s chest. Several long strands of blonde hair swept across his forehead and Brian brushed them back.

“You’re welcome.” Brian said, turning to hold the boy against his chest so they could both look up at the full moon.

“What are you thinking?” Justin asked after a moment of silence.

“Don’t ask me that. You’re not my wife.” Brian said with a low chuckle. Even now he tried his damnedest to stick to those rapidly fleeting ground rules for all tricks, all lovers. But how could he apply any of his former rules to Justin when the boy was his boyfriend? That was an unbreakable rule and Justin had decided that it was something that didn’t apply to him. To them. Not anymore.

“Want to know what I’m thinking?” Justin purred.

“Do I have a choice?” He asked, hugging the boy tighter.

“You’ll agree with me, I’m sure of it.”

“Okay, if you’re sure. Tell me.” Brian said, not keeping the trembling terror from his voice.

“Brian!” Justin turned, his eyes gray in the white light. He lightly slapped the man’s chest and stood on tip-toes to reach his lover’s ear. “I’ll tell you what I’m thinking right now: I want you to lift me up on this railing, throw my clothes to the pool downstairs, and fuck me until the neighbors complain. Then I want to fall. Fall with you.” He looked at Brian, and then brought the man’s gaze down, down, down to the pool.

“That’s dangerous.”

“I know.” Justin hummed. “It’s only a few stories, I jumped off my roof once to the pool and I made it. Our room isn’t much farther up, we are only up on the second story. They haven’t covered it up yet, but it‘s too cold for anyone to swim in this late at night.”

“If it’s too cold for them, it’ll be too cold for us. Plus, we could miss.” Brian studied the boy’s eyes, testing if he was serious or not.

“We won’t miss. It’s straight down.” Justin said, his voice full of promise. “And we won’t stay in for too long. That‘s the reason we throw our clothes down.”

“Justin—”

“The pool’s deep enough, I checked.”

“What have I gotten myself into…”

“Listen to the responsible grown up! You’re afraid of heights.”

“And you’re afraid of spiders, so what?”

Justin blushed. “Just kiss me you fool, it’s my birthday wish.”

Brian smirked. Fool, he was. Afraid, he was. But damned if he didn’t know how to kiss his Sunshine. He leaned down, pressing the boy against the railing with only their mouths touching. The man then let his hips lock against Justin’s, rubbing his groin against the boy as both grew hard. He drew Justin’s unbuttoned silk shirt over the blonde’s shoulders and let it drift dreamily into the sky, carried by the breeze all the way down. He dipped his fingers into the belt loops of Justin’s slacks and trailed his kisses down the naked chest as he lowered the pants. Brian licked into his lover’s belly button and let the line of hair leading to the boy’s groin tickle his nose and mouth. Justin laughed softly, a sound Brian had come to both cherish and yearn for. The blonde stepped out of his pants and let Brian come back up with the clothing in hand, their lips locking once more as soon as he was upright. He tossed the pants over the railing and heard a gentle splash. Justin returned the favor, slipping Brian’s flapping button-down over his tanned shoulders and throwing it over the side. He slid his tongue down over Brian’s neck, around his Adam’s apple, his collarbone, one nipple and then the next, down his sternum, flat stomach and belly button before reaching the man’s pants. Justin took the soft cloth in his teeth and pulled the button loose. He coaxed the zipper down and Brian struggled to keep his hands calm at his sides. Justin sniffed his lover, burying his nose deep in the thick patch of pubic hair. Brian yelped with pleasure as the boy’s hot tongue flicked across the base of his dick. Justin guided the slacks down over Brian’s thighs with generous hands, waiting for the man to lift one leg after the other to discard the pants. Justin tossed them over his shoulder to the abyss below, rising slowly back up Brian’s body to meet his panting mouth.

“Now fuck me.” Justin ordered, though Brian was already heading inside to grab protection and back out in a flash.

“Your wish.” Brian moaned, wrapping himself and lifting Justin onto the railing. He pushed himself into the familiar tightness with a grunt of pleasure. “Is my command.”

Justin threw his head back and felt he was floating, only the cold line of metal railing keeping him grounded in reality. “Please.” The boy begged, running his fingers through his lover’s hair.

Brian began his thrusts slowly, carefully, his hands on the arch of Justin’s back to keep them both from falling over the edge. With his legs the only thing still on level ground, Brian felt a thrill of danger-powered excitement pulsing through his veins. When Justin wanted kink…

“Brian!” Justin leaned back and laughed, a low, throaty sound. His arms wrapped around Brian’s shoulders and held on as the man fucked him, pushing him more and more, rocking him slowly off the ledge. “Brian!” Justin moaned again.

“Oh…Justin.” The man answered breathlessly, his eyes following the line of darkness below them. “Ugnh…God…”

“Harder! Harder!” Justin begged, fingers digging into his lover’s flesh. The cool wind blew against their sweat-slicked skin and brought a rash of goosebumps over their bodies. Justin shivered, letting his arms fly from Brian’s skin and draping himself over into the empty air. His back bowed and Brian fucked him harder, fingers sliding over the boy’s skin.

Brian grabbed the boy’s hair and pulled him up, keeping a hand on the small of his neck to keep the blonde from going back too far. “Don’t fall.”

“Don’t let me fall.” Justin grinned mischievously up at his lover.

Brian bit his bottom lip. “You’re asking for it.”

“Not asking. Begging.” Justin said breathlessly.

Brian chuckled and plowed into the boy, shoving Justin’s ass off the railing until the tops of his thighs rest on the metal. Justin cried out with the thrill of it, hugging Brian tightly now. The blonde put his head on Brian’s shoulder as the man rocked him harder, grunting, groaning, breathing in quick pants.

“Brian!” Justin cried out, one hand lowering to massage his aching erection. “Oh, God yes!!!” He said, his world swimming with delight.

Brian kissed Justin passionately, as if that would shut him up and not wake the two o’clock in the morning, sleeping businessmen upstairs. But the boy was determined to make noise and screamed inside the confines of Brian’s mouth, his body bucking wildly under his own hand as Brian’s cock impaled his writhing ass.

The boy pulled away and howled into the night, loud, long, echoing against the silent, latently comatose hotel. He screamed, shooting his seed all over Brian’s stomach and chest.

Brian shouted with bliss, his voice uncontrolled as it bounced off the early-morning walls. A blush of heat rushed over his cheeks, but the wonder of when he’d become the quiet one and Justin the vocal one barely registered as he pumped himself until his erection faded. He pulled out of Justin and looked into the boy’s eyes.

“You.” Justin breathed. “Go. First.” He nodded behind him, still hanging over the railing.

“A fuck…like that.” Brian panted. “And I’ll do anything.” He whispered with a short laugh.

“Go.” Justin urged, kissing Brian again. “Don’t forget to hold yourself before you hit.”

Brian raised an eyebrow. “I’m telling Debbie you talked me into stupid stunts.” He put on leg over the railing nervously.

“She’d never believe it. I’m her angel.”

“So I hear.” He shook his head, whispering. “The things I do for sex.”

Justin nodded, draping the gossamer curtain around his body. The material clung to him, the darkest parts mere shadows of treasure. The boy smiled and waved. Brian laughed and closed his eyes, tipping himself over the edge.

He didn’t plan on screaming, but the sound ripped himself from his throat. Justin ran to the rail and watched the man plunge into the pool. He giggled once Brian swam to the surface safely.

“Come on!” Brian coaxed.

“Not on your life!” Justin answered, then whispered to himself. “I am going to get such a spanking when he figures out how to climb the locked gate and get back into the room without a key…”

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Brian stirred from sleep, making sure his boy was still by his side. He stared out the hospital window at the bright sky. Morning came to them through thick and thin, despite however bad they thought it would get. It was truly like Justin’s smile, clear, beautiful, and everlasting no matter how awful things got.

The man kissed Justin’s forehead softly and vowed that as soon as they were feeling better, he would punish the boy severely for tricking him over that ledge.

Not that punishment was different than pleasure once they both took their clothes off...unless they brought the paddle into things.

But that was a different memory altogether.

Thicker Than Blood

Liberty Avenue was even more active than usual. There was nothing new happening on the street, but the first warm day of spring had brought everyone out in full-force to enjoy themselves. The wall-to-wall people were locked onto each other in pairs and sometimes trios, sealed at the lips while they walked. Justin laughed and thought that to be a very nice skill indeed. He tried his damnedest to get to the diner for work, but the opening was blocked by a waiting line of at least three dozen. The boy sighed and pushed his way through, getting shoved back as eagerly as he pushed forward. With a frustrated sigh, the boy tried to yell for Debbie, but his shouts were easily overwhelmed by impatient patrons. He sighed and continued to push against the crowd.

Things had been going so well! So smoothly, both at work and with Brian. The passed three months had found them inside most of the time, cuddling in front of the television or watching the snow fall from Brian’s tall windows. It was nice, and brought a smile out of Justin whenever he thought about it. He was content. Then the happy winter ended with a bang. A big, painful bang.

A very good friend from childhood had betrayed him, caused him the most unspeakable pain. But the treachery had hurt, both inside and out, more than anything else that had happened. Justin said he hated Bear for raping him, but it was difficult to feel no matter how bad the abuse had been. The man had been nicknamed Bear not because of his size or sexual preferences, but because he was Justin’s protector once upon a time. The blonde had named the big man Bear because he was security, a teddy bear with benefits of strength and size. Justin had never been afraid of Bear, until he was given a chance to fuck the boy and threw away all those years of friendship and safety in a heartbeat. That deceit made it hard for Justin to fully trust anyone in his life, even Brian. But damned if they weren’t trying, and succeeding, in building around the nightmare.

“Christ.” Justin sighed. He scanned the area where the back alley used to be and found piles and piles of men just standing around. “I’m going to be late and they need all the help they can get in there!”

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Sullivan Kinney weaved easily through the crowds. He had his Jeep. People tended to get out of the way after the first few hit the ground rolling. A surly laugh escaped his thick lips as he rammed into a car on the curb and shoved his way into the spot. Someone shouted and banged on his window and Sulli grinned at the man. All the danger the Southern man possessed melted through his gaze and showed the shouter how easily he could turn into a victim.

“That’s right, sugah, keep walkin.” Sullivan growled as the man molded back into the crowd.

Getting out, Sulli scanned the array of hot bodies and barely-there clothing. But none of these men held the fascination of the one he came back to Pittsburgh for. The bushy blonde hair he searched for, the sparkling blue eyes, contagious laugh and bright smile all belonged to Justin Taylor. Unfortunately, the boy’s mind, body and soul also belonged to Sullivan’s cousin, Brian.

But that would all change soon. Very, very soon.

He spotted his young, frustrated target and a cat-like smile curled his lips. In his mind, Sullivan had already won the boy. It was only a matter of making sure everyone else knew he reigned victorious. Brian might disagree, but he would not win. Not this time.

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Brian checked to make sure his wallet was still in his jeans pocket out of habit. This many people around made him nervous. They weren’t dancing or fucking, they were just -there-. He raised an eyebrow and watched the door for Justin expectantly. The boy was already five minutes late, but all employees got a reprieve for the day and a purple heart for braving the war outside.

“Where’s Justin, we need the help in here.” Debbie groaned as she pushed her way through to a table shouting that if anyone ended up underfoot they would be buried where they lay.

“I hope the crowds aren’t freaking him out.” Michael said absently.

“It’s been a very long time since being in crowds freaked him out, Mikey.” Brian rolled his eyes.

“They’re freaking -me- out.” Michael retorted, noticing his friend check for his wallet for the sixth time since they sat down. “And you’re being more paranoid than a gazelle in a lion’s den.”

Brian raised an eyebrow again. “Your analogies need work.” He laughed. It felt good to finally get back into short sleeves and show off his already golden tan.

“Damn, you’re fine.” A man said, leaning against the table.

“We’re eating here…” Emmett said with disgust.

“I’m taken.” Brian said flatly, glaring at the man. It was the first time he had acknowledged that fact to anyone outside of their social circle, even though the rumor mill ran it’s course through the ranks. Apparently, this guy had been under a rock all winter.

“That’s what I heard.” The man traced a finger under Brian’s chin. “But I can do you better than him. What’s one little twink from the next, hmm?”

“He’s not a twink.” The group said in unison, not only protective of Brian, but of the coupling of Justin and Brian together. It had been ages, even a lifetime, since they had seen their cocky friend this happy and as friends it was their duty to help retain that happiness.

“Get your hands off him!” Michael added, shoving the stranger.

“You’re not welcome here.” Lindsay said spitefully.

“And there’s no way you could ever replace Justin.” Brian finished.

The man scoffed. “I heard you were domesticated, but no one believed it. Brian Kinney, destroyed by some kid.”

“Go to hell.” Brian said. “And take that Chanel knock-off with you.”

The stranger gasped. “This is not a knock-off!”

“Well it’s not Chanel.” Emmett smirked. “And it’s trying too hard to be anything else.”

The table burst into a fit of giggles and outright laughter, their group now the center of attention in the diner. A flush of red embarrassment flowed to the arrogant stranger’s cheeks. He turned to hurry away and saw his competition shoving through the doorway. A fit of malevolence ran through the man and he turned suddenly, grabbing Brian’s shirt and pulling him in for a deep exploring kiss.

Justin stopped in his tracks. The crowd seemed to part just for him to have a view. He saw the trick’s back because the rest of him was pressed so tightly against Brian they could have fit into the same shirt. Tears burst down the boy’s cheeks before he could put up his shields to stop them. How could Brian do this? In front of everyone! As if for the winter hibernation, Justin was fine to bed down with, but now that the spring chickens were out, he was reduced to so much garbage. To be thrown away.

“Son of a bitch!” Justin yelled.

The group turned from Brian in time to see Justin throw himself out the front door. “Honey, no!” Emmett cried after the boy.

The shock of the unwelcome kiss wore off at Emmett’s shout. Brian threw the brash man off and swung, sending him to the floor. “Justin!” Brian got up and ran to the door. He pushed against the waiting, hungry patrons and got knocked to the floor. “Fuck!”

“He saw what he needed to see.” The man rubbed his jaw and went to sit at the counter with his own laughing friends. “Turn me down…”

Brian screamed in rage. It was all he could do to keep from sobbing.

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Justin found it was much easier to move in the sea of bodies when it didn’t matter who he knocked down to the cement. Tears blurred his vision, his skin suddenly chilled in the warm spring breeze. His legs threatened to go out from under him but Justin didn’t stop. He didn’t know how his heart managed to beat so loudly in his ears when the organ was reduced to slivers of broken pieces. Trust. He never should have trusted Brian with his heart when the man never wanted it to begin with. A mirage, a façade, a charade, that was all they would ever be to each other.

At least, that’s the only thing Justin would be to Brian. A toy that could just as easily be replaced by the latest model hot off the sales floor.

“FUCK!” Justin screamed into the open air.

“Need a cigarette?” Sulli lit his own and blew a thin plume of smoke, leaning against his Jeep.

Justin gasped, momentarily forgetting his troubles. He backed away.

“Just a cig, sugah. Nothing more.” Sullivan smiled, taking the stick from his mouth and holding it toward the boy.

Justin reached out tentatively, taking it. The last time he saw Sullivan Kinney, the Southern man had been the lesser evil of a kidnapping team. He had been gentle, much more mellow than their first meeting.

“A question, Angelface?”

Justin took a deep breath and forced his tears to subside. He knew the man was dangerous, but he just didn’t care anymore. “Sure, why not? Tonight, anything will fail to surprise me.” He steadied himself for any onslaught of inquiries from what color underwear he was wearing to how far away Brian was so he could judge how quickly he had to push Justin in the car and escape.

“Do you hate every little thing about me?”

“What?”

“Do you hate me, totally and completely?”

“How could you ask me that!”

Sullivan smiled. “Surprise.”

Justin stood there, stunned, before returning the smile. “You asked me that absurd question to…surprise me?”

“To see you smile.”

“I don’t believe you. You’re up to something.”

“I sure am.” Sullivan kicked off his Jeep and stood closer to Justin.

Justin swallowed his pulse and tried not to let the man see how he effected him. Heat swam to his face as Sullivan sauntered to press his body mere breaths away. The blonde felt himself react without meaning to. The man had raped him for the love of—but he had grown to be gentle, almost compassionate about Justin’s well-being…A shiver ran through the boy as Sullivan ran a hot hand over his chilled neck, tenderly pulling their faces together so when he spoke, his breath was like tingling fire on Justin’s lips.

“You didn’t answer the question, Angelface.”

“Yes.” Justin shivered and his lips trembling had nothing to do with the weather.

“Yes?”

“Yes…I hate you.”“Do you now?”

Justin gasped when Sullivan pressed their erections together through the tight leather and blue jeans. “Yes…”

“You love me.”

Justin’s breathing grew ragged, heaving from somewhere deep and dark, a place where the most detailed fantasies never reached the light. “Yes…”

“What do you love about me?”

Justin couldn’t control himself, his knees weakening until he either had to fall against Sullivan or hit the ground. He chose Sulli. A tear trickled down his smooth cheek and the man wiped it away.

“Please.” Justin begged. “Let me go.”

“I’m not stopping you, sugah.” Sullivan said, his arms only loosely around the boy’s waist.

Justin fought to look up into the dark hazel eyes swimming in predatory fire. The familiar color but none of the refined tastes...it was a primitive look of desire and ecstasy…primal, carnal. This man was nothing but trouble. Hot, rough, passionate trouble.

“Yes.”

“Back to this again, sugah?”

Justin pressed his face against the open silk vest and inhaled the sweet, musky scent of the man. “I like when you call me ‘sugah’.”

“Well if that isn’t a start.” Sullivan grinned. “Now tell me why you’re not smiling that gorgeous grin and we’ll work from there.”

Justin tried not to blush further. “Brian…was kissing someone else.”

“Sacrilege.”

“I thought we were monogamous.” Justin sniffled.

“This is Brian we’re talking about, sugah.”

“I know, but—”

“Sorry, darlin’, but he’s never been quite stable.”

Justin pulled away and stared up at the man as if for the first time he saw who he was confiding in. “You kill people, Sullivan! Brian’s not the unstable one!” He started to back away but Sulli grabbed his wrist.“I never killed anyone, Angelface. Brian didn’t tell you?”

“Tell me what?” Justin asked suspiciously.

“Last time we were all down in Naw’lins, he figured out that it was all his imagination. Jeff is a police officer now. I can’t believe he didn’t tell you!” Sullivan said with as much feigned shock as he could manage. “I guess no matter what he shares with you there’s always going to be secrets between the two of you.”

Justin squeezed his eyes shut against the burning tears. “No…he didn’t tell me.”

“Sugah, he’s no good. You fell for the wrong Kinney, and for that, I am truly sorry.” Sullivan let the boy go and turned to get back into his Jeep, practically counting the seconds until Justin stopped him.

“Wait.”

Sulli turned around. “Yeah, sugah?”

“Maybe…maybe you’re right.”

“Well he -was- kissing some stranger…back to his old tricks so to speak. And the boys didn’t even try to stop him. If you ask me, they don’t particularly care whether or not you stick around.”

“But they’ve always…acted like they care. Even when Brian was being a jerk Lindsay and Melanie were nice to me. And Debbie.”

“Women are great at hiding their emotions. Witches, all of them. But you go ahead and ask what happened, sugah. Go on back into the diner and demand the explanation you deserve. Melanie and Lindsay and Debbie would never lie for my cousin, would they?” He cocked an eyebrow. “Good seein’ you again, Angelface. I missed you.”

Justin turned toward the diner and back to Sullivan. He was too angry to feel betrayed, and too betrayed to feel anything but helpless.

Sulli lifted the boy’s chin and kissed him, reminding Justin what his cock felt like pressed against the tight leather pants. “I’m heading out of town, maybe back to Naw’lins since it’s been such an unseasonably warm March...It bein’ time for Mardi Gras and all, and weather-wise it should be a paradise...”

“Mardi Gras?” Justin said breathlessly.

“Oh, sure. I go every year. It isn’t the same as goin with someone you care about but…I’m sure when the girls tell you what Brian was doing with a trick he’ll be more’n happy to bring you down. It’ll be fun, just the two of you and all those other gorgeous men. Later, Angel.”

Justin shook his head and followed Sullivan. “I need to pack.”

“I was hoping you’d say that.” The man said, opening the driver’s side door and escorting Justin over the seat. “I’d hate to see another tear fall from those deep blue eyes because of something Brian did.”

\*

Justin raced up to the loft and threw his clothes in the duffel bag. Shorts, some jeans, shirts and underwear, toothbrush and some Crest, a hairbrush…anything else he would need Sullivan assured him could be picked up later. The blonde shook with exhilaration, the adrenaline of danger coursing through his veins. He knew he would get fucked by Sullivan until he couldn’t walk, but for the first time in his life, Justin was looking forward to it. Brian had once said Sullivan would ruin Justin, but how was the boy supposed to know that his former lover meant that the Southern man would fuck him good and hard? It was about time for a change in scenery, and lovers. Justin wanted a nice uncomplicated thrashing; a heated, rough fuck.

The boy scribbled on the message board by the telephone and left his last words behind:

‘I fell for the wrong Kinney, after all.’

\*

Brian kicked his shoes off and leaned against the door. It had been a struggle to get through the crowds. Justin was nowhere to be seen, both on the street and on the way home. The boy was gone, and it terrified Brian to think about how long he would be missing. There were awful people out there just waiting for someone to victimize, and something warned him that if he didn’t find Justin soon, the boy would be that victim.

The man slipped on his running shoes because he planned to do more walking than driving. He would start with the park and check the thicket of trees Justin liked to go to think. There were clubs and bars the boy could go to, but it was useless to go where the waiting line would be longer than two city blocks. If Justin went there, he would still be in line when Brian found him, thus negating its appeal. No, the blonde would go somewhere to think alone. A quiet place where nobody would see him cry.

Justin’s message sat untouched as Brian went back out the door.

\*

The radio screamed into the night sky through the red Jeep’s open windows and Justin threw his arms over his head with a yell that matched the freedom he felt. He couldn’t believe that only an hour ago he had been feeling sorry for himself, wallowing in the self-pity only love could afford. With a dose of Ecstasy in his system and the hot Southerner in the driver’s seat going over eighty miles an hour, Justin knew what it was to let it all go.

“Yeah!” Sullivan roared, watching the boy instead of the highway. “Scream, sugah! Let it out!”

Justin howled at the full moon above, hanging out of the window, his seat belt left dangling and forgotten. “MotherfuckingsonofabitchIdon’tfuckingneedyou!!!!!”

Sullivan sped up, pressing the peddle to the floor. He answered Justin’s cry with a wordless scream of triumph. They had both discarded their shoes and gotten comfortable, then came the music and drugs. And now…

“Come here.” Sullivan shouted over the music. “Come here!” He grabbed the seat of Justin’s pants and yanked him back inside, pulling him over the gearshift and onto his lap.

Justin sat with his legs over the seats and kissed Sullivan, hands raking violently through the man’s hair as they devoured each other. The boy felt the Jeep swerve but made no move to stop it. Some throes of passion were worth dying for. Sullivan jerked the wheel and brought them back onto the highway without opening his eyes. He felt Justin dig his nails into the shaggy tresses of deep brunette, pulling with such a fury that they both fought to keep from coming on the spot. Justin moaned, his face falling to Sullivan’s neck, tongue lapping over the sweet, salty sweat. Sulli unzipped Justin’s fly and reached his hand inside, curling his fingers around the erect shaft. The boy gasped. Such heat in one man’s hands! He turned his body toward Sullivan and pushed himself harder against the man as Sulli roughly jerked Justin’s cock free.

“Sulli!” Justin groaned.

“Spread your legs.” Sullivan answered gruffly, his voice husky with lust and deeply accented with his native lands.

Justin did as he was told and Sullivan reached his hand deeper between the boy’s legs, massaging the pulsing hole with one finger while Justin licked his way down the smooth line of Sulli’s neck. The blonde’s hands pulled Sullivan’s head back against the headrest and looked heatedly into the man’s eyes.

“You like that, Angel?” Sulli asked, breathlessly. The Jeep veered off and back onto the empty stretch of road. He brought his first two fingers to slide over the head of Justin’s leaking cock, wetting himself with Justin’s slick juices.

“Yes!” Justin hollered as the man entered him with hot, slippery fingers. He gripped Sullivan’s vest down one side and pressed his face into the man’s chest to muffle a feral growl.

“Don’t do that!” Sullivan tore Justin’s head back up by the hair, both hands abandoning the speeding vehicle’s steering wheel. “I want to hear you.” He purred and brought Justin’s lips to his, releasing his grip to blindly find the road once more.

Justin groaned, loud and low, falling away from the kiss to nestle against the man’s ear.

“You’re so hot, sugah. So fucking hot.” Sulli said, pushing himself in and out of the boy.

Justin whimpered, trembling lips breathing kisses like tiny butterflies over Sullivan’s tanned chest. The man bit his bottom lip and pressed himself into Justin’s tight canal until his fingers reached their hilt. He found Justin’s prostate and rubbed against it, forcing the boy to buck and writhe under the pressure, massaging Sullivan’s dick through the leather and denim.

“Oh…ughn.” Justin breathed.

“Scream. Scream for me.” Sullivan ordered, working the boy until he thought the world was going to end with one massive orgasm.

Justin threw his head back against the open window socket, the cool air whipping his blonde hair into a disaster. He kept grinding against Sullivan’s groin as if he knew that alone would send the man to meet his maker.

“OH, GOD YES!” Justin screamed into the night, rocking violently under Sullivan’s hand. His bare toes curled, the wave of bliss rolling through his legs upwards to touch and thickly coat the lowest regions of his belly with numbing fire, swallowing his chest and arms, then finally his mind before shooting with full power to his raging cock in a searing explosion. Justin felt Sullivan rubbing himself roughly against the boy’s ass, almost to the point Justin had reached. The blonde pushed his round cheeks firmly against Sullivan as the man jerked him to complete emptiness.

Sullivan breathed heavily through gritted teeth while Justin moved on top of him, grinding that great ass into the leather. “Oh, fuck…FUCK!” The man yelled, his raging dick releasing the pressured fluids still under cover. “Fuck.”

Justin took a deep breath and rest his head against the man’s chest. Sulli swerved and brought the Jeep fishtailing to a stop on the side of the road. He cut the engine, the last thing to do before his muscles went slack. His neck lost its strength and the seat cushion caught his heavily numbed head. There was a dim feeling of fingers brushing themselves through his hair as Justin cuddled against him, the engine ticking while it cooled the only sound besides their wild panting. Sullivan realized he was actually in a post-coital embrace. HIM! But after an orgasm like that, without even having to get out of his clothes to get off, he was willing to do anything Justin asked.

No wonder Brian had fallen in love.

\*

Three days had passed since Emmett saw Justin take off, since that bastard had decided it was his right to break up the hot new couple on Liberty Avenue. The gang had gathered at Brian’s loft to reevaluate the search party that had been going on for almost the entire seventy-two hours straight. It was more than Justin missing with no money or extra clothes, it was his stability they were worried about. He tried to hide how upset he was with what Bear had done to him, but they all knew he had lost more than just a friend.

“Are you sure he didn’t take anything?” Michael asked as if in another dimension. He stood by the telephone, lost in space.

“His clothes are all still on the hangers, Mikey.” Brian rubbed his tired eyes.

“What about his toothbrush?”

“Hmm?” Brian sat up. “Fuck, no, I didn’t check—”

“Don’t bother. I’m sure he took it.” Michael turned horrified eyes to his friend. “On his way out.”

Brian’s stomach turned itself in knots. “What is it?”

Michael held up the note for the man to read.

“I fell for the wrong…FUCK!” Brian threw it on the ground. “No. Not…FUCK!”

“What is it?” Lindsay asked cautiously.

Michael shook his head and went to Brian, making sure he was close enough to catch the man if he fell.

“Brian?” Lindsay pressed.

“I fell for the wrong Kinney, after all.” Brian closed his eyes and wavered on his feet. He felt the comfort of his friend steadying him. “He’s with Sullivan.”

“Maybe he’s not. Maybe he just went out -looking- for him.”

“Why would he grab his toothbrush if Sullivan hadn’t convinced him to go away with him? Justin wouldn’t have even known Sulli was in town unless the man made it apparent. He’s been waiting, just waiting, for a chance to get Justin to go willingly.”

“What do you mean? I thought Sullivan prided himself on taking what he wanted without permission.” Michael said.

“Justin told me that Sullivan had…he said that he said he wanted Justin to get better and then he would come find out which Kinney was the right one for him. After the kidnapping, Sullivan took a shining to Justin for more than forcing him to…Christ.” Brian sank down to his knees. “Looks like he got what he wanted. I gave him all the ammunition he needed to manipulate Justin.”

“It wasn’t your fault!” Emmett chimed in. “Honey, if your cousin didn’t hire that cheap imitation to do exactly what he did, than my middle name isn’t Florence…which I probably shouldn’t have said out loud because I’ll never live it down.”

Brian looked up at the man helplessly, nothing in his eyes showing he had even registered room for a joke. “Even so…Justin’s gone. Sullivan will have his fun and turn completely when he‘s done, like a tornado… he’ll destroy everything that we once knew. We’ll be lucky,” He said, tears blurring his sight, “if we get enough pieces back for a funeral.”

\*

Justin’s head rest in Sullivan’s lap as the light of dawn peaked on the third day of their trip, the edge of Louisiana behind them. They had changed clothes yesterday, the leather replaced by regular jeans while Justin slipped into some light cotton pajama pants. Sullivan had already booked a room overlooking the French Quarter. They would make it in time for the first ceremony. The things he had planned…they wouldn’t be watching much of the parades.

The boy sighed in his sleep and Sullivan glanced down at his new lover. It was almost peaceful, watching Justin dancing in dreams. Like morning after a horrible storm.

“What the fuck is wrong with me?” He asked the silent air, rolling down his window and taking a deep breath of the cool morning breeze speeding passed the Jeep.

“Hmm?”

“Nothing, sugah.”

“Want me to drive?” The boy asked, sitting up sleepily.

“You don’t know the way.”

“It’s straight down interstate 59, you’ve gotten us nearly the entire way there. You need sleep, Sulli.” Justin soothed, caressing the man’s chin, hand brushing against the rough stubble. “Pull over.”Sullivan obliged the boy. He didn’t even know if the boy could drive, but he was way too tired to find out. Usually he could make the trek without batting an eye, but Sulli had been practically comatose the entire drive after Justin worked his amazing magic. The car stopped and Justin crawled over the man, Sulli sliding out from beneath him.

“You can rest in the back, if you want more room.”

The Southern man nodded, stretching his long legs as much as he could as he slipped into the backseat. Justin watched the fabulously toned ass move under the denim, lean muscles under the tight, dark blue skin. He shook his head, trying desperately to clear his head before his dick got hard again.

Too late.

Justin reached over and locked Sulli’s door, then his own. He leaned between the seats as Sullivan settled onto his back. The man lifted his mirrored sunglasses in question.

“Aren’t you gonna drive, sug—” He stopped as a mischievous smirk graced the boy’s lips.

“Drive…” Justin agreed, climbing on top of Sullivan. “I think I remember how. First, I have to start the engine.” He grabbed Sulli’s dick through the pants sand squeezed until he felt the flesh harden in his hand. “Then I have to put the stick into gear.” The blonde said, trailing the man’s zipper down slowly, fingers curled into the waist before pulling the pants down. He threw the discarded jeans into the front seat. “Then…let me see…I think I have to merge onto the freeway.” He smiled, mouth lowering to take the head of Sulli’s erection into his mouth. He kissed the slit and grinned at Sullivan. “Am I right?”

“Merging.” Sulli nodded, hand at the back of Justin’s head lowering him down again.

“Ohh…looks like a traffic jam, we’ll have to take another route.” Justin said softly, pulling his own pajama pants over his thighs and throwing them up front.

“Different route.” Sullivan agreed, sitting up and pinning Justin to the side door.

“Yes, this way looks clear.”

“Clear?” Sullivan kissed Justin, wrapping his hands in the boy’s hair and forcing him against the window. “It looks like unfinished road to me.” He grabbed Justin’s cock and pulled the boy’s hips to jar his own. “Under construction.”

Justin winced, his breath torn from him in a shaking gasp as Sullivan yanked his neck to one side and lavished his throat with tiny bites, grazing the skin with a perfect white smile.

“Fuck me!” Justin demanded, tearing Sullivan from his neck by the hair.

“You want to get hurt, Angel? Keep ordering me around!” Sulli growled.

“Fuck ME!” Justin screamed in his lover’s face.

Sullivan slapped Justin hard enough to roll the boy’s face to one side. “Say that again.”

Justin crouched on his knees in stunned silence. He took a deep, shocked breath and stared at Sullivan. With another breath, shaking, trembling, he could speak once more. “FUCK ME!!!”

Sullivan threw Justin to the seats and landed on top of him, an untamed growl rumbling from low in his throat. “Little Angel, I’ll show you authority.”

“Pound it into me.” Justin said, mouth hanging open, waiting. “Show me who’s in charge!” He scratched his nails down Sullivan’s arms, leaving a trail of light pink scrapes.

Sullivan grabbed the boy’s dick, jerking him hard, bringing the blonde’s hips off the seats. Justin gasped with pain, a yelp escaping his throat. “Shut up!” The man said, covering the boy’s mouth with his own.

Justin moaned beneath Sullivan, his voice lost in the man’s deep, exploring mouth. Sulli forced Justin’s legs open with one hand, licking his finger and lubing the boy’s hole.

“Try to stop me.” Sulli snarled, leaking hard on pressed just slightly against the boy’s opening. “Try to fucking stop me!”

Justin thrashed his head over the seats, hands flying to Sulli’s face, trying to knock him off. “Please, no!”

“No?” Sullivan purred.

Justin gazed up at the man and mouthed ’yes’. Sulli grabbed Justin’s wrists in one hand and pressed them into the upholstery above the flowing blonde hair.

“Say you want to get hit again! Tell me you didn’t love it!”

“FUCK ME YOU BASTARD!” Justin screamed. Sullivan slapped the boy again with his free hand. Justin bucked beneath him with the blow, tears streaming down his reddened cheeks.

“Fuck you. I’ll fuck you, little boy. Tight little ass.” Sulli moaned, pressing his dick into Justin’s willing hole. “You like that, don’t you?”

Justin tried to close his legs around the man, a moan escaping his quivering lips.

“Open your legs!” Sulli demanded, bucking against the boy to force compliance. “Keep them open, little bitch.”“Ugh.” Justin hissed.

“You like that, don’t you? You like to be fucked, little boy?”

“Yes…”

“Yes, what?”

“Yes…sir.” Justin caught his breath in quick, ragged gasps. His face stung, and he wanted more.

“That’s right, sugah. I’m in charge.”

“Bastard.” Justin whispered breathily.

Sullivan slapped him again. “You like that? You like to get slapped?”

“Fuck you!” Justin shot back. Sullivan shoved himself completely into the boy and pressed their bodies together. His mouth overpowered the boy’s swollen lips and took him in one breath. He thrust into the blonde furiously, eating him from the outside. He ate one whimper after another as Justin twisted beneath him. The boy was struggling, making them both harder.

Sulli let Justin come up for air, staring down at the boy with amazement. “Whore. You’re a dirty little whore.”

“Fuck me, you son of a bitch.” Justin demanded.

“Don’t you talk about my mother like that!” Sulli slapped the boy again, plunging into Justin until he thought their hips would break.

“Bitch! She was a bitch!”

Sullivan growled in a rage, taking Justin’s cock and pulling it, stretching it between them in time with his own drive.

Justin groaned with glee, reveling in every ounce of powerful pain. He closed his legs around Sulli and got another slap. The boy opened his legs and let the man plow deeper, deeper, without being told. Each breath came in a scream.

“Who’s in charge, whore? Who’s got you pinned!”

“Sullivan.” Justin gasped. “Sulli!”

Sullivan grit his teeth, torn between strangling the boy to death and pledging his undying love. He pressed on, moved forward, rocking the Jeep in the empty field. “You,” He said, one word with each ragged breath, “need. To. Be. Punished.”“Please, sir.” Justin begged, squirming under his lover.

Sullivan leaned down and licked the drop of blood just starting on the corner of Justin’s lip. He felt the strain in his arms as one stroked Justin and the other held him up on top of the boy’s wrists. He was close, so damn close. He let go of the blonde’s raging hard on and gripped a handful of hair, bringing Justin up for a kiss. Sulli let the boy fall back down and found the beautiful cock again.

“Oh, please!” Justin cried out, dark stars blurring his vision. His entire body begged for release, yearned for satisfaction. He wrapped his legs around Sullivan and pulled the man in closer, his tender thighs convulsing with expectancy.

Sullivan groaned, lost in a vast world of stars, some great universe reserved for only the most extraordinary of ascents. Justin was screaming, moaning, hands clawing at empty air as Sulli’s hand went on without him. He collapsed onto Justin, feeling the sweet cum of his boy between them, sliding against their sweating, panting bodies. The man came back to his world and couldn’t breath his heart was pounding so rapidly.

Justin was beneath him, trying desperately to hold back the tears cascading down his face. Sullivan pulled out of the boy and caressed his reddened cheeks.

“Did I hurt you?”

Justin looked up at the man, startled, as if caught in the act of getting himself off by noticing he wasn’t alone only after he’d come. “Sullivan.” He smiled.

“Angel, did I—?”

“No.” Justin took Sulli’s face in his hands and rose to kiss the wide lips. “It was…fucking spectacular.” He sniffled. “I’ve never…felt anything like it.”

“You’re amazing.” Sullivan grinned, falling back onto the boy with relief and weariness. He fell asleep on top of Justin, not caring whether they missed the first day or not.

Justin caught his breath under his lover, staring up at the sunrise out the windows. It was truly otherworldly, the feelings running through his body. It hurt, but it felt good. Great, even. Unlike anything he’d ever experienced.

But it wasn’t Brian. It wasn’t love, it was…substitute. Sullivan, no matter how hot and ecstatically wonderful at fucking, wasn’t Brian.

No one would ever replace Brian, but Justin was willing to play with Sullivan until his body fell apart at the seams. At least the pain Sulli caused was mixed with pleasure.

\*

Brian lay in bed, sprawled to the four corners of the mattress. Michael and Lindsay were curled at either side of him while Mark laid at his feet, all fast asleep. Brian’s mind wouldn’t let him rest. His deep hazel eyes had fought off the tears all night long…three nights long…but now he couldn’t fend off the emotion any longer. He trembled at the thought of what Sullivan and Justin were doing at that moment.

The morning yawned into midday, early afternoon. Michael woke and stared at his best friend silently. The couple had been through so much together, it seemed unfair for all of it to be taken away now by some mindless cunt.

“We’ll find him, Bri.” The shorter man comforted.

Lindsay stirred and watched her friends. “He’s right, Brian…Justin’s gotten away from him before, he’ll—”

“You don’t get it. He went willingly. Sullivan tried to get him like that from the very start, remember? Justin knows what he was getting into when he left. Distraught and skewed in reality but…he still knew what Sulli was offering. He did this, he wanted this…to get away from me. He walked right into a trap and won’t know it until it’s too late.”

“He’ll come home…I just can’t imagine life without him.” Lindsay whispered.

“It’s not whether he’ll come home safe.” Mark said and Brian had a sudden feeling his son hadn’t slept much more than he had. “What dad’s trying to say is that Justin might be having a good time. He might not -want- to come home. The more I thought about it, I figured that out, too.”

Brian nodded softly.

“I bet they’re having a great party and forgetting about all the shit that went on in Pittsburgh.” Mark sighed.

“Mark.” Brian started, reprimanding for the language before the thought struck him. “You’re right.”

“I am?”

“If there’s a party to be had, Sullivan will be there.” He got up and threw his suitcase where he used to be. “And the biggest party around is happening not far from where we grew up right this minute.”

“Mardi Gras!” Michael uttered the obvious.

“Yes, Michael.” Mark rolled his eyes. “But…if Justin doesn’t want to come home, what are you going to do?”

Brian turned and studied his son’s face. “Join the party.” He said as nonchalantly as possible. But they had all seen the discouragement on his face. Brian didn’t believe Justin would ever leave Sullivan unless it was in a body bag.

\*

“This is it, sugah.” Sullivan announced proudly, sitting up from the backseat. He hadn’t realized they had gotten on the move again, but some time between the tremendous orgasm and now, Justin had found energy to drive.

“I figured that out all by myself.” Justin smirked, watching the man in the rearview mirror.

“I can’t wait to get you to the room. J'ai envie de toi mon ange.” Sullivan whispered in his ear.

“What does that mean?” Justin turned in his seat, their faces inches apart.

“I want you, my angel.” Sullivan winked.

Justin beamed a true smile at him. “I like that. You could kill someone and speak French to them, and they wouldn’t think you were doing anything to them at all.”

“You’re adorable.” Sullivan kissed Justin lightly on the nose. “Je t’attends à la prochaine…”

“What does that mean?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know?” Sullivan grinned. He got into the front seat and pulled Justin to sit on his lap.

“You aren’t French, and you’ve never spoke it before. Why now?” Justin asked.

“It’s the atmosphere.” Sulli shrugged. “I’ll take us to the hotel.”

“I want to walk around!”

“We will, but first you have to see the room.”

“I will, Sulli, but please? I’ve never been here before.”

“Fine.”

“Don’t be mad…we can do whatever you want.” Justin slid off the man’s lap and buckled his seat belt, leaning his head against the window.

Sullivan watched the boy. He felt bad for causing that pout. What?!? He felt -bad- about making someone unhappy? “Oh, fuck, sugah. You’re my Angel, we can be tourists to your hearts content.”

“Really?” Justin unbuckled his seatbelt and wrapped his arms around the man. “Thank you!”

“One question, darlin?”

“Of course!”

“How on -Earth- did you do that!”

“Do what?” Justin gave a half-smile to show he knew exactly what had mystified the man. He batted his eyes innocently at Sulli.

“So coy.” Sullivan playfully slapped Justin’s ass. “How do you manage to be timid and a little diable all at the same time?”

“Devil?”

“You’re catching on.”

Justin sat back next to Sullivan and watched the festival out the front of the car. The boy felt satisfied. If he could tame Sulli, then Brian would be a piece of cake. If he was through fucking random men behind his back…

\*

The hotel room was more impressive than the painted partiers and decorated buildings. It was huge in area, but had a uniquely dainty aura. Old-fashioned drapes hung heavily over the tall French doors, crimson velvet. Justin walked to the windows with awe, pushing them open and stepping onto the balcony.

“Sullivan, this is wonderful!” He cried, leaning over the edge and looking down on the crowd. “How did you ever—”

“Afford it? I have ways.” Sulli came up and wrapped his arms around the boy from behind.

“Why am I suddenly afraid they aren’t legal ways?” Justin turned around.

“Do you care? You benefit from it, I benefit from it, and that is really all that matters, non?”

“I guess you’re right.”

“Of course I’m right.” Sullivan guided the boy inside. “Now come see how comfortable the bed is.”

Justin giggled. “You have no shame.”

“It isn’t in my blood.”

“Ain’t that the truth.” Justin sat down on the cushiony bed and sunk. “Oh, my lord.” He grinned and fell into it on his back. “This is heavenly!”

“You bet your sweet ass it is. I come here every year, same room, same bed. I’m glad you’re hear to enjoy it with me.” Sullivan reached next to the bed and pulled a gold-laced bottle from the ice bucket. “Champagne, sugah?”

“Please.” Justin kicked off his shoes and crawled to lay along the bed, burying his face in the blood-red pillow.

Sullivan handed him a carved-crystal wine glass.

“The master of seduction.” Justin raised the burgundy liquid to the window light.

“It’s all practice and a devotion to the art.” Sulli tapped his glass against Justin’s.

“How many men have been in this room with you? Before me?” Justin sipped the thick Merlot, his lips colored momentarily with the deep purple liquid.

“Why do you ask? You’re here now, and you still wonder if I’ve had others just like this, who rest right where you lay at this very moment? Why do you ask things you know will only cause a rift between us?”

“Just wondering.” Justin frowned.

“You don’t need to know, Angel. I don’t remember, nor do I want to. You’ve been the only one on my mind for the longest time, and I beg you now to not be upset because of the past. Mine, or yours.”

Justin nodded. “Sorry.”

“Don’t be. Viens ici que je te saute.” He held an arm out for Justin to slide next to him on the bed and answered the unspoken question. “Come here so I can fuck you.”

“Oh, now we weren’t taught that in school…” Justin grinned.

“That’s right. My momma taught me that one.”

Justin’s mouth dropped open. “Your—”

“NO!” Sullivan laughed. “I had friends, lovers.”

“My lovers only taught me one French thing.” Justin smiled softly, his tongue curling under Sullivan’s top lip, urging him to open his mouth.

“Well, Angelface, that’s the most important word in the entire French language.” Sullivan purred.

“Oh, yeah?” Justin ran his fingers over the tightening bulge in the man’s pants. “I bet there’s a lot of screaming coming from this room. Not all of it in French…”

Sullivan almost blushed. “You’ve got my number, Angel.”

Justin licked the man’s tongue lightly. “It’s a talent.”

“I realize that…” Sullivan’s tongue flicked out to taste the boy’s lips. “Mmm. Wine and sugah, my favorite mix.” The man moaned, turning so his legs widened for Justin’s hand to slip into his jeans. He threw his head back and let out a deep, shaking breath. “Oh, yeah.”

“Be quiet.” Justin said, fingers toying with the man’s firm balls. “I don’t want you to speak again until I give you permission.” He said with a sly smile. “If you do,” the boy purred, “I’ll do unspeakable things to you.” He finished, massaging the achingly tight testicles.

Sullivan licked his lips. “What horrible things could you do to me, little one?”

Justin pulled his hand away and left Sulli alone on the bed, walking to admire the crimson and gold wallpaper. He looked over his shoulder at the man and grinned evilly. “What, you ask, can I do to you?”

Sulli shook his head. “That’s no threat to me, angel.” He got out of bed with enough stealth to put a leopard to shame. “I’ll just come and get you.”

Justin pressed himself to the wall. “Don’t come over here, Sullivan.” He warned.

“Or what? You’ll…scream?”

“I will!” Justin went farther across the room, sliding along the wall. “Don’t you—”

Sullivan ran to him, scooping the boy up in his arms and viciously tossing his victim back to the bed. Justin rolled against the padded headboard with a weighty thud, his mind reeling. He didn’t have time to cry out before Sullivan turned him over and pressed his face into the pillows. The man tore Justin’s slacks down the center and threw the pieces aside, exposing the wonderful round globes. He licked a trail into the crevice and heard a muffled groan from the boy.

“You’re not the aggressor here, little boy. The sooner you figure that out, the better.” He let Justin’s head rise. “Do you understand?”

“Sulli, stop.” Justin said numbly.

Sullivan growled and pushed Justin’s face back into the pillow. “Little angel needs to be punished. You want it quiet? I’ll give you quiet.” He snarled, straddling the boy. “I can make sure you never speak again. You like that, don’t you?” The man wet his fingers and entered the boy, growing harder than he thought possible at the stifled protesting from beneath him. His balls ached for release, squeezing against his body. Sullivan removed his digits and lowered down Justin’s body, careful to keep the boy’s head against the velvet bedspread. He smeared his precum over the head of his dick and sunk into the waiting hole, a low moan rumbling from his throat.

Justin struggled, the lack of oxygen and jarring from the headboard sending ripples of fuzzy waves through his mind. Still, it didn’t feel altogether awful. He felt his own dick grow hard, his ass shoving itself back to meet the man’s intrusion.

“Yeah, you like that. You want to be silenced.” Sullivan crushed the blonde’s face into the covers and thrust into him, hard, pulling out until only the head remained inside that satiny opening. “You’re helpless.” He plowed in again, muting the boy’s gasp with more pressure. He grunted wildly, fingers entwined in the mess of blonde locks. Sulli pushed Justin’s face harder into the mattress with each thrust, making enough noise for the both of them.

Justin whimpered, but knew only he could hear it. He felt Sullivan’s free hand slip beneath them and squeeze his cock roughly.

“Yeah. Oh, yeah. You love this.” Sullivan moaned. He suddenly pulled out of the boy, flipping him over. The man pushed back into Justin, shoving the boy’s legs over his shoulders.

“Sulli—”

Sullivan slapped Justin, enraged. “You won’t speak!” He shouted, covering the boy’s mouth with one hand while gripping the twitching hardon with the other. “Look how you like it…” He growled, rubbing his thumb over the leaking slit. “Putain. You filthy whore, pretending to hate this pleasure. I’ll show you pain. I’ll make you cry.” The man leaned down and ran his tongue over the frightened tears of his boy. “That’s it, show me how badly you don’t want this.” Sullivan shoved himself deeper into the blonde, deeper, slapping the boy’s ass with his ready balls. The thrill of seeing wild fear, panic, in Justin’s eyes made him tremble, scraping his bottom lip with his teeth in ecstasy. “Oh, yeah.”

Justin shook his head because Sullivan wasn’t letting him talk to protest, to beg him to stop. He tried bringing his legs off the man’s shoulders and got another brutal slap with the hand that gagged him. The boy gasped, drawing breath enough to scream when Sullivan slapped him again. And again.

Pure hatred stained his fiery hazel eyes. “You wanted quiet, you had better follow it!” He reared up to slap the boy again but clamped his hand back over the swollen lips instead. “This is your fault. You want this. Open up, putain, let me in. I know you can get deeper than this!”

Justin thrashed his head back and forth, worried that this was never going to stop. He…had to do what Sullivan wanted or he would get hit again. He just wanted this to end. The blonde relaxed and felt Sulli fill him to the brim. A moan escaped from under the strong hand, his eyes rolling back. God, it felt good.

“That’s it. You want this bad.” Sullivan growled ferociously. “You’re a whore. I want you to earn your money.” He said, pulling on Justin’s cock, stroking it, kneading it with one practiced hand. Justin tossed his head back over the side of the bed, letting the sensations roll over him. He could see nothing else but the man above him, holding his mouth, pushing into him viciously. There was a wild fire to Sullivan’s eyes, and Justin dimly wondered how many people had lost their lives in this room.

“Tell me how badly you want this.” Sullivan released him.

“Sulli—”

Sullivan slapped the boy again. “Tell me how badly you God damn want this!”

Justin let out a shaking sob. “I want this.”

Sulli laughed, a sound from the depths of his being. He stroked Justin with pure fascination, watching the pulsing cock exposed and waiting for release. He controlled this. Only he could give his boy what he needed. The man pulled Justin harder and the blonde knew he would be more than sore tomorrow.

“Sulli, please—” His voice cut off with another sharp slap.

“Only when spoken to, whore!”

Justin whimpered, the first drops of blood splattering the side of his face and disappearing into the bedspread. He closed his eyes, tears streaming down his face. Sullivan slapped him again angrily.

“I told you I’d give you reason to cry. Yeah.” He watched the tears roll over the boy’s beautifully white flesh. “Ungh. Yeah.” The man breathed, precum soaking his hand. Justin’s deep canal convulsed around his dick, pulsing, raging, squeezing until he thought he would get lost inside.

Justin bit his lip, the pressure outstanding. He whimpered again, but tried to make as little noise as possible. Small sounds escaped from his throat, vanishing under Sullivan’s massive inhuman grunts. The man had to let go. He couldn’t take anymore of the pleasure. Sulli burst inside of Justin, hips rocketing against the boy until he was empty once more. The boy shot his load over Sullivan’s hand, gasping for air. The blonde tried to turn over, embarrassment and pain reddening his cheeks.

“Get off.” The boy cried, voice so small it was no more than a frightened whisper.

The man got off his prey as if nothing had happened, as if his lover had woke from a bad dream. “What’s wrong?”

“You hurt me.” Justin said, struggling to sit up and pull his knees against his chest. “You threw me! I couldn’t breathe!” He sobbed. “I wanted to stop and you wouldn’t.”

Sullivan caressed the boy’s jaw. “I’m sorry, I got carried away. You came, didn’t you?”

“I didn’t have a choice.” Justin sighed, too weary to argue. “And you ripped my pants.”

“You ripped my vest.”

“But you have more tops, I only brought those and a pair of jeans.”

“I’ll buy you more clothes tomorrow, sugah, I promise.” Sullivan whispered, leaning in to kiss the boy.

Justin pulled away. “I want to take a shower, I’m filthy.”

Sullivan opened his mouth to answer and Justin shook his head.

“Alone, please. Just…alone.” He sighed and went to the bathroom.

“Just because someone gets hurt isn’t a reason to stop playing!” Sullivan yelled after him. “Fucking bitch.” He got off the bed and grabbed Justin’s slacks from the floor, huffing out of the room and into the lush hallway beyond.

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Justin winced as he tested his ribs. Nothing was broken, but he was damned if it didn’t feel that way. His mouth was going to bruise. This was quickly becoming one of his worst ideas ever. He turned the water on ice cold and got in, his body jumping with instinct.

“Fuck.” He hissed, wetting his hair and soaping his body. “What the hell was I thinking? Brian…I wasn’t thinking. Sullivan…they can’t change. They’re both just men. Why did I think I could be the force that persuaded the permanently carved-in-stone? Stupid. Just plain stupid. And now look, you’ll probably be bruised, you dumb kid. More so than from the ride down here.”

The boy let the water cascade down his body and cleared his mind. He concentrated on the carved royal purple tiles, on the floral design painted with gold under his feet in the shower. There was a chip on one corner floor tile where someone had dropped a heavy object. In all that beauty, there was one imperfection caused by one person. Nothing was truly unchangeable, was it? He wondered. Brian…had cared for him, despite what he said in the beginning. Sullivan had never said he would do anything but fuck Justin, and that was what they had done. Nothing was really as it seemed at first.

So how was he going to get himself out of this and back to Brian? How could he say that he’d changed his mind, thanks for paying for a trip down here and a great room and some really hot fucking, but that his other lover felt right?

“Fuck.” Justin said again, emptying the miniature bottle of shampoo in his hair and lathering up. Maybe he would wait it out, have a good time and vacation from Brian and Pittsburgh. If he could only decide what hurt more, Sullivan’s violent streak or Brian’s deception?

He was way too young to need such a break, to feel the things he was feeling. Justin didn’t know when he had matured over his years, but it had to be long before his memory served logical thoughts.

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“Three days gone, Mikey. Three days and every single fucking flight is booked!” Brian bellowed. “I have to drive. Mardi Gras will be on the last day by then. Goddamnit! Six days and Justin could be…”

“Ready to run to your arms with a fervor you never imagined.” Michael said matter-of-factly.

“If he’s still got energy to run. Or walk.” Brian sighed. “Or breathe.”

“This isn’t a catastrophe until you make it one.” Lindsay said. “You’re going to leave this airport and make the drive and hope against hope that Michael is right. Until you see him, you won’t know what to think, so don’t think about it.”

“Easy for you to say.”

“It’s not easy to say, it’s just easier to tell you what to do than worry myself.”

“Have I ever told you that you would make a great motivational speaker?”

“Go, Brian. Bring him back.”

“Kicking and screaming if you have to.” Mark added. “Bye, dad.”

Brian tousled the kid’s dark blonde hair. “Later, kiddo.”

“Hey!” Mark said before Brian could get into the Jeep.

Brian turned around.

“Try to get yourself home safe, too, kiddo.”

Brian nodded and took a deep breath. It was going to be a long and lonely ride to New Orleans.

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“Come on out, I have a surprise for you.” Sullivan mused, lightly rapping on the door after two hours of cold water pruning the boy’s skin.

“One second.” Justin said with obvious disdain. Time had slipped away as he stared at the chipped tile and cursed himself for not sticking around for an explanation. How long had it been?

“Hurry, sugah, our guest can’t wait long.”

“Guest?”

“Come out and see!”

Justin opened the door warily. He saw a single, well-dressed man hanging onto a clothes rack. The silver frame held smoothly tailored pants, each different designs, each made to replace the ones Sullivan had torn.

The boy stepped out of the bathroom in a towel and stared. “Sulli, what—”

“My deepest, most sincere apologies, ma ange.”

“You…oh, Sullivan, I…”

Sullivan smiled. “Pick however many you want. They’re yours.”

“Thank you.” Justin said, lost in awe. The boy didn’t notice Sullivan’s interested stare at the bruises on his face. He didn’t pay attention to the man’s hand as it slowly traced down his body to massage a raging erection. Justin fingered the expensive cloth and sighed. Brian’s favorite style, colors…perhaps Sulli and Brian weren’t so different after all.

“Monsieur.” The man gestured to the three-paneled mirror in the corner.

“Thank you.” Justin nodded to him, pulling one pair from the hanger and holding them up to his waist.

“Do you like them, sugah?” Sulli said, letting his hands fall to his sides.

“I do.” Justin smiled into the mirror at the man.

“Good. We’ll take them all. You’re dismissed.” He waved the man away.

“Sulli, I—”“Shh. Your money is my own, darlin’. Now I can tear a few and not fall from the grace of your happiness?”

It wasn’t that…Sullivan didn’t understand that he had caused him unwanted pain. Justin sighed. He felt the need to explain himself, his actions. “Sorry, long car rides make me a bit…cranky.”

“No matter. Put a pair on. We’re going to go have dinner and then I’m going to rip them off that chilled and thoroughly cleaned ass.” Sullivan winked and went to change clothes. “One more thing, sugah?”

Justin looked at the man. “Yeah?”

“I had these made, too.” He smiled and gestured to an open closet. Justin leaned to look at the costumes more closely. “They’re…wow.”

“King and Queen of Hearts. What do you think?”

“Perfect. But I’m not sure how you’d look in a dress.” The boy smirked.

Sullivan grabbed the boy’s waist and pulled him onto the bed. He pinned the boy and kissed him. “You won’t be so funny when you find out how little you’ll be wearing underneath that skirt for easy access.” He winked and let Justin up. “Go on. We’ll miss our reservation, get dressed.”

Justin nodded. Yes, he would ride this out and go home after Mardi Gras. Definitely. What was a little pain in place of a rack of new clothes?

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Brian weaved his way through traffic for a half hour before finally giving up and paying an atrocious price for parking. How the fuck was he supposed to find Justin in this crowd? The parades had yet to start, but people had crowded the streets and balconies in wait. He knew whatever hotel they were registered at was under a false name.

He barely heard his cell phone ring over the din, forced to press the phone to one ear and a hand over the other. “Yes?”

“It’s Will. Christ, sounds like a party…”

“No joke.” Brian sighed. “What the fuck do you want, Will?” He demanded. He truly had no time for Justin’s big brother today.

“I just heard about what happened. Michael called me.”

“Spectacular. Now that you’re in the loop, let me congratulate you by hanging the fuck up!”

“Relax, would you? Cam and I are here.”

Oh, great. “What?”

“We’re after Bear, we trailed him here. He’s here!”

“FUCK!”

“Listen, we’ve got a pretty good lead on him, but we haven’t seen hide nor hair of Justin. Cam’s got him on binocs right now. If he goes near Justin, we’ll nail him.”

“Why can’t things be fucking simple anymore…” Brian swore under his breath. “When did you turn assassin?”

“Runs in the family.”

“Apparently so does psychosis.”

“And fucked up bed partners.”

Brian hung up, not wanting to hear Will’s odd sense of humor. If Bear was here in New Orleans, and so was Justin…how were they to know he actually left with Sulli at all? Or if Sullivan didn’t come up against Bear and lost? If the man got his paws on Justin…there was no hope of him surviving that round.

Will called back. “Brian, listen to me. I know how your cousin is funding this trip.”

“I don’t like the sound of that.”

“I paid him.”

“WHAT!?!”

“I had to! It took all the fucking money I had to pay him off!”

“What for?”

“Your smut tape. He had the snuff film Brad made. We…I didn’t even think about it until he came to me. He’s got Dark Starr up and running again.”

“God damnit!”

“Bear might be working for him.”

“This gets better and better. So Bear knows that Justin is here.”

“We’re hoping that’s the case. We’ll find the kid if Bear tries for him.”

“Sure. And what are you going to take him down with? A tranquilizer dart?” Brian hung up and stormed through the masses.

A trickle of loud music started down the street and a cheer rose through the crowds. Dusk had set itself to twilight, then to the dark blue of first night. This was the end of Mardi Gras, and it promised to be one hell of a night.

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Justin sat in the full gown, surrounded by the skirt and cage filling it out. “I feel silly.”

“You’re supposed to.” Sullivan said, taking Justin’s chin and applying the last bit of makeup to the boy. Their faces were a matching white base with red hearts under their right eyes. Justin pouted under a thick strip of red down the middle of his bottom lip. The wig was a little much for his tastes, a curling mass of black tendrils cascading over his shoulders. Sullivan painted his lip similar to Justin’s and put his crown on.

“You look silly, too.”

“Good.” Sullivan put Justin’s crown on. “Now let’s get down there and have some fun!”

Justin smiled. “Good idea.”

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Brian worked his way through the crowd and saw a glimpse of someone waving. For a bright, shining second the man thought Justin had spotted him and was in one brilliant piece. His face fell when the man got closer, stopping to whisper in Brian’s ear.

“We lost him. We fucking lost Bear!” Will sighed.

“What? How could you lose him! He’s got to be upwards of four hundred pounds!”

“Don’t exaggerate. The crowds work great for camouflage…especially if he knows he’s being watched.”

“You let him see you?”

“Bear’s always been good at following his instincts. If he thinks he’s being watched, he’ll go into hiding and wait it out. Even when there’s no one staking him out…he’s a very paranoid man.”

“Great! Just fucking great, Will!” Brian threw his arms up in frustration. “If he finds Justin before we do…”

“I know, Brian. I watched the tape.”

Brian stopped breathing. “You…what?”

“I watched it. I had to know what they did to you and Justin. I couldn’t just…if there was a clue to where Bear went or why he…turned against us…I had to know.”

“You’re a sick kid.”

Will turned lost eyes to Brian. “I wanted to know what they did to my brother. I had to know what was on the tape.”

Brian searched the deep blue eyes. They were too old to be Justin’s, but the pain was real. Justin felt pain this intense sometimes. It tore at Brian’s heart until he let his shields slip away. “And now you can’t un-see it. You’ll never forget.”

Will turned to watch the parade. “Right.” He sighed and forced himself to look back at Brian. “Don’t stare at me like that.”

“Like what?”

“Like I’m Justin.”

“I know you’re not Justin.”

“But somewhere inside you…want me to be.”

“If you mean that I wish he were standing here safe in front of me, then yes, I wish you were fucking Justin. If you think that I want to even remotely replace him with you because of the similar looks, then you’re dreaming. There’s only one Justin, and you’re not him.” Brian plowed his fingers through his hair.

“You’re a good man, Brian Kinney. If we ever get him back, remind me to tell him to never pull this running-away shit again.”

“He was hurt.” Brian said defensively. “He saw what appeared to be his greatest fear come true, and couldn’t see anything else. Even the danger he walked into head-on.”

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Bear watched Cameron from a gift shop with his own pair of binoculars. He knew someone had followed him into town, even if he didn’t see them right away. Now that he knew it was the Taylor girl, Bear figured Will wasn’t too far away. That was trouble, but he hoped to get to the focus of coming down South before either of his watchers found him again.

He knew Sullivan Kinney brought Justin down here. The man practically waved the tempting globes in front of his face for two weeks before he finally up and left for Mardi Gras. As if Bear was going to let the Irishman have all the fun! He might have been boss at Dark Starr, but fresh meat as hot as Justin Taylor was anyone’s for the taking. If they could get their hands on it.

The big man turned to the clerk. “I need a costume.” He growled.

“We…don’t carry costumes, sir. W-we have a nice assortment of tee-shirts…beverages, shot glasses…” The dwarfed clerk stuttered.

“Go out there and find me something and I’ll make it -very- worth your while.”

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Justin let the thrill of excitement filtering off the partiers flow through his veins. He accepted a drink from Sullivan and the two mingled with the crowd in their full costumes. The blonde closed his eyes, allowing Sulli to lead him through the bodies. Music filled his mind, pumping, eclectic, ethic, carnal. He laughed despite himself. Justin knew the makeup covered the bruises around his mouth, he knew that he looked nothing like he did when he left Pittsburgh. That alone was a relief, a way to get out of his life for just…one night. He felt heat flash over his face, numbing his limbs, pulsing life into his cock. Sullivan had tailored the drink.

“Come on, sugah. I’ve got something to show you.” Sullivan pulled the boy into an alleyway.

“Bu…the parade is that way!” Justin pointed over his shoulder dizzily but Sulli kept leading him down the dark path.

“I know, angel. I’m going to make my own parade. Come on!”

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Bear looked at the upper half his body in the mirror and closed one eye, then the other, and opened both. “I like it. Very nice.” He admired himself and turned around to look at the clerk. “You’ve done well.”

The big man was hidden beneath a huge dragon’s head, its glittering scales shining sequins of the official Mardi Gras colors; purple for justice, green for faith, and gold for power. The reptile’s long flaming mane cascaded down Bear’s back in warm colors; red, yellow, and orange. For a flowing beard that reached down just above the man’s groin, cool blue in three sparkling shades were used. Everything glittered with sequins, large and small. Through bulging golden-amber eyes Bear could see the room, but no one could see him.

“Not too obvious who’s under here, right?”

“N-no, sir.”

“Good.” Bear drew his gun. “Thank you. Here’s your reward.”

The worker shrieked and cowered, ducking down behind the counter. Bear leaned over the register and tapped the frightened clerk on the head. “I let you live. That’s a nice reward, no?”

“Y-yes. Please.”

Bear chuckled and walked out of the shop, into the throngs of people. From above, no one would be able to make out who he was. Now all he had to do was find Justin.

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Brian climbed up a fire escape and scanned the crowd. Nothing. No one. It was all a mess.

His cell phone rang and he didn’t have to answer to know it was Will.

“Listen, we think we might have seen Sullivan.”

“Where?”

“He’s in disguise.”

“No surprise, there. Tell me something useful, Will.”

“We’re not sure it was him. Dressed as the King of Hearts, sound like your cousin?”

“Sounds as good as we’re going to get. Where are you?”

“On the trail. Get down and go left, toward your Jeep. Cam’s going to meet you and bring you to where we last saw the king and queen.”

“He had someone with him?”

“Dressed the same, but there’s no way to tell. I’m willing to try any lead if you are.”

“Fuck yes, I am.”

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“This way.”

“Go back?” Justin shook his head. “Please…”

“No.” The man said, glaring, squeezing Justin’s wrist harder. “I paid for you, and you’re going to earn it.”

Justin dug his heels into the concrete with his last ounce of willpower. His head spun, but anger overwhelmed the drugs. Momentarily sobering him against the strong concoction. “Wait! It’s one thing to…call me a whore when we’re fucking, because it doesn’t mean anything…but to outright state that you’re paying me to fuck you is…over the…top.”

Sullivan backhanded the boy, his grip on the nimble wrist the only thing keeping Justin from falling. He turned an angry glare to the boy leaking so much heat that it nearly burned the blonde when he looked to his violent lover.

“You will shut the fuck up and do what I tell you, when I tell you, and you’ll fucking like it or I’ll tear your intestines out and wear them as a necklace!”

Justin screamed. “NO!”

“Shut up!” Sullivan shouted, slapping the boy again. His hand came away with smears of white makeup.

Justin sobbed, sinking down to his knees and refusing to move any farther. The drugs sent wave after wave of amplified terror through his body. Sulli yanked him to his feet and dragged him through the alley, the boy clawing at Sullivan’s hand. “LET GO!”

“NO!” Sulli hollered maniacally. He threw Justin against the brick building to one side and wrenched his fingers into the black wig, throwing it to the ground, the crown clanging lightly against the cement floor. Justin shrieked, hands flying to his face for protection as Sullivan knelt down and lifted the full hoop skirt up around the boy’s waist.

“Shut up!” Sullivan growled, pushing his fist against Justin’s securely closed legs trying to push into the pleasuring hole on the other side of the barrier.

“Stop, please…” Justin shoved his arms against the skirt, trying to force it back down, his hands feeling like they were covered in sticky cement. Whatever drugs Sulli had used…too much… “Not fun…anymore.” The blonde whimpered.

“This was never supposed to be fun! Don’t you get it? This is all there is! It’s pretend! It’s feelings of trust and devotion and love and it’s all fucking bullshit!” Sulli grabbed Justin’s dick in a vice-grip, rising to meet Justin’s eyes with a feral, predatory fire burning inside the hazel confines. “What you made me feel, what I made you feel, what Brian made you feel, it’s all make-believe in your fairytale world, angel, and it’s nothing. I want to hurt you and I want to fall in love with you.”

“You can…you can fall in love.” Justin whimpered, the skirt bundling around Sulli’s hand on his cock. “With me.”

“I want to fall in love with you, and that makes me want to hurt you.” The man drawled in a voice so low it was painful to listen to. “That makes me want to hurt you like you’ve never been hurt before.”

Justin screamed wordlessly, shaking his head as the violent man broke through his groggy defenses and spread the boy’s legs apart. Keeping his fist between Justin’s legs, Sullivan smeared his leaking cock with his hot, slippery juices. The blonde screamed again and Sulli slapped him. Grabbing the boy’s hair, he replaced his fist with his hips to keep the boy spread wide. The man pulled Justin’s hair until his sniveling, protesting lover had to stand on his tip toes to avoid pain. Sulli guided his raging cock into the quivering hole, pinning Justin to the wall with his thick, pulsing rod.

“This is love, ange. This is all you’re ever going to get, all you deserve. Tell me I lie.” Sullivan pushed himself into the opening and a low chuckle escaped his throat as Justin winced, his tears cleaning lines down the messy white makeup. The heart below his eye slid to a blotch in the boy’s sadness.

“No.” Justin argued, mind swimming. His body reacted, rigid against Sullivan’s push, under the hot hand gripping his dick. “Please…” Justin shook his head trying to clear his thoughts. “Brian.” His voice came out in a shuddering whisper, a choked sob, as Sullivan pounded him into the brick wall.

“Oh, baby. Brian won’t help you now. No one will help you,” He said, pulling out and then shoving back in, scraping the dress’ bare back and Justin’s flesh against the stone. “Ever. Ever again.”

Justin’s head bobbed to the front as darkness consumed him, threw him back to the light, enveloped him once more and gave him back to reality. The boy felt he was on a wild ocean’s black waves, impaled on the only thing above the rough seas. Sullivan. Justin released his dress and clawed at the man’s back, craving the safety and warmth of flesh.

“That’s my boy!” Sullivan shouted, the darkness of the alley seething around his face when Justin stared at the faint, faraway voice. Icy cold water surrounded him, filled his lungs, thick as the pitch black void dulling his mind. Sulli slapped him. “Wake up! Hey!”

The man shoved a popper under Justin’s nose. “Wake up, whore!” He repeated. The blonde gasped, hurrying toward the drowning surface with hands clawing into Sullivan’s back. Coughing, Justin whimpered, eyes rolling to watch Sullivan.

“Ughn…” Justin moaned, his head falling to rest at the crook of Sulli’s shoulder.

“Stupid bitch, I want you to scream for me! Did Brian not introduce you to drugs or what? Christ! You’re such a novice.” He growled, fucking the boy as hard as he could. Nothing brought him out of the lethargy. “Damn you, cousin! You couldn’t have forced him into a decent drug and alcohol dependency like any good Kinney man?”

“Brian…” Justin murmured.

“Oh, shut up!” Sullivan snarled, pushing Justin’s head up against the wall. “Look at me. Look!”

Justin’s eyes fluttered open, his cock raring for release. He blinked a few times and finally focused on the man. “Sulli…van?”

“Come out of it!” Sulli pumped harder, stroking Justin’s dick roughly. “Come on, Angelface, you’re going to be drugged far more than this where we’re going.” Sullivan pulled out of the boy and forced his lover to the hard cement.

Justin rode the new wave of drugs, staring at Sullivan’s cock hungrily. His tongue flicked out to caress the dripping slit. He drew a thin string of semen into his mouth on the tip of his tongue, moaning at the salty-sweet taste. His fingers gripped Sulli’s ass cheeks, bringing the man closer. Justin took the brunette into his mouth, flicking the head around with his tongue. Sullivan took two handfuls of Justin’s hair to steady himself.

“That’s it. Take it all, Angelface.”

Justin growled greedily, a starving man introduced to a royal banquet. He slid the shaft down his throat with the ease and relaxation of a professional. This skill was one Brian had him perfect long before they were even regular lovers. He guided Sullivan’s dick in and out, in and out, bringing the head to tease once more with his strong, pointed tongue, trailing down the underside of the shaft, licking the base, reveling in each choking gasp he brought from the brunette.

“Oh…that’s it. That’s right.” Sullivan whispered, grunting, his thick lips trembling as the boy flicked his tongue between the tight, constricted balls and the patch of skin leading to his anus. Justin slid his thumb over the twitching slit, massaging the tender area while taking one ball into his hot mouth, then the other, tasting them separately, licking, teeth grazing over the sensitive skin.

Sullivan threw his head back and howled into the empty alley, spasms ripping at his fingers wrapped tightly in Justin’s hair. The man’s knees threatened to drop him, shaking with the mind-numbing pleasure. The blonde went back to taking Sullivan into his mouth, downing the shaft, enveloping the cock in his fiery throat. He worked his fingers against his lover’s crevice, pushing gently against the hole but not entering. It was something Brian loved, and his cousin was no different. The man shouted, a great barking sound into the night loud enough to overcome the parade’s noise. Justin moved quicker, sliding easily over the long, thick member slick with saliva and semen. He pushed harder against Sullivan’s tender opening and the man bucked against his mouth uncontrollably, thrusting his hips into the willing, inebriated lips. Justin fell into motion with the drive, matching the man, drawing him closer and closer to ecstasy. The boy pushed against the hole again with one finger, his thumb pressing the aching spot of skin hidden by the man’s full testes. Sullivan screamed, emptying into Justin’s mouth and down his throat, fingers unconsciously massaging the boy’s scalp, his eyes closed as his lover devoured every last ounce of cum ejected into him.

The boy fell against the brick building with a dim grin on his face, eyes closed with delight. He sighed dreamily, one hand going to stroke his painfully erect cock.

“No no, sugah. We’ll save that for our friends who were kind enough to welcome my guest into their club.” Sullivan reached down and slapped the boy’s hand.

“Ugn!” Justin protested, licking his lips and rubbing against the satiny cloth of his costume against his groin.

“NO!” Sullivan grabbed Justin’s wrists and hoisted him to his feet.

“Brian…” Justin whimpered. “Please..?”

Sulli glared at the boy. “So you want me to be Brian, hmm?” The man punched Justin in the stomach, doubling him over gasping for breath. “You think your white knight is still coming to get you? Well you’re wrong! The place we’re going is a very powerful business associate of Dark Starr Productions. Now that I’m running things, I make sure to keep my clients happy. You’re my proof that things are better than they ever were, and these men will claw their way to the top for a taste of you. A taste of what I promise to bring them at the next auction.” Sullivan pulled Justin to his feet and dragged him down to the dead end. The man banged one fist on a stack of heavy crates with a secret rhythm and the metal boxes slid aside.

The door had a slide hole and a pair of eager eyes peered out at the guests, slammed it shut, and admitted them.

“Now be a good boy and let them hear your wonderful scream, ange. Welcome to The Tormented Gardens.” He waved a hand over the greedily staring crowd.

Justin stared back timidly, the drugs fading in his veins with the throbbing agony in his gut. He did as he was told in front of all those men. He cowered behind Sullivan and screamed.

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Cameron swore under her breath, leaping from one close building roof to the next. “What do you see?” She asked her brother into the cell phone.

“Nothing. At least, not the same King of Hearts.” Will answered from his post on one roof. “One second they were right under me and the next…Damnit!”

Brian was on street-level, listening to the voices through a three-way line. Will had called the two and stopped them from advancing toward him. They were all looking through the crowd with no luck.

Bear walked passed Brian and grinned behind mirrored glass eyes. He circled the man, watching panicked eyes search for the missing boy. Bear went on the other direction. He laughed to himself as Brian saw nothing but strangers. The big man walked away, knowing exactly where Sullivan was taking Justin.

The Tormented Gardens.

That club scared even him, but that was part of the excitement. The walls were specially designed to contain reaching spires of flame, columns of scathing fire. In between each pillar were sets of shackles spaced only three inches from the fanning heat on either side. The main floor was a sunken pit of concrete full of water just a scant few degrees away from freezing. If any of the victims got too close to the flames in choosing death over torture, or needed to learn how to behave, in they went. The steam rising from the extreme temperature changes forced steam up to the second floor in a blinding, tropical wilderness. Between the flames and water was a corrugated metal walkway, stairs leading upwards at regular intervals. The second story was made up of crisscrossing foot-wide iron and steel support beams spaced six inches away from each other so squares of empty space vented the steam from below.

The throne was made of stone, squared, primitive. The owner, known only as Marquis, sat on it and watched his minions whip and torture frightened young boys chained to the wall.

Discarding the dragon mask, Bear paused beside the crates and pounded the secret membership knock, glaring at the bouncer’s eyes until the man granted him access. He went inside and scanned the room. It didn’t take long to find Justin by the sheer wails erupting from his sweet lips.

Sullivan was dragging the boy over the walkway, holding the majority of the boy’s skirt in one hand to keep it from catching fire. Justin was squirming aggressively, pulling more toward the pool than the fire. They passed many men on the way to the throne, each pawing the smooth skin, tracing over the marks left by Justin’s tears.

“Here is only a wanton taste to feast your eyes upon, Marquis! This is my own slave. There are others. Many others. Feel what you get with my business!” Sullivan shouted with a regal voice that echoed over the screams. He threw Justin against the bottom stone step leading to the dark haired Marquis.

The man nodded to two muscled men, who dragged Justin up the steps to stand before their leader. A cruel smile played over the boy in smeared makeup and tattered dress. Sullivan knew this was the form many of the Marquis’ boys ended up in, royally dressed but beaten, abused, rough around the edges; the reasoning to their costumes.

“I wish to deal business with you, Marquis.” Sullivan bowed, lowering himself to one knee.

The man twirled his finger in the air and the muscled men turned Justin around. One lifted the boy’s lofty skirt and exposed him to the Marquis.

“Oh…” The man licked his fingers and traced them around Justin’s hole. “Very nice. He is indeed yours. He had been marked.” The dark man smiled. “Recently.”

“He had to learn to keep his mouth shut.” Sullivan returned the evil grin. “Go ahead, see how he feels. Even after six days of the most extreme…teaching, this boy will swallow your fingers and keep them for himself.”

“A greedy boy.” The Marquis purred. He plunged his fingers inside and Justin cried out.

“Get your fucking—” He shouted, but one man covered his mouth.

“That’s quite enough out of you.”

“Six days of mercilessness and he keeps his spunk…”

“I want him to. The others will obey.” Sulli promised.

The Marquis nodded, fingering Justin as the boy struggled against his bodyguards. He reached the blonde’s prostate and pushed against it. Justin moaned.

“Oohhh. How old is he?”

“Seventeen.” Sullivan lied.

“How many men has he been with?”

“Myself and his brother.” The Southerner lied again.

“Brother…”

“Nearly twins.”

Marquis purred again, massaging Justin’s prostate, one hand reaching around to feel Justin’s hard cock. “Spectacular.” He released the boy’s erection and stroked the remains of the satin gown. “Pretty.”

“I have your reservation for my auction then?”

“If you offer better than this one, I will be hanging on the very invitation with bated breath.”

“Much better than this one, you have my word.” Sulli rose and ascended the steps as Marquis pulled his fingers out of the boy and inhaled the scent.

“You have made me a very happy man tonight. I hope to fill my shackles with members of you quarters. Until that day, I will be dreaming of this one.” The Marquis spread Justin’s ass cheeks wide and plunged his tongue into the fiery depths. Justin gasped. “And tasting him.”

Bear slipped behind a group of onlookers as Sullivan made his way toward the door. Justin had done well, making Sullivan a very rich man. If the Marquis of New Orleans embraced the newcomer to the flesh trade, many others would follow.

Sullivan let the men take handfuls of Justin’s hair, sliding it through their fingers as he marched the boy toward the stairs.

Justin glared at the men, then turned piteous eyes to the boys hung to the wall. He tripped on the first step and only Sulli’s tight grip on his arm held him up.

“Fucking asshole.” The boy said nastily, wishing his voice didn’t tremble so badly with fear and embarrassment. Sullivan raised his hand and Justin ducked away, quieting instantly.

“Not in here, angel. If you humiliate me in here again I will trace your body in chalk and call it a day, understand? You are lucky the Marquis liked your spunk.” He yanked Justin to the upstairs bar and threw him against it. “Jack Daniels and a Crow’s Eye for the lady.”

“What the hell is a—” Justin stopped when Sullivan threatened to hit him again. The bartender was turned around so he couldn’t see what went into his drink. It was black when it was set in front of him. He turned his nose at the shot glass and stared at Sulli. “I am not—”

“One more and it won’t be a warning.” Sulli growled, lowering his hand. “Drink it, sugah.”

Justin lifted the glass. He knew there was no way he would make it to the door even if Sullivan lost track of him. Truth be told, he was shaking too badly to be sure he could even throw the drink at the man’s eyes and make a run for it. He took a deep breath and the fumes invaded his nostrils with a hotter fire than the ones below.

“Drink it.” Sulli said, downing his JD.

Justin closed his eyes and poured the shot down his throat. It was something he would regret more than his choice to follow Sullivan away from home. The liquid clawed at his throat, but he was nowhere near sober enough to feel the pain. The world hung in suspended animation, separate shining shades of throbbing, flickering red. Justin couldn’t breathe except through the deep holes in his shimmering pink skin. He was shrieking, but the sound was like music in his wonderland. He fell to the floor and Sullivan stood over him moving so incredibly slow it was like watching the monster not only crawl out from under the bed, tearing the covers from his body, but eating him too. Chewing on his legs, his arms, gnawing on his bones. Justin couldn’t move, the drugs moving through his rapidly beating heart. He took huge, gasping breaths until the initial shock wore off and his mind faded to black, then white, then back to normal. His limbs were heavy, as if each of them weighed more than the world. He couldn’t move. He had never felt so helpless and the man who eagerly took advantage of him was just standing above waiting for the drink to wear off.

“You like that one, Angelface? It’s also called The Cataleptic. It’s put more people into comas on their first try than it’s killed, but who’s keeping score?” Sulli picked Justin up as if the boy weighed nothing. He nodded to the bartender and took the boy back downstairs, carrying him to the door with a salute to the Marquis. Bear opened the door for him and it wasn’t until Sulli was out in the night air that he realized the doorman had followed him out.

“My hired muscle, what are you doing here, sugah?” Sullivan smiled seductively.

“Don’t give me that bull, Kinney. I am immune to your charms, that passion-promising smile. I know you. I know you’re going to back away and vanish right now, or I’ll smash your nice pretty face into a thousand pieces. You’re going to let me have my prize because in this game, I have won. You can not out muscle me.”

Sullivan sneered. “You know you won’t get away with this.”

“So fire me.” Bear growled.

Sullivan dropped Justin on the ground. “You aren’t strong when you sleep.” Sullivan warned, slinking into the shadows. He knew how to choose his battles to reign victorious. This was not one of those wars. Justin was gone to Bear. For now.

Justin looked up in shock. BEAR! He could barely move, but his mind was racing with sobriety. The big man, the betrayer to all the boy’s childhood held dear, bent down and hoisted Justin against the wall.

“You’re mine now.” Bear grinned. “I should never have backed away from you on Brad’s wishes when I could have easily snapped his neck.” Bear tore Justin’s skirt up to the waistline and his grin widened. “But I won’t make that mistake again, blue eyes.” He promised, stroking the bruises on Justin’s inner thigh from Sullivan’s rough delights.

Justin felt his body slowly returning to him, through the muck of his consciousness. He shook his head gently, though it seemed a massive move in his psyche.

“You don’t tell me no, Justin Taylor.” Bear chastised, releasing his own massive erection. “You have no choice, you’re under a Cataleptic. Damn lucky kid. Most people your size don’t survive one, let alone regain enough sense to move. Just relax and enjoy body paralysis while it lasts, because you can’t do a damn thing to stop it.”

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Brian leaned against the building, his legs unwilling to take him any farther until he sat down and took a second to rest. Will had climbed down to stand with him while Cameron kept an eye out from the rooftops.

“He’s not coming home.” Brian whispered, unsure what emotions his voice would betray if he spoke any louder. “Not ever again. I was a fool to think I could save him this time.”

Will crouched by the man and studied his face. “You’re only a fool if you give up.”

“The night is almost over!”

“Almost.”

“He’s been here for six days. How do we even know if he made it to the final parade?”

“Because we have to believe that, Brian!”

The brunette shook his head stubbornly. “No.”

“Listen to me!” Will grabbed the man’s chin and locked eyes with Justin’s lover. “We are going to find him and he will be fine. There is no other option, Brian. None. Justin will not die tonight.”

Brian pulled away. “You’ve met Sullivan once. Just once, and never when he was around Justin. I’ve never seen him want something so bad in his entire life.” He shook his head. “Justin had no chance out here!”

“There is always a fucking chance! Now get the hell up and keep looking!” Will got up and pulled Brian to his feet. “Get on a goddamn float if you have to, but don’t you dare give up or I’ll send you to meet him on the other side, do you understand?”

“If he’s dead, I’ll send myself to meet him.” Brian glared at the man and sifted into the crowd.

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Bear pulled Justin to the ground and shook him, both on their knees. He shoved a popper under the boy’s nose and shook him again without releasing the seal.

“If you don’t start moving I’m going to give you this and fuck your corpse.” He threatened.

Justin struggled inside to move. A finger, an eyelid, lips…Finally, his tongue slipped from his mouth and wet his lips over the dried blood and makeup covering them. His voice was shaky, untamed, no more than a breath of sound.

“Don’t.” He begged.

“Getting there.” Bear approved, turning Justin so the boy faced away from him. He let the blonde’s face lay on the ground, ass airborne, hands sprawled at his sides.

“No.” Justin pleaded, voice quivering but more solid, stronger. His fingertips twitched and he could feel the dim ache of his head and stomach from the drink itself.

“Shh.” Bear said soothingly, lifting the back of the skirt backwards over Justin’s body and head. He kissed each exposed globe tenderly, moving down to the boy’s tortured opening.

“Please.” Justin said, stronger still. His legs tingled, feet convulsing. “Don’t…”

Bear leaned down and took Justin’s balls into his mouth, spreading the boy’s legs for easier access. A sound escaped him, guttural as he tasted the blonde. He lathered spit up and down the testicles, spreading it to Justin’s hole with eager, thick fingers. The big man stuck one finger into Justin’s warmth, stretching the opening, in and out, back and forth. Justin moaned despite himself, his body now unfathomably sensitive to every touch; to the cold beneath him and heated breath at his balls, to the fire of Bear’s finger devouring his core. Justin was hard and Bear took full advantage of stroking the boy, jerking in movements that were dizzyingly fast to Justin’s sensation-overloaded mind while at the same time fingering the aching hole and teasing the tense balls with his tongue. Justin cried out, unable to decide if it was pleasure or pain, or what he could do to remedy it, or if he even wanted to. The boy felt he was going to vomit, but wanted to taste every inch of the big man’s sweat-glistening flesh. His mind was a contradictory war that left him confused but aware of what was happening. He knew it was the drink, and at the same time wanted another shot of the red world. The finger had been replaced by two thrusting digits, opening him wider, pressing against his secret spot at every hard, meaningful push. Bear’s tongue lapped at the boy’s balls sending shockwaves of ecstasy through the blonde, through the drugs, through the end of all time. Justin’s cock pleaded with the boy for release, speaking to him not in words but in warm, curling fingers of velvet inside his skull.

“Ugh! Ouunngh…Ah! Ah!” Justin gasped for air, spilling his warmth over Bear’s hand with wave after wave of bliss shaking his body from head to toes.

Bear pulled his hand away from Justin, slipping his fingers out of the convulsing hole. The big man took Justin by the shoulders and lifted him so they were facing each other once again. “My turn, blue eyes.” Bear instructed, swinging the popper in front of his face. “If you can do it, do it now.”

Justin whimpered, his head throbbing with a headache worse than he ever imagined possible. But he understood. If he didn’t return the favor to his former protector, the man would take it any way he could get it. The blonde took a deep breath and stared at the large, throbbing member; memories of how badly Bear had hurt him when that cock pushed inside of him lancing through his head. He lowered himself of unsure hands and trembling knees, closing his eyes. The boy took Bear’s cock into his mouth, sucking on the huge head already leaking pre-cum. He tasted the semen and tried to imagine someone else. Anyone. Not Bear. Bear wasn’t making him do this, Bear would never…

“There you go, blue eyes, I know you know what you’re doing.” The big man coaxed and broke the train of denial.

Justin held back a sob and licked a long line from head to base, his hands cupping the man’s balls and massaging them. The boy shuddered as Bear groaned, his voice like a roar alongside the simmering drugs. Justin took as much of Bear into his mouth as he could before it blocked his airway and he slid the man back out, lapping at the slit and jerking the man off with his hands. Bear moaned, another roar, his legs curling around the boy’s body, encompassing him, pulling him closer. Justin jerked Bear faster, hoping it would all be over soon. The man didn’t disagree with the speedy tempo, instead bucking against Justin’s hands and mouth.

Justin squeezed his eyes closed tighter, licking the head and its slowly seeping cum. A soft sob shook loose and Justin groaned to mask it, hoping his sadness wouldn’t wake more sinister things for Bear to do with his dick. The blonde ran his fingernails along Bear’s thick erection and brought a massive growl from the depths of his dark soul. It was enough to make Justin shake with sorrow, the addition of pain adding to Bear’s enhancement as he shot his load all over the boy’s face and neck.

It was too much. This was Bear. Justin couldn’t handle it. He threw himself onto his back and shrieked, wiping at the sticky cream covering him but only managing to spread it further over his gown. He screamed, kicking against the ground, shaking his head as the waves of nausea overwhelmed him and his body struggled against a second onslaught of the drug.

Bear crawled to the boy and shoved the poppers under his nose and forced the drug into the boy’s system.

“Stop screaming, stop it!” Bear said, covering the boy’s mouth until his heavy breathing was the only sound in the alley. He released Justin and stared down at him.

Justin murmured incoherently. “Bear-Bear…” He whispered, reaching up to touch the man’s face, his eyes very lost in sadness and shame. The boy shook his head, his voice so small…so very small. “Please.”

Bear’s heart sank to his stomach. He had always wanted to fuck the boy, but never…to hurt him. What had he done to those beautiful blue eyes? To that smiling boy…He had turned into the monster he had once protected the youth from. Not again, never, ever again. “Your brother is here. Not far. Run.”

“Hunh?” Justin looked up at the man, eyes wide and shining with tears as Bear stood him on his shaky feet.

“RUN!” Bear tore the puffy sleeves off the once perfect costume and threw Justin in the direction of the alley opening. “RUN, DAMN YOU!”

Justin ran, every sense alive and terrified, never looking back. Bear hung his head and sighed. “Forgive me, Justin. One day, remember I was once good and absolve my sins.”

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Justin tripped and fell in his gown, it’s front split already, the fall tore it to even more red and black tatters. The world moved without him. The journey had been so long…his legs burned with exertion and he just wanted to lay down, to sleep. He laid on the pavement, unable to move as he caught his breath. The boy shook his head and forced his feet back under him. Later. He would make sense of the emotional shit later.

The music pulsed louder and Justin covered his ears, hearing his heart pounding against his fingertips, leaning against a building as the floats threw beads to the audience. Justin pushed his way passed them and shouted for aid futilely. If he didn’t find help soon, he was going to pass out.

“There, there, my boy.” A chillingly familiar voice soothed him.

Justin turned around, staring up at Marquis. The man was dressed in brilliant silvers and golds in a magnificent cape draped over a deep blue silk button-down and tight black vinyl pants. He crouched down in front of Justin and smiled.

“I still taste you, my boy. We could make beautiful music together in my house of screams…unless you want me to return you to your Master?”

Justin trembled and shook his head. “No, no, NO!”

“That drink doesn’t have much effect on you, I like that. You have a strong Will, my boy.” The Marquis rose to his feet and offered Justin a hand up. Justin didn’t want to touch the man, but he would never be able to get up on his own.

“I’m going home.” Justin whispered.

“I will be very upset to not see you when I visit your home town.”

“Pity.” Justin shivered, wanting desperately to sleep for a year. At least.

“How about we work something out, hmm? I help you get home and you agree to see me when I come up.”

Justin recoiled in horror. This man wasn’t bad on the outside, but the outer skin wasn’t what terrified Justin. But if he promised now, he didn’t have to live up to his end of the bargain when the time came…

“How can you help me?”

The Marquis kissed Justin’s hand, still holding onto it. “I have means of transportation.”

Justin glared at the man. “My brother is here, I need to find him.”

“The brother you took to your bed, ma petite?”

Justin wanted to tell the man that Sullivan had lied, but thought it might hurt his chances at getting help. “Yes.”

The Marquis smiled. “Very nice.”

“Can you help me or not?” Justin swayed on his feet, wondering when the last time was he had ingested anything but drugs or alcohol.

“I will help you.” Marquis took Justin by the arm and brought him inside a bar. He sat the boy down and got a glass of water for Justin. “Does he have a phone on him?”

“He should, yes.”

Marquis offered his cell phone to the boy.

“Thanks.” Justin drank the water in one long swig, letting the glass topple over on the table. He rest his head on one outstretched elbow and dialed Will’s number.

“Yeah?”

“Will?”

“Justin? Baby? Justin, is that you!”

“Yes…”

“Are you hurt?”

“I…wanna go home.”

“Where are you?”

Justin looked at Marquis. “Where are we?”

“Lady Dove’s, 134 Bourbon Street.” Marquis smiled, stroking a finger under Justin’s chin. Justin lowered his head back to the table.

“Did you hear that?”

“Yes. We’ll be right there.”

“We?”

“Me and Cam…and Brian.”

“No. Absolutely not.”

“What you saw was some jealous trick trying to break you two up. Apparently you’re interested in letting him get what he wanted.”

Justin clutched the phone. “Brian…”

“Is still your patron saint of hidden love and contradictory emotions.”

“Hurry.”

“We’re five minutes away. Stay there.”

Justin closed his eyes. “Don’t hang up. I can’t sleep. Can’t—” He yawned.

“I can keep you up, my boy.”

Justin winced. “Hurry, Willy.”

“Who’s that with you?”

Justin eyed the man. “A friend of Sulli and Bear’s.” He sighed.

“Fuck! We’ll be right there, cause a scene, don’t let him get to you.”

“Can’t cause a scene.” Justin laughed. “Too sleepy.” He laughed again and squinted at the man sitting beside him. “You didn’t drug me, did you?” He snickered and slipped off his chair, laughing.

“Justin? Justin!”

Marquis picked up the phone. “He is unhurt, in slight shock and sleep deprived yes, but nothing time will not heal. He is mistaken, I only run a club those men come to. I will not hurt your boy today.”

“Today.” Will said.

“Absolutely. My boy and I are helping each other out. I am now lifting him off the floor and putting him safely back onto his chair.” Marquis soothed.

“If you’ve hurt him in any way—”

“I assure you I did not. He liked what I did to him, no questions about that.”

“You had better not be there when I get there.” Will threatened in a low growl.

“Leaving now sounds wonderful.” Marquis patted Justin on the head. “Ado, my boy. Another day.”

“Yes…yes.” Justin nodded. “Good…bye.”

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Brian stroked Justin’s forehead and whispered in his ear. “Can you hear me? Justin?”

“Hmm?”

“Wake up, Justin.”

“Ohhhh…” The boy gripped his stomach, undecided if that hurt more than his head. He put the back of one hand on his head. “Ohhhhhhhh.” He groaned again.

“You had more drugs in your system than most junkies they get in here.” Brian said quietly.

Justin opened his eyes. “Hospital?”

“Yeah. In Pittsburgh.” Brian sighed happily. They were worried Justin wouldn’t wake up for a much longer time. If at all.

“Home?” Justin asked, tears welling up in his eyes.

“You’re safe now.” Brian stroked the boy’s hair. “Are you in pain?”

“Inside.” Justin forced his tears away.

“Should I get the doctor?” Brian was already standing up. He wanted to do anything to wipe the horrible pain from the boy’s face.

“Head.” Justin closed his eyes. He wasn’t about to let Brian know what he had done with Sullivan. “And…heart.”

Brian leaned down with a sigh, kissing the boy’s forehead. “It’ll get better.”

“I really don’t want to see you right now.” Justin turned away from the man. Shame burned his cheeks.

“What you saw was some arrogant prick waiting for you to walk into the room. Everyone heard him, Justin. He was jealous that I wouldn’t take him over you.”

“Look, I need to shovel through a lot of emotional shit right now. I need to be alone. I don’t want you around. I don’t want to explain myself, or have things explained to me. I just…want to be alone.” He turned to watch Brian get up and start to leave. “You’ve been crying.” The boy said in an attempt to scathe the man. One thing Brian had never liked was either of them crying, it made him feel weak.

“Yeah.” Brian said simply. “I have.”

Justin pushed himself up on his elbows. Brian admitting he had been upset enough to cry? “Why?”

“Because you’re safe.”

“Happy tears.”

“And because I knew you wouldn’t look at me.”

“Feeling sorry for yourself tears.”

“Justin.” Brian groaned. “You can’t be mad at me for what that useless, jealous stranger did. You can’t be mad at me for leaving with Sullivan because it’s not my fault. So why are you mad at me?”

The boy turned his face away, tears burning in his chest. “Because I can’t be mad at anyone else but myself!” He shouted, then whispered. “And that hurts too much.”

“Then you can be mad at me if it helps deal with the pain. Get better…I’ll stop by later.” He walked to the door.

“You talk real pretty, Mr. Kinney.”

“It’s all I can do to stop from screaming. Justin, eleven days ago I thought there would be nothing left of you but shattered dental records. I’m too shocked that you’re sitting in front of me to even start arguing with you. I’ll process how to talk to you without bending to your every whim after I figure out how you escaped alive, then I’ll get angry that you thought I would abandon you for some senseless trick. I’m beyond that part of my life, and sometimes that makes me nervous, but I’m not a coward, I’m going to face this and let myself see that I have never been happier. What I want now is to take away that haunted look of betrayal in your eyes. I want to know that you trust me again, not because you know in your head that I would never do that to you, but in your heart. I want you to feel for me what you once did, in the very beginning.”

Justin smiled softly. “You’re not a God, Brian. I know that now.”

Brian’s face fell. “I mean…with that sheltered purity and light. I don’t want to be a God, I want to be a man. Your man.”

“I don’t want anyone right now, Brian.”

“I know.”

“Bear was there. Sullivan…I can’t handle this with you right now. I…want to…be alone.”

“I’m leaving.”

“No, I mean -really- alone. Not for a day or week. I don’t want to do this anymore. I don’t want to be in love. Not with you, or anyone. The Goddamn fairytale is over, Brian. I want out.”

Brian set his jaw in a rigid line. Those were not Justin’s words. “I’m not stopping you from doing what you want, Justin. I’ll be here when you want me to be.”

Justin turned his back to the door, tears sliding down his cheeks. “I don’t want you to be there, or here. Just. Go. Away.”

Brian fought the tears. “One more thing…before I go?”

Justin turned around, the pain in his eyes contagious, crashing over Brian like a fierce blow. Tears glittered in his eyes. “What?”

Brian reached into his pocket, drawing out a string of rainbow beads. “You missed the end of the parade. I…punched some naked college girl for these.” He offered a small smile and draped the shimmering plastic necklace in the boy’s hands.

Justin gazed up at the man emptily. “Thank you.”

Brian nodded. “This doesn’t stop me from loving you, even if you stop loving me.”

“Go, Brian.”

Brian left.

A Family Way

Justin sat in front of the unfinished painting, brush dangling from his right hand long forgotten. His eyes were unfocused, staring not at the art but at something no one else could see. The young man grew more and more withdrawn as days turned into nights, sliding into each other unnoticed by the cold blue eyes. Justin couldn't stand to be with his family, let alone Brian. He would have been happy grabbing a bottle of vodka and walking until his problems melted away, but Lindsay intervened. No one wanted to lose him again. She made an invitation Justin had to accept.

Lindsay said he could bunk in the attic with all her art supplies, free of charge. What drew him to the converted studio, though, was the promise that he would be left completely alone. No one came to knock asking how he was doing. No one forced him to talk about the trauma in New Orleans. Apparently everyone thought it was a good idea to keep him upstairs, where at least they could hear a thump of a dead body if he killed himself. Even Debbie stayed her distance. Justin didn't have to come down unless he needed to use the bathroom or got hungry. Seeing as it was unusual for the boy to eat much, or for the upstairs toilet to be occupied, Justin hadn't seen anyone for two weeks.

At first, Justin stared at the craft knife in Lindsay's tool box, eyeing the sharp blade for hours on end. But the emotions that ran through his mind screamed for action, for release. It was either blood or paint, and Justin chose finally to attack a canvas instead of his wrists. After two weeks in solitary confinement and only one semi-finished, aggressively raging red and black bar scene, Justin wanted to scream and throw himself out the sky-light.

It was too quiet and he was far too sober.

Justin knew Lindsay and Melanie stopped carrying liquor in the house when Mark, Brian's thirteen year old son from another woman, came to live with them. But it was worth a shot.

The blonde crept halfway down the stairs and listened. He could deal with Gus, maybe Lindsay but Mark and Melanie didn't have to speak to ask a question. Their eyes did the grilling all on their own. Justin knew Mark would make a great lawyer if he stopped playing on the wrong side of the courtroom.

Gus stood at the bottom of the stairs watching Justin intently, the older boy lost in his own thoughts. "Wanna play, Jussin?"

Justin woke from his silent reverie. "Gus? Um…who else is home?"

"Jus' momma."

"Not Mel or Mark?"

"Huh uh." Gus shook his head. "Wanna play?"

"Where's momma?"

"Kitchen. Wanna play, Jussin?"

"Not right now, Gus."

The boy hung his head. "Momma says you're too sad anyway. I'm not suppos'ta bother you."

Justin sighed and sat on the carpeted steps. "Come 'ere, Gus."

The boy climbed next to Justin. "How come you're sad, Jussin?"

"I got hurt."

"How?"

"Bad men."

"Like before?"

Justin winced. He hoped that when Gus got older, the baby would forget about the time spent kidnapped by Sullivan Kinney. Mark and Justin would never forget, but with Gus there was hope. "Yeah, like before."

"You weren't this sad before."

"Too many hurts inside make me much sadder this time."

"It hurts inside?"

"Yes."

"Daddy hurts inside, too. That's what momma says."

"I know he does."

"How come?"

"Because I have too many hurts and he can't help."

"Will you get better?"

Justin sighed, forcing bitter tears back into the painful tightness of his chest. It seemed like forever since he had cried, even though it had only been a few weeks since he was brought back home and released from the hospital. "I don't know, Gus."

"You will." Gus leaned over and hugged Justin's slim waist. "I promise."

Justin steadied his breathing. He was not going to cry. Touch…an eternity without touch, without allowing touch. Gus didn't want anything from this embrace except to make Justin feel better, and still the blonde wanted to run away, to hide from the boy.

"Thank you, Gussy."

Mark slipped in the door as if a spy slinking into a foreign embassy. He gasped when his eyes locked with Justin's. The teenager didn't expect to see his friend downstairs, let alone speaking with Gus. A slight rift of jealousy rippled through him, but he pushed it away. If Justin was going to talk to anyone, Mark would not stop him.

Justin fought the urge to bail, to run back to his sanctuary. A tremble ran though his body as Mark took a genial step forward, jacket wrapped tightly against his body. It wasn't cold out…

"I got you a present." Mark said before Justin could say a word. He slipped his arm out and set a bottle of vodka on the stairs at Justin's feet.

Justin could have chastised the boy for stealing, but this gift was exactly what he wanted. The blonde sighed. "Why don't you…come sit down?"

Mark grinned, beaming at the invite. He obeyed, sitting on the other side of his brother. The boy stayed silent, waiting for Justin to make the next move.

"How was school?"

"It's Saturday." Mark said, but wanted to keep Justin talking. "But in general it's okay. I made it this whole week without being sent to the principal's office!"

"That's good, Mark."

"Doesn't it get lonely up there?" Mark asked abruptly, unable to help himself.

"Thank you for the vodka." Just said and got up.

"Wait, please! I…know I'm not supposed to talk about what happened because it will upset you, but I can't just ignore the fact that my best friend in the entire world is wasting away up in the attic. Alone."

"Thanks for the vodka. Mark." Justin said, adding the boy's last name with a finality that meant the conversation was over. He took the bottle angrily and started up the stairs.

"Want me to chill a glass? I could!" Mark tried to stall Justin's ascent.

"No." Justin said flatly. He turned around. "But…do we have any V-8 Splash left?"

"Sure! You want the bottle or just a glass?" Mark beamed.

"Oh, the entire bottle sounds good." Justin tried to return the smile but just didn't feel it. Mark getting the juice was better than Justin having to walk around Lindsay.

"Can I come up and draw?" Gus asked. It was one of his favorite hobbies that didn't involve completely trashing the house.

"Gus…I don't think so…"

"Okay." The boy sniffled.

Justin bit his bottom lip. He was so incredibly lonely. "Only if you leave right when I say, no questions asked."

"Yeah!" Gus charged up the stairs, passed Justin.

"C-can I come too?" Mark asked quietly.

"Same rules apply. No questions, no pressing me."

"Okay, I'll get the juice." Mark started down. "Hey, Justin?" He turned.

Justin looked over his shoulder. "Yeah?"

"Thanks. I really miss you."

"I really miss me, too."

\*

The group at Liberty Diner finished their lunch. Emmett and Ted sat across from Michael and Brian, Melanie on the other side of Michael. Debbie took their dishes and returned with a frown. Brian didn't eat much anymore. Her boys were starving themselves, but no one would give details to what happened. Only Brian and Justin knew, and she thought that Lindsay and Melanie must know something more because they were harboring Justin. Nobody knew more than they had to, just that Sunshine was hurt and was not to be disturbed.

"Lindsay wanted us to have dinner together tonight." Melanie said softly. The light had gone out of their lives as if it had never existed. Her lover usually stayed home to make sure Justin wasn't left completely alone. "She said that Gus wanted to ask Justin to come down."

"She won't let him, will she?" Brian asked, suddenly looking into her eyes with panic. The boy had made it clear he did not want to be bothered. Brian was afraid he would hurt himself if anyone tried to make him talk.

"She told him not to. Again. He really misses Justin."

"We ALL do." Brian scowled.

"Then maybe it's time to ask." Debbie took Mel's side.

"No!" Brian shouted. "We've left him alone for two weeks and if he hasn't come down then he is not fucking ready!"

"Maybe you're not ready, either." Michael said. It was easy for his best friend to be strong when Justin got hurt, as long as the boy let him make it better. Now that Justin refused help, Brian was falling apart.

Melanie's cell phone rang and she turned away from the group. "Hello?"

"It's Lindz. What did they say to dinner?"

"Unlikely."

"Tell them that Mark and Gus are up in the attic with Justin. He came down and invited them up."

"They are?"

"Mark wouldn't say much, but he came down to get juice and glasses for them."

"I'll tell the guys. We'll be home in a little bit."

"Did you tell her we aren't coming?" Brian snapped.

Melanie hung up. "No, I told her we would be right there. But Mark and Gus won't be joining us. They're up having juice with Justin."

"What? They talked to him?"

"He came down and spoke to them."

"How was he?"

"I don't think Lindsay talked to him, but it's a start."

Brian put his head on the table. It was definitely a start.

\*

Panic lanced through Justin's body as familiar and dreaded voices multiplied downstairs. He turned accusatory eyes to his young guests.

"We didn't tell them to come, honest." Mark said immediately.

"Time to go." Justin said, struggling to control his panting breaths.

"I'm not lying!"

"Get OUT!" Justin shrieked.

Mark scooped a sobbing Gus into his arms and stampeded downstairs. He pointed at the group of adults. "You fucking ruined it!" The rage in his voice was hot enough to scald. They had heard Justin scream, but had nothing to say to the allegations. "We were getting along great and then he heard your voices and thought it was an ambush! I could have made him better!" Mark yelled though his tears. "I want my friend back." He whispered, sinking onto the bottom stair. The teenager wiped his nose with his forearm and sniveled to a stop.

Brian crouched in front of his sons, Gus still crying freely and Mark hiding behind the mask used so adamantly with the Kinney men. "He needs time to heal, Mark. Justin is very good at knowing what he needs, and when he needs it. I want you to trust him to get better on his own, alright? Go on to the kitchen and get some dinner."

Mark looked up at his dad. "You're going up there." He stated.

Brian looked at his friends, then his boys, and got up. "Yes. Yes I am."

\*

Justin fought the distorted images of the Tormented Gardens, of Sulli and Bear and Marquis. He threw the canvas against the wall, smashing the wooden frame. An untamed scream tore from his throat and Justin fell to the floor on his knees. He plowed his fingers through shaggy blonde hair, pulling until the pain brought stars to his vision. Still, it wasn't enough.

Wasn't good enough. The pain didn't make the images go away.

Justin skittered noisily across the floor and tore open Lindsay's craft box, twisting the blade of her Exact-O knife until it could go no farther. The blonde squeezed his eyes shut and pressed the blade to his wrist, trembling, seeing nothing but the pain, feeling nothing but torture…those evil faces…Sullivan…Bear…Marquis…Russell…so many men…The blood came in a thin, hot line, the vein not punctured yet.

"I hear killing someone else is a much more therapeutic approach. And you'd be alive to see it." Brian said, fighting to keep from screaming, from lunging at the boy. Justin was upset enough to take his own life.

Justin gasped, gawking at Brian. His shock turned to anger and he threw the knife at his lover, then followed suit with the canvas remains. "GET OUT!"

"No." Brian said simply. He was sure to stand against the wall, hands clasped unthreateningly in front of him. Over his groin.

"GET THE FUCK OUT!"

"No."

Justin got to his feet and moved to the corner farthest from Brian, grabbing the vodka bottle on his way. His body went to throw it, but his mind brought it instead to his lips. His eyes were wild, frightened.

"I am not going to hurt you. Somewhere in there, Justin knows that."

A brief flicker of recognition flashed in the blue eyes, as if hearing his name said aloud made him realize how far away he was from the person he had been. The boy put the cold bottle against his wrist to seal the inch-long cut.

"I'm Justin." The blonde said with simmering rage. The emotion was strong and took over all fear, all panic, all helplessness.

"Good to know."

"What do you want?"

"To talk to Justin."

"That's why you came over, even though you knew it wouldn't happen?"

"I came over for dinner. Lindsay doesn't get much of a social life these days."

"That is not my fault!"

"Yes, Justin, it is." Brian said, again, with no emotion, no blame, just facts. He knew to keep saying the boy's name to maintain the persona he was talking to. What he didn't need was for the blonde to fear him, to become some shell of his former self willing to commit suicide out of desperation to end the pain. Anger was good. Anger, Brian could deal with.

Justin stared at Brian, an icy glare with nothing of the happiness the boy used to harbor.

"We are terrified about how far you will take this. Now I see how far, and it's what we wanted to stop you from doing. We can't talk to you because you think this is something no one can help you with, and maybe we can't, but I will not let you kill yourself. You won't even let us try to help you, Justin. You are wasting away to nothing and-"

"Leave. Just get out!" Justin turned his face against the wall. "You have the knife, so just go."

"No. One attempt does not end with one unless you die. You are going to let me talk, Justin." Brian pointed at the boy until he had his attention. "We want you to get better. We are your friends, your family. But the things in your head that you aren't sharing have emptied your heart, and worse, your stomach. It's kept you from eating. You stay up here, scared, angry at the world, so no one will remind you of how bad you're looking. I'm here to remind you, Justin."

"I know I look bad! I know my ribs are sticking out, and my skin is like paper. I know I'm not eating. I. Can't. Don't you see?" Justin held back the tears, shoving them deeper into his heart. "Everything…I can't stop thinking about it! It clouds EVERYTHING!"

"No one wants you to stop thinking about it. That's how people work through trauma. They either hold it inside until there's nothing left-"

"Like you."

"Or they get it out by talking and crying and screaming and throwing fits and…"

"Painting."

Brian smiled and tried to will the same reaction out of the boy. "I was going to say drinking."

"Brian, I really don't want to-"

"You need to be with people right now, Justin."

"Kindly let me finish?" Justin groaned. "Slap me if I ever sound like my mother again?"

"Will do."

"I was…fuck. Brian, I don't want to be alone! Look what I almost did. But at the same time…I do. I can't stand thinking that there are people around me but…if I…it's so lonely. I yelled at the kids." He hung his head.

"Those kids love you. You protect them. It's okay to get mad, that's why we were given vocal capacities to scream."

"I'm their Bear." Justin scowled, anger returning. "I'll hurt them and they'll never recover."

"You are nothing like Bear, Justin. He didn't deserve the honor of protecting you."

"He let me go." Justin looked at the man to judge his reaction.

Shock and surprise, anger, amazement, fear, gratefulness. "He did?"

"You wanted to know how I got away from Sullivan. That's how. But it cost me…I flipped out…I don't remember all of it but I know that he-" Justin shuddered, the first tears spilling down his cheeks. "He made me…and he came, all over. I lost it. He drugged me to stop the screams but I was already drugged…I thought I was going to die and all I could think about was how I could have ever loved anyone, let them into my life, been so innocent…The world was thick, my voice…I said something that made him let me go." Justin choked on his sobs. "I was running and falling and so tired. Then there was nothing but the ground and…nothing. The hospital." Justin shook his head.

Brian stood absolutely still, blending into the room so Justin could feel safe to bare his soul. He knew that a man had spoken to Will and said something to piss him off, had helped Justin but not without a favor in return. Whether the boy truly didn't remember or he wasn't ready to add that part into the equation, didn't matter. He was sharing, talking, not slicing his wrists.

"Damn him! Why did he have to pick me?" Justin threw his hands in the air. "Why did I have to see that fucking asshole kissing you? I trusted you, but I trusted Bear and I…it hurts so bad to think that I put myself into that situation. It's all my fault, and I am so fucking sick of being a victim! Why can't I be cold and calloused and unfeeling?" Justin sobbed loudly. "Like you?"

Brian stayed still, his voice steady despite the pain ripping through his chest at his boy's heartache. "I can't be like that anymore. You helped me to feel."

"Why don't you hate me for that? Justin curled into a ball, rocking on his feet, hugging his knees.

"Because through the pain and trouble and anxiety, the way you look at me makes it all worthwhile. The way you smile is my reward." Brian lowered himself, so very slow, onto his hands and knees.

Justin watched his lover but didn't protest. His body was rigid with fear but his eyes begged for the comfort of touch.

Brian crawled over the floor and stopped an arm's length from the boy. He carefully untied his shell bracelet, holding one hand, palm up, out for Justin to accept. The blonde shook terribly and closed his eyes, but rest his hand in Brian's. The man knotted the bracelet around Justin's wrist.

"Sullivan gave me a scar to remind me that I could never safely fall in love. I thought it was the most horrible thing he could have done, short of killing me. Before I was his victim I loved the idea of love, and you brought that feeling back to me. For so long, I thought I was safe from ever having to feel the pain and trouble of love because I never had to acknowledge the reason I strayed so far from the path. I brought everything back to the surface to keep you safe. I want you to hide the scars now until you're ready to fall in love and reveal what keeps you from sleeping at night to that special person." Brian lowered his head and kissed the boy's palm and the shell resting on Justin's wound.

Justin looked at the man, studying the pained hazel eyes. His gaze drifted to the scar wrapping around Brian's wrist. That bracelet was all that kept Brian from revealing himself to the rest of the world. He was coming out of his safe shelter so Justin could get comfortable in his place, for as long as he needed.

"I can't make it go away, but if you know how I can help, please tell me."

"I don't know what will help."

"How about a giant bowl of ice cream?"

"French vanilla?"

"And two cans of whipped cream."

"Cherries."

"Rainbow sprinkles."

"Butterscotch?" Justin almost smiled.

"And M & M's."

"Damn you, Brian Kinney." Justin shook his head and took a swig of vodka. "You knew you would come up with me screaming and go down with me smiling."

"I let you wallow in self-pity for two weeks! My bed hasn't been fucked on in ages!"

Justin smiled, and the emotion went to his eyes. Happiness. "Maybe you could find another jealous twink who wants to break us up to give your bed a little romp."

"Don't we have to be together again before we can break up?" Brian said hopefully.

"I…don't know. I'm not ready for more sex…let alone a relationship. I can't be jealous of a boyfriend I don't have."

"Want to make a bet?"

"You get jealous of guys around me?"

"All the time." Brian pushed his tongue in his cheek. "Not that I just said that or anything."

"Of course."

"I understand, Justin. I will never force you to come back to my bed. But you're going to have a lot of explaining to do to make up for your absence on those sheets…" Brian teased.

Justin grinned. "I'll think of something. Your bed's gullible. But what are we going to tell the shower?" Justin asked with mock worry.

"He'll never know you weren't on vacation. Shh!"

Justin laughed and leaned against Brian. The man embraced him and rocked their bodies with a gently comfort.

"You don't really want ice cream for a return meal, do you?" Brian asked as he felt the tension leave Justin's body, his body responding in the same way.

Justin shook his head. "I smell chicken parmesan."

"Debbie's been preparing for the day when we breached the fortress."

Justin recoiled again, pulling away from Brian. The man let him go, a tightness in his stomach like a solid weight. What had set the boy to hiding again?

"I can't eat in front of them right now." Justin shuddered, his voice a whimper. He thought Brian was going to force him, still, to do something he didn't want to do.

"I didn't ask you to, Justin." Brian coaxed soothingly. "Do you want to make a picnic up here with just you and me and what's left of that vodka?"

"No." Justin said, turning his sorrowful blue eyes away from Brian.

"Baby, please don't pull away from me."

Justin took a deep breath and closed his eyes, then another deep breath. He looked at his lover. "I want to go outside. To the park?"

Brian let go of the tension building in his shoulders. "Yes. The park. I'll uh…go and get some of Deb's dinner and we can go, okay?"

"You don't want to do it tomorrow afternoon? The sun is going down tonight."

"We'll watch the sunset."

"I like that."

"I do, too. Get your coat."

\*

Panting, gun held in the air to keep from shooting one of the oblivious porn store patrons, Will pressed himself against one of the high shelves and listened. Just beyond the 'Huge Tittie Fucking Lesbians IV' and 'Virgin School Girls Meet Godzilla Dick' was a dark hallway blocked off into separate pay rooms. Intended initially for a quick means of taking care of one's business, Will knew one booth was hiding much more than a dollar bit of flesh film.

Bear was here.

Cameron slipped one hand around the corner and waved Will onward. She was closer to the dimly lit hallway, but wanted her brother closer to guard her back. The blonde man moved, pressing himself against one wall while Cam took the other. Each listened to the doors on their side, shaking their heads in turn and moving on. They could hear the sounds of release, but no voice was bold enough to be Bear. Will swore that if he ever caught Justin in a place with such lack of security, and sanitation, he'd wring the boy's neck. Brian, if the man ever got back on speaking terms with Justin, would not let him come into a place this…filthy.

His sister pointed at the last corner booth on Will's side. It was behind a blind spot, the door hidden in the dark illuminated only by a small right light proclaiming OCCUPIED.

"Fuck." Will hissed. Cameron shook her head. Bear could just as easily have been hiding in the dark as in a booth, and even unarmed, he could pack a powerful punch.

Will pulled back the hammer, bringing a round into the chamber. Since Cameron came back into their lives, Will had taken a great shining to helping her rid the world of people who hurt their little brother. The old list was dwindling, but Justin was accumulating more than his siblings could ever keep up with. Will's stomach clenched in knots. There was still a part of him that loved Bear. If Justin would let him talk, the boy would figure out that there was hurt all around from the man's betrayal. They both trusted Bear. Now Will was going to put a bullet in his former friend and call it a day.

Bear crouched in the blackness and crawled toward Will, pressing himself as far into the wall as he could. Cameron was moving, gun pointed at nothing but the tiny, almost nonexistent red bulb. Will moved to flank her, shaky in the dark. The big man slipped between them, each covering one wall and moving to center on the door. Bear turned the corner and got up. He hurried passed 'Donnor Goes Blitzen' and 'Racial Harmony VI' to the door and ran out.

Justin was waiting. And so was Marquis.

Hell, so was Sullivan. It was just a matter of who got to the boy first.

\*

Justin's head rest on Brian's lap, his eyes shining with the yellow and orange clouds above. A soft smile lit his face as his lover traced a strawberry dipped in whipped cream over his lips. The boy laughed, pressing his lips together to stifle the tickle of such a light touch. He turned over and brought himself onto his hands and knees. The fresh air was just what he needed…not to mention the comfort of watching the clouds with no one around but Brian. They hadn't spoken a word since the attic; their eyes did all the talking, all the apologizing, all the healing no words could say.

Now it was time to talk, the sun casting deep golden hues over their faces, shining in Brian's eyes and making the hazel irises glow with a deep orange fire. The boy reached under his shirt collar and pulled the string of rainbow beads from Mardi Gras Brian had given him.

"I was afraid you would have gotten rid of them." Brian said, running his fingers along the plastic.

"Never crossed my mind." Justin caressed Brian's cheek. "It's the little things…Love isn't in candy and flowers or sonnets, songs, and poems. It's coming home to someone…wanting to come home to them every night. It's eye contact and-"

"Finishing each other's sentences."

Justin smiled. "Exactly. I missed you finishing my sentences."

Brian touched Justin's chin, tilting the luscious lips upward. He kissed the boy, gentle as a sigh, waiting for his lover to return the touch when he was ready for more.

Justin's hand grasped the hairs curling at the back of Brian's neck, pulling the man against his mouth. A deep sigh escaped the two, a unified breath they had been holding for far too long. The boy had to bring one of Brian's hand to the small of his back with his free hand, the man's touch trembling and uncertain until Justin gave him permission.

A shrill ringing made Justin jump away from Brian, sprawling to his elbows, legs on either side of his lover. Brian went after him slowly, laying on his back beside the boy. He brought Justin on top of him and sat up, whispering. "It's okay, just the phone."

Brian bit his lip and grabbed his cell phone. "This had better be fucking good." He growled.

"Brian, it's Will. Bear's back in town. We were on him, but he slipped by."

"God damnit, can't you fucking keep an eye on him for one second?"

"What's wrong?" Justin snuggled up against the man, regulating his breathing.

"Brian, he's already been at Lindsay's. He forced his way in and ransacked the house looking for Justin."

"Is everyone okay?" Brian pulled Justin closer to him, pressing the boy's cheek against his chest and absently stroking his lover's baby-fine blonde hair.

"They're fine, he didn't want any of them."

"Where is he now?"

"That's the problem, we don't know."

"Find him."

"Where are you?"

"The park. Out in the open."

"He might try Debbie's or Liberty first, but you might be safer on the move."

Justin rubbed his face on Brian's shirt, inhaling the man's familiar scent. He lifted his head and put his chin on Brian's shoulder, catching the last of the sunset.

"We'll go." Brian sighed.

Justin raised his head in alarm, lips trembling in place of screams. His mind shouted a warning but his body couldn't move. Bear was coming up the grassy hill at record speed, a wide grin plastered on his dark face. The big man plowed right into the couple, his large hands swooping Justin up by his shirt and one arm while sending Brian shooting across the blanket. Justin found his scream as he flew into the air over Bear's shoulder.

Brian recovered quickly and threw himself into Bear. The big man caught Brian by the shoulder and wrenched the man's arm behind him. He threw Brian rolling onto the grass with a weighty thump and stood ready for the next futile assault. Brian shook his head and struggled to get to his feet.

"LET ME GO!" Justin screamed, kicking his feet. He lifted Bear's shirt and raked his fingernails against the man's back until bright blood seeped into the waist of his pants.

Bear brought the boy from over his shoulder and shook Justin roughly until the blonde head stopped fighting against the motion. He swung Justin back over his shoulder without any more protest, Justin's mind reeling as he nearly lost his dinner down Bear's shirt.

"Time for me to fly, Kinney."

"NO!" Brian screamed through clenched teeth. He stood ready to attack and hoped Will was bringing the arsenal fast enough so his stalling would be worthwhile.

Justin blinked a few times until the green lawn stopped spinning. He didn't want to be shaken again, but he sure as hell didn't want to be kidnapped. The boy waited until he felt coordinated enough to get away and run like a bat out of hell, then shifted all his weight over Bear's heavy shoulder. The big man's grip on his upper thighs wasn't prepared for the new movement and Justin collapsed to the ground at a ducking, dodging sprint. Brian jumped on Bear, digging his thumbs into the man's eyes as his lover made his escape.

"You idiot!" Bear growled, swiping at the gnat of a man attacking him. "I'm trying to SAVE him!"

"Bullshit you are!" Brian yelled, hoping he wouldn't throw up his dinner along with his dignity when he popped out the big man's eyes.

Justin ran until his lungs took in fire instead of air, his legs protesting to go any farther on the adrenaline rush. He reached the line of trees surrounding the park and fell in a heap at the foot of the oaks.

The dark haired man smiled and stepped beside the blonde, one royally decorated slipper foot setting delicately on the heaving back. Justin gasped and stared up at his newest problem.

"Hello there, my boy. I traveled so very far to see you. You wouldn't be skipping out on our agreement, would you?"

Justin gaped up at the man. "Marquis. N-no. No I…"

"I brought something for you, my pretty one. You do remember the Cataleptic, don't you?"

The boy shook his head, backpedaling on his arms and legs away from the trees. "No. Please."

"Be a good boy and take your medicine." Marquis stepped forward menacingly, shaking a small phial back and forth in the air.

"No."

The man's two bodyguards crept from the trees after their master, their big muscled arms pinning Justin to the ground. One man jerked Justin's head back and pried open his jaw. A strangled scream curled from his throat as Marquis straddled the blonde, uncorking the phial with one thumb as he leaned down to lick his tongue over the boy's lips and teeth.

"That's my good boy. Remember to swallow!" Marquis said with a smile, tilting the glass tube over Justin's open mouth.

The sky had lost all it's warmth, the faint stars overhead dotting a hazy twilit horizon. Justin's body bucked under the men, convulsing as the drug coerced through his limbs. He shrieked as the liquid tore at his throat, his eyesight going from white to fiery red and then to an all encompassing, mind-numbing black.

\*

Sullivan Kinney crossed his legs at the ankles over an expensive cherry oak desk, fingers laced through the back of his bushy dark brown hair. A contented smile lifted the corners of the man's thick, curvaceous lips. From his newly converted office in the room furthest from the front door, the man could see all his achievements at Dark Starr Productions. It had taken some major cleaning, due to the vibrant lacquered ruby blood and brains stuck to the cement walls, but the room was well worth it. It was dark and foreboding, as a snuff film director's office should be.

The sounds of powered grunts floated to his ears accompanied by muffled screams and sobbing as the whistling songs of a chorus of leather whips rained down upon unwilling flesh. All of the victims captured on film were unloosening, and all of them were going to die. Sullivan paid a high price for the five boys now being tortured to death, and he was going to make them turn a profit.

Just two hours ago Sullivan had received a visitor in his dark chambers. The man had offered the tremblingly young sacrifices and two bottles of the black liquor and drug mix, The Crow's Eye, or more appropriately, The Cataleptic. All of this for Justin Taylor's location. Sullivan gave a list of possible addresses for the new actor's in his snuff films, told the Sadism King of New Orleans about the first flesh auction of the season, and showed Marquis out. He then immediately called Bear, though the men were not on personal speaking terms at the moment. This was more than personal, this was a brand new game with the finest of ivory pawns up for grabs.

'Where are ya, sugah? I've got a message for you.'

'In town.'

'Oh?'

'Marquis has an agreement with Angelface for a rendezvous, if you'd like to know.' Sulli had purred, wrapping the cord of the telephone around one finger.

'How soon?'

Sullivan twirled the phials of dark liquid while talking to his former hired muscle, holding the bottles against a lamp and unable to see through the brutal liquid.

'How soon?' Bear repeated.

'Could be days unless he figures out I lied.'

'So where is he?' Bear asked, reading the back of a porno, putting it back, and picking up another.

'Having a picnic.'

'You know this for fact?'

'I do.'

'Mind coughing up some proof?'

'Not at all. I happen to have the room wired. When he cries himself to sleep, that boy stays out until morning no matter who comes to see him. The point is, I have a business to run. I can't always come to Angel's rescue.'

'When have you ever?' Bear growled, eyeing the two people that entered the shop. He fell into a crouch, out of Will's view.

'Don't you dare act high and mighty with me, darlin'. You fucked him too. Hurt him worse than I did, if I recall his midnight tears.'

'What's the ulterior motive, Kinney? You're never without one.' Bear said in a near whisper.

'You know Marquis. He'll kill the kid and I am not through having my way with my cousin's true love.'

'I see.' Bear said, moving to the film booths toward the back.

'You're being chased…'

'Point?'

'Justin is having a picnic in the park. I hear he's feeling better today. Maybe you should pay him a visit?'

'I ask again, what are you getting out of this. No bullshit about fun and games.'

'The victory of taking that sweet ass away from your possession as you did to me, once you obliterate Marquis as a threat.'

'You're a coward.' Bear said as he switched the lock to occupied on the last empty booth, hiding in a dark corner.

'Yes, but a damn good looking one.' Sulli had said before hanging up.

The Southern man got up from his desk and walked among the many tortured beds, the victim's turning piteous eyes to the saucy man as he stalked just beyond the camera lenses. He leaned to the assistant director and told him to take over.

Sulli just couldn't sit back and wait to see who got to Justin first. He may have preferred to stay on the side lines until he could rush in as scavenger, but patience was not his strong suit and the game could not go on without him. Besides, if he caught Justin before Bear and Marquis, he wouldn't have to kill anyone to get another taste of the sweet boy meat.

He did rather mind ruining his manicure with fresh blood.

\*

Bear barreled down the hill at breakneck speed, Brian ahead of him going so fast he nearly took flight. The three men below, Marquis and his muscle, had Justin shrieking uncontrollably on the ground. When the screaming stopped, so did Justin's seizing body.

"Justin!" Brian yelled, jumping on the man who pinned the boy's arms. Bear threw all his weight onto the man, not much smaller than himself, who was prying Justin's jaws open. Brian was easily discarded, tossed to the grass like so much meat. He got to his feet and ran at Justin's attacker, losing his breath as the big man doubled him over with a punch to the gut.

Marquis lifted Justin over his shoulder, his eloquent clothing made to hide twenty pounds of lean muscle. He managed his new boy as easily as the many other semi-conscious boys in his harem. The man headed to the trees, coveting his treasure into the darkness.

Sullivan ran to the scene, scanning the area but not finding Justin. Or Marquis. His cousin was on the ground coughing, gasping, the muscle above him ready to smash his fists through Brian's skull. Sullivan dove at Brian and knocked him into the bodyguard's legs, toppling them all to the ground.

"Hello, cousin. Fine night for a rescue, no?"

"Fuck off!" Brian punched Sulli in the nose and scrambled to his feet.

"My nose! If you broke my nose, you bitch..!" Sullivan growled, lunging at Brian. The two rolled to the grass, one on top of the other, throwing random, uncoordinated blows that rarely hit their mark.

Bear broke his opponent's neck and stepped over the Kinney sprawl to match the second muscled man. A sudden fire tore through the man's body long before he heard the explosion. The other contender burst into a flower of blood and meat, one hand reaching up absently to scratch at his ruined throat before falling to the grass. Bear turned to stare at Will and his smoking gun. The two gawked at each other for what seemed like an eternity before the big man bolted into the woods, shoulder numb and bleeding. Will fired twice more, once at Bear's shadow and then at the grass by Sullivan and Brian.

The men, hands tangled in each other's hair, looked at Will.

"Where's Justin?" Will ran to them. Cameron took of after Bear.

"FUCK!" Brian growled.

Will put the gun to Sullivan's cheek. "Let go or lose your face."

Sulli sneered but released Brian.

"Now get the fuck off him and put your hands on your head. Slowly."

"What are you, a cop, sugah?"

"Does it matter what side of the law I'm on when I scatter the park with your teeth?"

Sulli slipped off his cousin. "Good point."

"Where is he?" Will repeated as Brian got to his feet.

"Well I don't have him, I think that's plain to see."

"Who does?"

"I notice two missing men who came here with the exact same reasoning as you and I. Perhaps you should ask them, hmm?"

"The other one, who is he?" Brian asked.

"Marquis. He owns a rather seedy establishment in Naw'lins." Sulli smiled seductively.

"And how did he come to know Justin, Sullivan." Brian demanded.

"Answer straight away. Don't forget you're on the list of people who get to die for hurting him." Will said.

"Now why would I help you if you're just going to kill me?" Sulli grinned. "Face it, sugah, you need me."

"Fine. Say that we do need you." Will reasoned. "What kind of information do you have to bargain for your life?"

"I want assurances."

"And life's a bitch."

"Then I'll say goodbye and let you send me to my maker with all the secrets you're going to need to find Angelface."

"He's bluffing." Brian said with a scowl. "If there's one man here who believes he'll never die, it's Sullivan." Brian glared at his cousin. "He knows no more than we do. Kill him."

"I don't think we should cut him off so easily." Will said, fitting into the role of good cop.

"We are wasting valuable time. Kill him and let's go." Brian grabbed the gun. "Better yet, let me do it." He pressed the gun to Sullivan's forehead.

"Now wait a second, cousin. I know Marquis. He's one of my new clients."

"Keep talking." Brian said in a crazed whisper, his eyes wide and showing too much white.

"He may take Justin to the auction. Tomorrow night."

Brian sighted down the gun at Sulli's head. "You and I both know Justin won't be at that auction. One night and day is not enough to taste all that kid has to offer. Especially if he's hurt or in shock."

"Brian, we might need him. He has contacts that we don't." Will put a careful hand on Brian's tense shoulder.

"We'll fucking manage! On your knees!" Brian shouted, enraged. "Sugah."

"Come on! Listen to Justin's brother, hmm?"

"On your fucking knees you SON OF A BITCH!"

Sullivan fell to his knees. "Talk some sense into him!" He begged Will.

"Where is Marquis taking him!?" Brian screamed, the gun trembling, pressed hard against Sulli's tan flesh. His finger twitched on the trigger.

"Nowhere! Fucking nowhere! His drivers are dead. He's a fucking dandy. He'd still be in the park, if not nearby. He's a maniac, but he needs his servants, his muscle. FUCK!" Sullivan squeezed his eyes closed. "Wherever he can get on foot is where to look!"

Brian sneered. "Thanks, Sulli. You've been a peach. Say hello to my father in HELL!" He shouted and pulled the trigger.

Sulli was still screaming when the chamber clicked empty. He looked up at Brian with disbelief.

"Remember, you could have died tonight. Now get the fuck out of my sight and stay away from us unless I change my mind!"

Will grinned as Sullivan salvaged as much pride as he could while walking away with a renewed life. "How did you know the chamber was empty?"

Brian handed him the gun. "I didn't. I'd have reloaded it if I knew. Come on, if he's on foot then Bear has a head start."

"So does Cam."

As if to verify his point, a gunshot echoed in the night air and then, shrill with pain, a woman's bitter scream.

"CAMERON!" Will yelled, and both men took off into the trees.

\*

The blonde woman clutched her stomach, firing after the delicate-looking man who was so much more than he seemed. Her assassins training taught her to suspect even the most helpless of people. The man had turned around on his heel, dropping to one knee with a small handgun and firing before Cam could take cover. She had let her emotions cloud her judgment, and not only was Marquis getting away with Justin, but she might lose her life because of it.

She screamed as pain tore her apart. A shadow loomed over her, ominous, the barest hint of white teeth adorning the big man's face. He knelt down and brushed the blonde hair from her face.

"Thought you were a professional." Bear said, taking the gun from her trembling hand.

"Fuck you." Cameron spit blood at the man.

"Haven't had a woman in a very long time." Bear said, picking her up. "And I sure as shit am not going to start now. You need a hospital, stupid girl."

"Drop her!" Will pointed his gun, Brian behind him.

Bear dropped Cameron on the ground. "So sorry."

"Which way did they go?" Brian demanded. He hadn't had time to tell Will that Bear, for the time being, had tried to help Justin stay away from Marquis. From an outsider's view of the fight, the big man could have been on anyone's side.

"It doesn't matter. They're gone."

"He's on foot, they can't have gone far."

"Marquis is not one for traveling with the peasantry of commoners. He has a car."

"Sullivan said he didn't drive!"

"Are you surprised your cousin lied to you?"

Brain squeezed the bridge of his nose. "No. Not surprised."

"They are gone." Bear said again.

"You." Cameron said breathily, pointing at Bear. "Take me to the hospital. Will, shoot him if he doesn't. Brian, keep looking." She closed her eyes, gritting her teeth, muttering "flesh wound" as Bear lifted her and Will pointed his gun at the man.

"Don't get hurt." Will said behind his back as he escorted the big man through the woods.

Bear looked back at Brian with sad eyes in the quickly darkening night. Clouds were thick with rain, moving slowly to cover the moon. He told Brian that he wanted to make amends, that he would have helped Cameron with or without the gun point, but could not say it out loud. He was too driven on machismo to utter the words of regret.

But Brian didn't see. He was already streaking into the trees in search of his boy.

\*

Justin nodded his head limply with each step of his captor, his limbs tingling with fire. The boy's eyes fluttered open and he searched for a way to escape. The blonde's fingers fell numbly onto a small purple velvet pouch looped onto the man's belt. He pried the top open and reached inside. A coolness only metal gave invited him to take a further look. The boy swiped a large coin between his fingers and peered at it in the darkness. He dropped it back into the purse and retrieved a small ring as the first heavy raindrops pelted his skin What was all this? Justin flipped the ring into the dirt in Marquis' wake, closing his eyes to the dull viscosity of his mind. He knew he had to fight it, this incredible drug, but all his body wanted to do was sleep. And fuck. Whatever was in The Cataleptic, was taking its toll on every part of him. He grabbed a handful of golden trinkets and closed his fist.

He flipped the gold coin into the rain-filled gutter as Marquis stepped onto the street. The blonde hoped the clatter of the piece wasn't as loud as it was in his own ears.

Marquis didn't skip a beat, sitting the boy in the backseat of a Cadillac, buckling him in, and moving to the front.

"Mmph…ple…win…" Justin struggled to speak.

The man came back, tilting his head. "What is it, my boy?"

"Wind…air?"

"You won't be able to run, dear, even if your fingers could open the door. Do you still want the window open? You're going to get wet."

"Ple…air."

"It will knock you out soon, dear. One dose of the drink will kill most people, but if you survived one you will survive many. You didn't die, but your body won't let you stay awake for much longer.

"Ple…air." Justin nodded. He stared dreamily at the man as his captor rolled his window down and rushed to the front seat.

Justin blinked a few times and let a fragile chain fall from his fingers from the open space. He felt the car moving and swallowed in a dry mouth, wishing he could scream because it was all he could think to do. The boy wanted Brian more than anything else, to see the man burst through the trees in the pouring rain and rescue him. But they were already turning the corner, and Justin's last golden bauble slipped from his hand and dimmed further and further into the darkness.

\*

Justin woke slowly, clawing up through the thick blackness of his heavily drugged psyche. Something told him he was floating, but that couldn't be…could it? The blonde felt nothing below him, or above him, whichever way was up. He couldn't breathe, but was too weak to struggle. His eyes forced themselves open, but could only see a light powder blue color spread over his vision. Panic filled him like acid in his veins as his face seemed to pull away from his skull. His mouth opened and closed, desperate for breath. The faint smell of latex perforated his nostrils and he realized that a rubber sheet was pulled taught over his face and head. The blue latex fell and gaped but allowed no air into the boy's burning lungs. His ears failed him, picking up nothing of his surroundings beneath the latex. Justin's arms tingled behind him as they came back to life, a cold spreader bar slapping against his naked flesh as he strained to move.

Marquis watched the boy with a pleased smile, rubbing a hand over the thin cloth linen undergarments draped over his body. He had stretched the latex over Justin's face and head, fastening the rubber with a thick leather collar around his neck. The man knew from experience that the blonde would be more pliable to his master without the senses he relied on the most. Justin would soon grow to behave, his spirit broken with the eagerness to have a reprieve of the sensory deprivation. Eventually. Marquis had a feeling that this boy's willpower was going to be much harder to break than that of his normal victims.

The blonde was secured upside down, his ankles linked to a spread bar. A chain fell downward, locking Justin's arms against his back with another bar. Marquis went to his boy and pressed the broadside of a scalpel against Justin's forehead.

With the sudden cold steel, Justin snapped out of his panic. The boy shook his head and Marquis held the boy's chin to still him. He dragged the blade up the blonde's face and sliced the plastic over Justin's open mouth.

"Shh. Don't scream, you'll be doing plenty of that later, my boy." Marquis soothed, though Justin could not hear him.

Justin gasped, taking a deep breath and cherishing it, holding it. He felt his captor's hot breath on his lips, then the man's tongue slid over his teeth as if checking to see how clean they were. The boy drew back, but the chains linked to the ceiling kept him in place. His head spun, the blood rushing to his brain from being upside down for so long. Marquis pressed his body along the length of Justin's, his hard throbbing cock molding against the boy's cheek. He put one hand at the small of the boy's back and kissed along the sweet shaft, trailing a tongue over the unresponsive cock until it twitched to life. Marquis knelt down then, tonguing a hot trail along the latex, kissing over the blonde's nose, lips, cheeks, and blind eyes.

"So pretty. So rebellious. But you'll learn to be my submissive. They all learn."

Justin whimpered. He could hear slight murmurs, more vibration than words, as the man's Adam's apple worked against the latex. The Cataleptic was wearing off completely now, the paralysis leaving his legs and feet as it once had for his arms and upper body. The boy felt his dick grow hard and willed it to stay dormant as Marquis toyed delicately with his balls while kissing the blue rubber passionately.

"Now now, I have given you no reason for such sounds. You will wish for this beginning with its ignorant bliss before the night is through." Marquis purred, running one finger around the base of Justin's erect shaft. "You, my boy, will beg to be my prize when I am done."

"Please." Justin whispered, his own voice sounding distorted in his blocked ears.

Marquis stroked the boy's lips with his tongue and moved up his body, tasting the sweet fear dotting Justin's skin. The man disrobed. He ran a finger lightly over the sensitive skin of the blonde's puckering hole, then brought his mouth to the opening and whispered a silent breath over the tense round globes of Justin's ass. The boy shuddered, a groan escaping his lips before he could stop himself. Marquis purred, tongue jutting out to taste the skin just below his victim's balls, reveling in the sounds of pleasure the boy tried to hide.

The man left Justin hanging, his saliva drying in cool lines over the boy's body. He went to a small medical tray and held a pair of Japanese Clover nipple clamps to the light, the metal shining bright streaks across Justin's body. Linked together on a thin but strong chain, the pinchers were intricately designed, the metal looping up and around in a delicate Oriental web. At their top were two clamps which tightened the harder they were pulled.

"Here, my boy, is your first adornment. You will be worthy of taking a place by my throne when you submit, and I will embellish you with the finest of jewels brought from the deepest roots of the French Quarter. But first…" Marquis said, kneeling on the bed just under the boy's head. "First, I must break you." He locked his knee under Justin's chin to hold him in place, wrapping his leg under the blonde hair and pinning his other leg against the boy's back. Justin only struggled when Marquis touched him, but by then it was too late. He felt the chill of metal against his skin, the chain dangling over his chest as the first hiss of pain escaped on a gasping breath.

"Please!" Justin yelped. It felt like his nipple was being pierced all over again, only now the pain wasn't short and fading but instant, lingering.

"You will learn to speak only when given permission." Marquis promised, once more leaving his sufferer for the tray in the corner. The man returned with a double ratchet dental retractor, the metal piece clicking against Justin's teeth as it pried the boy's jaws open. Marquis set it in place behind the blonde's front teeth and secured it with a gag strap behind the boy's head. Justin tried to speak but came away with only syllables, his tongue free in a wide open mouth.

Marquis licked Justin's flailing tongue, moaning against the boy's lips. He caressed Justin's twitching cock, watching it tighten and slap against the soft feather-down hairline leading from his belly to the light colored bush of pubic hair. Justin tried to sit up, to get away, fighting against the chains and wishing he could see, wishing he could hear.

"No!" Marquis slapped the boy's ass. The sting made Justin struggle harder. Marquis lowered himself and screamed in Justin's ear. "NO!"

The boy winced behind the rubber, turning his head away. He tried to call for Brian, tongue striking the roof of his mouth futilely. Justin panicked, tears welling in his eyes. He watched them splash against the baby blue plastic, felt them trickle down between the latex imprisonment and his skin. He yelped, a breathy sound, as Marquis tugged the chain of the clamps to tighten unbearably on Justin's aching nipples. He slammed his hands against his back, fighting to keep them from dislocating at such an odd angle. Logically, the boy knew he was upside down, but his mind wanted no part in logic. Only fear.

Marquis worked two fingers into Justin's protesting hole, moaning as the gasp of entry whispered from the boy's lips.

"You like that, my pretty one. Struggle and protest as much as you want, but your body does not lie to its master." Marquis said proudly, pushing a third finger into Justin and pulling the digits out as one. "I think you are more than ready to begin your submission training." The man stroked his leaking cock against the boy and flipped him over in the chains so quickly that the boy's mind didn't stop spinning when his body finally did. The blood rushed away from his head and Justin saw stars like glittering treasure against his blue vision.

Marquis kissed the boy, drawing the hot tongue into his mouth and sucking it until Justin whimpered. "I want to fuck you to death, little boy." The man promised, whispering into his prey's open mouth. "Cry for me, Justin." Marquis slapped the boy open-handed, back and forth, back and forth, until Justin's head snapped to one side and didn't dare raise to meet his attacker's hand. "Where are your tears, little one? Perhaps more pain will make you satisfy me?" He asked cruelly, pulling the chain on the nipple clamps so they pinched viciously, a trickle of blood seeping down Justin's heaving ribcage from each throbbing bud. The boy yelped, a sound unmarred by tongue or teeth or trembling lips. Marquis smirked. "Good, but not good enough." He pulled the clamps once more and let the cold chain fall along Justin's stomach. The man kissed the latex, over each eye, before slamming his fist against his victim's collarbone. Marquis let Justin react to the pain before reaching down and stroking the boy's cock, replacing the agony with pleasure. Justin groaned, his cock raising to attention under Marquis' tough scrutiny. He shook his head, wincing at the pain along his collar.

"Nggnn…ooo." Justin protested with separate, struggling sounds. "Nggnn…ooo!!!!"

Marquis gripped the boy's collarbone and Justin screamed, a choking sob escaping his throat. "That's more like it." The man licked along the curve of Justin's ear under the latex. He tore at the bone with maniacal fingers until Justin shrieked with pain.

"Lll…eee…chsh…" Justin begged.

Marquis pulled a switch attached to the chains and Justin came crashing in a heap onto the king-size bed. He wrapped a blindfold over the latex, masking what little life Justin could see. The man turned the blonde over on his back and straddled his shoulders, forcing his dick easily into the pried-open mouth. Justin gagged at the sudden intrusion but had nowhere to go, his senses completely cut off. He couldn't hear his attacker as the man groaned with pleasure, nor could he smell the dab of faint cologne Marquis spread behind his balls after a nice hot morning shower. Justin couldn't see the massive cock sliding down his throat, thrusting, upping the tempo with every push. The boy couldn't taste much of anything besides the bitter salt of Marquis' precum, and soon after that, he couldn't feel much of anything but a thick, encompassing velvet darkness handed to him from lack of oxygen.

Marquis pulled out of the boy's mouth before he came, slapping Justin back to reality. "I'm not finished with you yet, my boy." He promised, putting the blonde's legs over his head, the spread bar separating Justin's ankles slapping against his tailbone. Marquis pushed himself into Justin's tight little hole, shuddering sensations jerking his body uncontrollably at the hot grip surrounding his unwelcome cock.

"Oh, that's it. That's just what daddy wants." Marquis whispered, thrusting his entirety into Justin, his balls slapping against the round white ass. "That's just what daddy needs, my boy."

"Uhhh…nggnn…oooh!" Justin shouted, tensing around the invasion. Marquis grabbed the boy's chin and leaned in to lick the protesting tongue, to swipe his lips over his treasure's trapped teeth. He rubbed his face against the metal retractor keeping Justin from speaking, the chill of it heating instantly with the fever enveloping the men. Marquis worked himself into Justin as if nothing else mattered. He quickened his pace, wrapping his fingers around the boy and jerking the leaking cock in time with his own. He felt Justin tightening against his grip and knew the boy would come without much more provocation. Marquis let go of Justin's dick and shot his load alone, thrusting into the boy until every ounce was pushed inside the hot canal. The man slipped out of his victim and secured the boy's wrists to the bed with clip chains on the spread bar, so he couldn't touch himself if the notion hit him.

Marquis went to the bathroom and filled a cup with the waiting ice water in the sink. He brought it back and sloshed the contents over his treasure, making Justin buck and shriek in surprise. The boy's chest heaved with sobs, with shame. The man stroked the wet latex and kissed Justin's forehead.

"I have a surprise for you, my boy." Marquis whispered, drying the area around Justin's dick with a clean towel. He unhooked the blonde's ankles and put the bar aside, sliding a pair of vinyl chastity underwear over the boy's hips. The dark man secured crisscross straps over Justin's

fading erection tightly, pressing the boy's dick against his stomach. "Now you won't think about losing control until I give you permission, will you?"

Justin whimpered, the cords laced over his groin nearly breaking the skin. He didn't know what the man wanted of him, couldn't hear the demands that were so eagerly shouted. His mouth was so incredibly dry, his body chasing down the aftereffects of goosebumps and so terribly wet in more ways than one. The boy cringed as Marquis straddled him once more, this time facing his trapped cock. He felt the man's searching fingers traipsing over each tight binding, fingering the flesh beneath the straps gingerly, as if afraid anything more would drive the boy over the edge.

And it would.

Justin moaned, his dick angry with the inability to satiate its need. He bucked against the man's exploring, begging for the most carnal of desires. Marquis slapped his caged cock angrily, the tone that floated back to Justin one of a parent disciplining a naughty child.

"No, no, no, my boy. You will not come until you deserve it." Marquis said, slapping the caught flesh once more for good measure.

Justin let his head relax against the bed, just concentrating on taking one breath at a time. His dick was hot with the pressure, the pain, the stimulus. He fought the urge to raise his hips to the merciless man.

"You're learning. Struggling…" Marquis traced a finger over Justin's trembling thighs. "But you are trying. Such a good boy." He sighed. "Such a very good boy." Marquis lowered his tongue to trace over the vinyl straps, lingering over the shaft as Justin trembled furiously with control. "Keep it up, sweet child. That's it." Marquis whispered, breathing hot and heavily over the bound flesh. Justin strained his jaw trying to clench his teeth, the tendons in his neck tensely sticking out against the smooth flesh of his throat. The boy cried out, short choking gasps of breath.

"Unghh…" Justin moaned, shaking his head.

Marquis licked a trail over each cord, Justin's hips pressed into the bed so anxiously the man thought every bone would break in that fragile body. He released Justin, raised himself up off the boy, and patted the blue latex over his victim's forehead. "You did very well, my boy. You deserve a reward." Marquis removed the vicious nipple clamps from Justin's reddened buds, tracing a swab of alcohol over the wounds and cleaning the blood. The man unlocked the dental retractor and closed Justin's mouth, placing a finger over the dry lips to shush him before he could say a word. He left Justin bound and went to the bathroom, filling the cup once again. Marquis brought it to his victim's lips and helped the boy raise his head to aid in drinking. The boy was a fast learner. He didn't say a word when his attacker took the water away, just lay his head on the bed and whimpered, silent sobs shaking him to the core. The boy fell into a fitful sleep as Marquis sat by the bed and simply watched the nightmares inside his victim take over.

\*

Brian leaned against a lamp outside the park, his quivering fingers trying to hold the lighter steady long enough for his cigarette to catch. The night had turned to a violent storm, rain drenching the city in massive sheets of torrential downpour. He was alone for the first time that night. The brunette shivered and threw his lighter into the gutter with a frustrated groan.

How bad was this man, that he had both Sullivan and Bear scared out of their wits? Brian didn't want to think about that…Justin was gone, vanished, in this strange, sadistic man's arms. Unconscious, possibly hurt…

"Damnit!" Brain yelled. "He was just getting better, you son of a bitch!" Tears streamed down the man's face, mixing with the weather, fearful whimpers catching in his throat. How was Justin going to be after this? If he…survived, would he be afraid of everything? Everybody?

"Oh, Justin…baby, where are you?" He asked the empty air helplessly. Brian turned to the gutter to grab his lighter and stopped, his hand hovering over a large glittering coin on the wet pavement. Picking up the golden token, Brian turned it over in his hand.

Mardi Gras-2003.

"Of fuck. You were awake! Justin, you were awake!!!" Brian scrambled over the road in search of more clues. "Come on, baby. Talk to me." Brian begged, fingers dancing blindly on the road as he moved further from the streetlight. Another shimmer caught his eye closer to the trees and the man dove into the dirt. A small gold ring glittered in his hand, washed clean as the water pooled in Brian's palm. "Justin…" He whispered, crawling back to where he left his lighter and had found the first trinket. Brian scoured the area. They had left the park, but gone where?

A delicate necklace lay crumpled on the concrete and Brian held it dangling in front of his face. Why did Marquis carry all this? It didn't matter now. Brian was hot on the trail, and if Marquis could form words after Brian tore out his throat, maybe he would be able to give an answer.

\*

Sullivan watched the distorted camera lens disinterestedly, his mind on other things no less primal than the violent sex onscreen. He rubbed his cock through the tight leather pants, but could only think of Justin's hot ass grinding into him on the way to New Orleans. He closed his eyes and could still feel the heated friction, the incredible orgasm the boy brought him to. His dick pressed painfully against the black leather and Sullivan held back a groan. The man bit his lip and got up, away from the slapping of whips on bare flesh. He could only guess what Marquis had planned for Justin, but he was damned if he didn't get to join! Fuck Bear, the man was useless, he hadn't even taken Justin from Marquis when he had the chance. Sullivan was going to have to do things himself. But he would need Brian's help. If the man was taking care of Marquis, Sulli would be free to take Justin for his own.

And he, more than anyone else on the hunt for Justin, had a feeling he knew exactly where the new and extremely private Tormented Gardens had moved to.

\*

Brian had searched for hours in the direction the gold trail took him, but nothing more came into view. In his pocket was the coin, necklace, and ring, settled in for a quiet stay, seemingly forgotten once their duties were relieved. He let out a frustrated scream. What had happened that made Justin stop leading the way? They were not on foot, they couldn't have been. So a car. But what did it look like? Where had it taken the boy?

"Aw, shit." Sullivan smirked, leaning against the streetlight. "What the fuck are you still doing here, cousin?"

Brian growled. "Did we not have an agreement over putting a bullet in your face if you came near us again? I should shoot you on principle, because you lied to me."

"Yeah, you should shoot me, but you're unarmed." Sullivan held a hand over a cigarette and lit it. He shook his head, a soft chuckle of disbelief falling into the stormy night.

"Is that a bet you want to make with your life?"

"Listen, Brian, for once we're on the closest terms of allied forces that we will ever get. We each have a piece of the puzzle to finding Angelface. If we work together, we'll find him before the night's out."

"What are you doing here, Sullivan? I already have the things Justin dropped. I don't fucking need your help!"

Sullivan smiled. "You have the middle of the trail, yes. But I have the beginning."

"What?"

"I started my search in the park, whereas you began outside of it."

"And what did you find?"

"First we agree to help each other."

"You aren't getting your hands on Justin again, what's your interest in the search?"

"Let's just say I grew attached to the boy on our little journey to Naw'lins. I don't want to see the end result of Marquis' fetish."

"What do you have, Sullivan?"

The Southern man grinned. "Gold."

"I have gold."

"Inscribed gold." Sullivan blew a thin plume of smoke into the air.

"What kind of inscription?" Brian moved cautiously closer to the man.

"The kind that tells me where it was made."

"Fuck, Sullivan, that doesn't tell us shit."

"Doesn't it? I suppose I'll just go investigate on my own then…and invite myself into the back room where they sell the more interesting items that Marquis will use on Justin."

"Go on?" Brian said.

"Front side, business side, gives these bracelets out to its highest paying customers as a type of advertising."

"Expensive."

"Not for these people. The backroom is a sexperiment that puts even -my- snuff business to shame. They have toys that you've never dreamed of, and many you would never wake from. They cater to the dead and the people who make money off taking a life, cousin. My point is, I've been there, I've seen the front room and shopped in the back. Do you think all this gold is from Pittsburgh? Not a chance. This man is permanently stuck in a fifteenth century royal torture mentality. He has his own stash of treasure for his harem boys. What else would he buy that would make him a valued customer, hmm?"

"Toys for the dead." Brian whispered.

"Would you like to accompany me? You won't get inside without me."

Brian scowled at his kin. The man knew he had no choice. "Fine."

"Your word you won't double cross me? Turn me in to the cops, or worse, a Taylor with a gun?"

"You have my word for the moment, Sullivan. When this is all over I'll gladly take your life for coming within a hundred miles of me or anyone I care about. If you want Will and Cameron's promise of life, fucking ask them yourself."

\*

Marquis threw ice water over Justin's raggedly rising and falling chest, rousing the boy from a restless sleep. His victim screamed as quickly as he could draw breath, shock and chill forcing goosebumps over the exposed flesh. The man trailed a tongue over the drops beading on the boy's vinyl underwear, one hand massaging Justin's dick to erection against the painful straps.

"Please, let me go." Justin begged.

Marquis grabbed Justin's chin and brought their faces so close the boy could smell fresh blood on his captor's lips. The blonde shivered, hoping the sweet metallic smell was underdone steak and not a person reduced to so much raw meat. The man kissed Justin thoroughly, wrapping his tongue around the boy's, exploring the deepest recesses, and his victim knew that the blood was not from any animal. Justin gagged, trying to pull away, but the man's sharp fingers dug into his jaw and held him still.

"Submit to me, my boy, submit. The longer you fight, the longer this will go on. I can break you in a day or a month, it's your choice." Marquis said to himself, knowing the boy could not hear him. He had added earplugs to further the deafness while the boy slept. "And my pleasure."

Justin bucked beneath the man. "What do you want?" The boy demanded.

Marquis covered the blonde's mouth with his once more, his teeth clicking against Justin's the deeper he dove, the force of his lips bruising the boy. "Silence." He whispered.

Justin swallowed as the man released him, unable to control the quivering shiver devouring his limbs. The boy's lips trembled violently and he turned his face into the bed beside him searching for any warm or dry spot left by his wake up call. There was none. Could he ask for a blanket and not be punished with another kiss? Or worse?

The boy suddenly wished he had sliced his wrists before Brian came up to make him feel better. It would have saved him from having to do it later, if he ever got out of here. Justin let his body sink into the mattress and hoped tried to disappear into the wet, icy sheets.

Marquis kissed Justin's collarbone and drew a hissing gasp of pain from his boy. "No reveries, my boy. I will not condone you daydreaming when I am in charge. You have forgotten who your Master is, haven't you? Well, not for long."

The man lifted Justin's hips and climbed between the boy's still-spread legs, letting the bar fall at the small of his back. The blonde shook his head, clenching his hips and ass to deny the attacker entrance to his most private of openings.

"NO!" Justin screamed. "Get off of me you sick pervert!"

Marquis threw Justin's legs back from around him and left the bed, abandoning his conquest to the sensory deprivation. Justin didn't know where his hunter went, but alone on the bed was more frightening than having the man ready between his legs.

"Marquis, this has gone far enough. I agreed to meet with you, nothing else! So let me the fuck go!" Justin shouted shrilly, trying in futile desperation to hear his own voice through the latex mask.

Marquis approached, turning on several bright lights above Justin. The boy winced and didn't know when the second blindfold had been removed as his vision swam with baby blue. Justin squirmed away from the shadow looming over the latex but couldn't get far, his arms still shackled to the bed.

"Get away! GET AWAY!" Justin shrieked as Marquis held up the dental retractors so their silver gleamed over his face. The boy's mouth still throbbed from the last excursion with the vial device.

Marquis lowered the dam onto the boy's lips and Justin quieted, pressing his mouth closed tight. He shook his head and the man smiled, patting his victim on the forehead and removing the metal, setting it on the bed beside him. The threat was in the air now: First disobedience was an unwanted kiss, the second was another visit of the dental retractor. Justin had been warned.

Tears streamed down his face and the boy relaxed his protesting muscles as Marquis removed the ankle bar and climbed back between his legs, releasing the binding straps over his aching cock. The man slid the chastity underwear over the boy's hips and discarded them by his side. He stroked the indentions left on the pink flesh of Justin's dick tenderly, leaning down to blow a light, hot breath over the marks. Justin sobbed, fighting to keep the pleading voice in his head buried. Marquis entered the boy without preparing his victim and Justin yelped, his sobs struggling to stay silent in his burning chest.

"There we go, let me in. All the way." Marquis pushed against Justin, fingers kneading the boy's cock like rolled dough. He thrust deeper into the boy, still not getting the access he desired. The dark-haired man picked the retractor up off the bed and pressed the metal against Justin's lips.

"No." Justin whimpered.

Marquis put a hand against Justin's left thigh and the boy opened wider for his attacker. "You're a quick learner, my boy. That may save your life, but not your mind." He promised, groaning as he rocked against the tight ass, his hips finding the flesh of his victim as he buried himself to the hilt in the sweet canal.

Justin pressed his face into one side of the bed as his body jerked with the quickening thrusts of the Marquis. The man grabbed his jaw and kissed the boy, the taste of blood still faint on his breath. Dimly, Justin wondered whether Marquis had eaten the whole person or just licked the wounds.

"That's my boy, that's it." Marquis said proudly. "Submit. Please your Master." He stroked the boy's cock, bringing a grimace of pain to the blonde's mouth. The man rubbed the vinyl indentions until they were mere whispers of red against the sensitive flesh. He rubbed his thumb over the tip of Justin's dick, smearing the head in pre-cum. The boy moaned, his balls full and tight against his body.

Justin's hips pushed involuntarily up toward the man's hand. Shame colored his cheeks beneath the latex.

Marquis released the boy's cock and slapped the flesh of his erect shaft. "NO!" He slapped Justin's balls. "NO!"

The boy turned his face again into the bed, clenching his muscles around his rapist's hard cock. The man groaned, pushing harder, harder, plunging into the boy. He pulled himself out until only the head remained, then thrust back in so violently it made Justin scream. Marquis pressed the metal against Justin's lips and the boy quieted, shuddering with cold. The man kept the retractor on Justin's face as he rocked faster and faster against his victim.

Justin bit his bottom lip to keep from crying out with the pain of Marquis working his unwilling hole. The man grabbed the boy's cock in his hands and stroked him again until Justin thought he would finally be allowed release. But as Marquis screamed in delight, he let Justin fall forgotten. The boy squeezed his eyes closed and turned onto his side as his attacker rose from the bed and walked away. Justin rubbed his groin against the mattress, breathing heavily. He quickened his pace, trying to come before Marquis got back.

The man turned him over roughly, punching Justin in the stomach and ribs until the boy curled into a ball on his back. Marquis pulled Justin's legs down flat and punched him again below the ribcage. The dark-haired man yanked the chastity vinyl underwear back over the boy's hips and tied the cords much, much tighter across the blonde's unspent erection. He bound Justin's ankles back onto the spread bar and shackled the metal to the bed. The boy sobbed loudly, fighting the new position.

"NO NO NO!!!!!" Marquis screamed, throwing more punches across the boy's exposed chest and stomach. The man grabbed Justin's cock through the vinyl cording and shook him roughly. "You are not to come until you FUCKING DESERVE IT!" Marquis yelled loud enough that his angry tone reached Justin's ears.

Justin sobbed; screaming, hitching, choking cries. Marquis fixed the dental retractor over Justin's lips, behind the boy's teeth. Justin screamed louder as his jaw was forced open and locked in place with a gag strap behind his head. Marquis tightened the collar around Justin's neck and the boy stopped shouting to draw in the limited breath given to him.

"You will be mine, little boy. Now you can stay like this until you learn to behave." Marquis said, stroking the already bruising skin along the boy's ribs and stomach. This boy was going to be mercilessly difficult, and he was going to keep running into the brick wall of his attacker until he learned to please only his Master.

\*

Brian followed his cousin into the jewelers front room, his heart thudding in his throat. It had taken him twenty minutes to drive from the park to the gold shop, with Sullivan buzzing in his ear the entire ride that the speed limit signs were suggestions and not law. Brian knew that they were no good to Justin if they got pulled over.

Sullivan leaned against one of the display counters and smiled seductively at the man behind the counter. "Hey, sugah."

"Mr. Kinney, what a pleasant surprise to see you again so soon." The man nearly blushed under Sulli's watchful eye. To Brian, the clerk looked to be the kind who didn't get blood rushing to the upper regions of his body very often.

"Murray, I need access to a few of your more…extravagantly priced items. May I?"

"Oh, of course, Mr. Kinney." The man nodded, unable to hide his excitement. Brian didn't know if it was excitement of being able to service Sullivan, or if it was purely money-oriented. Apparently, Sullivan was as big a paying customer as Marquis.

The backroom was well hidden behind a seemingly secure Curio cabinet. Murray locked the front door and put an 'Out To Lunch' sign up before moving the tall dresser aside and escorting the cousins inside. Brian watched the man suspiciously, and got the same eye treatment as the cabinet was moved back into place and locked. Murray switched on the lights and Brian caught a gasp in his throat before giving away his obvious lack of snuff experience. The room was like a medieval dungeon come to life. Brian's eyes wandered around the space and he felt nausea rolling over him like a wave. A sudden slap on his back brought him from the sickness.

Sullivan was acting like his cousin was the assistant director, praising some new film of sorts that Brian had done, and slapping him on the back. Murray looked impressed. Brian hoped the man didn't ask any questions.

Sulli leaned over and whispered in Brian's ear. "If you think that's bad, wait until you figure out what Marquis has emptied the shelves of."

Brian took a deep breath and walked down the stocked aisles, never imagining what the man had bought for the sake of marring Justin's mind and body.

"This is called the Pear." Murray was saying as Brian turned his attentions back to the flesh dealers. The metal looked like a demented pair of salad tongs, with a rounded opening ball on the end and a twisted corkscrew-like handle. "Stick this baby up any opening and tear shreds of skin away until your shining star does exactly what you tell him. Hurts like a bitch, but won't scathe the outside. Takes days to bleed to death internally from this thing." Murray made a motion of sticking it in an unwilling opening, pulling back the lever handle so the ball split in two and revealed a clawed foursome of thick nails. He pumped the handle and the claws spun. Brian cringed. "Based from the best of the Dark Ages."

"Interesting." Sullivan fingered the piece. "But not what I'm looking for, entirely. I need something to…compete with the new blood in town."

Murray nodded. "Ah, you mean The Tormented Gardens Tour."

"That I do. He's been here."

"Has he!" Murray nodded enthusiastically. "I can't wait to go to his show."

"Neither can anyone else. That's why I have to better him. No matter what it takes." Sullivan curled a finger under Murray's chin and Brian wondered exactly how old this troll was. He looked to be about mid-thirties, with early aging around his eyes and mouth. When he melted under Sullivan's touch, Brian aged him at much older and much, much more desperately pathetic.

"We can help you with that, Mr. Kinney."

"I know you can, Murray. I was counting on your help in particular. Walk with me, hmm?" Sullivan draped an arm around the man's shoulders and directed him away from Brian. The Southern man purred a drawling whisper in the clerk's ear, his free hand slipping a set of keys of the belt loop and tossing them to Brian. Sullivan pointed furiously behind Murray's back to a chain-link fence acting as an office at the back of the building. The records would be there; repeat customers, what they bought, where they were storing the items…things for blackmail if a dispute arose.

Brian went to the fence and unlocked it, stepping silently inside. He crouched by the filing cabinet and took a deep breath. Marquis was the only 'M'. The man read softly to himself from the folder.

"One set of shackles, wrist. One set of shackles, ankle. One set of (2) spread bars, wrist and ankle. One dental retractor, gag strap included. One sheet of latex wrap. Four suspension pulley systems, (2) ceiling, (2) wall." Brian sighed. The list went on and on…from chastity underwear to metal gadgets whose placement and purpose the man didn't dare dream of. Brian stood up and took the file with him, locking up the office. He tucked the file beneath his shirt and ran to the front, unlocking the Curio cabinet doorway and pushing it back into place. Brian left the keys in the gold shop's opening and got in his Jeep, peeling back onto the main road and heading toward the address in the file.

"Don't worry, baby. I'm coming. Fuck, Justin, I'm coming."

\*

Sullivan smiled, leaning against an aisle as Murray explained the various newly stocked items. He heard Brian's running footsteps on the concrete a few rows away and grinned, hiding a laugh.

"Is he leaving?" Murray asked.

"Did you do as I asked?"

"Yes, Mr. Kinney."

"Then he is leaving, Murray."

"Where is he going, Mr. Kinney?"

"Away, Murray. Just away." Sullivan smiled. He knew Brian would take Justin as soon as he found him, so he took great lengths to prevent the burn. The Southern man had already paid for the information and replaced the file with a different address, long before he even invited Brian to come along. The file held an address that would lead Brian all the way across town from Marquis and Justin's true location. Sullivan had left a note for his cousin with the real address of his Sunshine at the file site, but it would take at least an hour to get from there to the blonde. Perfect time for Marquis to lose his hold on Justin to the boy's rightful owner. It was all part of the game and now Sullivan was winning.

"I'll take one of…these, Murray." Sulli smiled.

"This was The Marquis' favorite, too." Murray smiled back.

Marquis' favorite. Sullivan could see why. The Heretic Fork was certainly an item the traditional blood-fiend had to have. Sulli stalked through the aisles toward the door. The man stopped and stared at the absolutely ideal contrivance in his hand. He could already see it stabbed into Brian's flesh as the man struggled to speak while blood filled his throat and poured down his chest. When his cousin came to collect his lover, he would finally lose.

\*

Justin's body shook with the ice water and the boy didn't remember falling asleep. His tongue tried to scream in the dried, open cavern of his mouth.

Marquis put a hand on the boy's forehead and steadied him, releasing the gag strap and taking the retractor away from Justin's lips. "There you go." The man soothed, tipping a glass of water to the boy's mouth. Justin drank when the cool liquid hit his tongue, letting Marquis raise his head to help. The boy took a deep breath when the water was finished, his head flopping back onto the mattress.

The man put a gentle hand on Justin's mouth to make sure the boy knew to remain silent. His victim nodded, body relaxed. Marquis stood and left Justin on the bed, returning with a towel to dry his chilled body. The man wiped down his boy and took the shackles off the spread-bars. He pulled the chains attached to the metal and lifted Justin into the air.

"Ugh!" Justin gasped, biting his tongue to keep from speaking.

Marquis changed the wet sheets and flipped the mattress over, covering it with fresh blankets. The man then released the chains and controlled Justin's fall to the bed. He took the boy's ankles off the cold steel and set the bar aside, loosening the cords and sliding the vinyl over Justin's hips. The boy sighed with relief as the biting straps fell away from his body. Marquis kissed the indentions tenderly, sending shivers over the boy. Justin took another deep breath as the man left him. The dark-haired man brought a heavy blanket back and covered his prize with it, tucking it around the quivering limbs.

"There, there, my boy. You've been quiet for so very long. Such a good boy to submit to me." Marquis soothed, stroking the covers over Justin's chest. "We had to bruise you a little, didn't we? But it all worked out." The man said softly. He pulled the strap back from around Justin's neck and set it aside, peeling the latex with a sweat-stuck cling from the boy's skin. Justin pressed his eyes closed when the blue left him, his pupils unable to adjust from the vulnerability so soon. The man kissed Justin's eyes delicately and stroked a finger over one earlobe, bringing the plugs away from the boy's hearing. When he spoke, it was barely a whispered breath.

"Shh. You must be quiet. Sleep now, my boy. Be good and I can be very nice. Be naughty, and I can be more cruel than you could ever imagine. Nod if you understand me."

Justin nodded, repressing a sob, his eyes still closed.

"Look at me, boy, it's still dark outside. There is only the faintest light of early dawn."

Justin obeyed, studying the vicious man's now soft eyes. He opened his mouth to speak but Marquis clicked his tongue.

"No. Shh. You are to speak only when asked to speak. Nod if you understand me."

Justin nodded.

"That's a good boy. You're so very good. You will forget about any life you had before; any love and happiness are not yours anymore. You belong to me, my boy. You are no longer free, but even this I will make seem like you were never anything but my possession." Marquis stroked Justin's jaw, his cheek, wiping the silent tears that fell from his wide blue eyes. "Now open your legs."

Justin tensed, squeezing his eyes closed. He shook his head.

"Open your legs, or go back to the world I've kept you in for nearly thirteen hours. Do you want that?"

The boy shook his head, sniffling. He felt Marquis' hand travel under the blanket to wait for Justin to comply. The blonde let his tormentor's fingers curl around his aching dick, forcing his body to lose its rigidity.

"Open your eyes." Marquis said, gently stroking the marked cock. Justin looked at the man as he was told. He trembled under the raven-haired man's touch, unsure of what he was supposed to do, supposed to feel. Justin looked the question at Marquis.

"This is your reward, child. You will reap the benefits fully now. You deserve to come. But if you speak without permission I will punish you once more. Nod if you understand."

Justin nodded. He swallowed and rest his head on the fresh sheets. Marquis rubbed his hand over the boy's ready cock, fingers slippery with the come that had been teased into submission twice before. Small sounds of pleasure left the boy's bruised lips unhinged by any threat of punishment, no matter how severe. Marquis worked his blonde beauty like a beloved pet, stroking Justin tenderly, devotedly. The boy's eyes fluttered closed and he bit his bottom lip to keep from groaning with the overwhelming new sensations.

"I ask you this, my boy: do I make you feel good? You may answer, dear."

"Yes?" Justin said, uncertainty coercing through him.

"I ask you again: do I make you feel good?"

"Yes." Justin sighed, legs opening wider for the probing fingers of Marquis' other hand. The man expertly spread the boy's juices over his twitching hole before entering Justin with two eager fingers. "Yes." Justin bucked against the man in time with the movements on his erect cock.

"Shh. Quiet now. Open your eyes and look at who is making you feel so good."

Justin pressed his lips together and forced his eyes open, staring at Marquis. The man quickened his push into Justin, jerking a fast-paced, rhythmic song over the blonde's leaking dick. The boy groaned loudly, a guttural sound reserved strictly for the bedroom. Marquis stopped the pace, squeezing the quivering erection brutally. Justin gasped, turning questioning eyes to the man.

"Shh." Marquis said. Justin pressed his lips together, an apology in his confused blue eyes. The man picked up where he left off, bringing Justin to an uncontrollable fit of arousal, his young body rearing up for more with every rapid caress. Marquis pushed his fingers to their hilt, pulled them out, thrust in, massaging the boy's prostate with every re-entry.

"That's it. That's what we want." Marquis purred, watching the nearing storm draw the boy's face into a concentrated mask of pleasure. "Don't come yet, Justin. Not until I say." He said sternly, pushing deeper and deeper into the boy, rubbing the cock furiously.

"Ahh…" Justin moaned. "Ungh…"

"Hold it. Not yet…" Marquis warned, jerking the boy faster, pushing against the core of bliss deep inside. "Don't you dare, Justin."

"Urgh…" Justin pressed his hips into the bed and stopped moving along with the man's professional hands. His body tingled with the coming explosion, curling his toes and fingers.

"Good boy. I control you, don't I? Answer me."

Justin breathed heavily as the stroking grew less and less frequent, the pushing against his tight hole slower and slower. His head rolled over the bed.

"You are mine now. I control you. Say yes and we can be very nice to each other." Marquis said, the undercurrent of threat in his voice.

"Brian…"

Marquis released Justin's cock and pressed his fist against Justin's sore collarbone. "NO! I control you!"

"Plea-"

Marquis pressed harder. "Say it, my boy."

Justin began to cry. "You control me."

"I am your owner."

"You are my owner." Justin whimpered. Marquis took his hand away from the boy's neck and went back to working his magic on the constricted cock.

"That's right. That's a good boy. My good boy." The man went faster, fingers plunging into Justin as if guided by a machine; quickly, viciously, eagerly.

"Oh…"

"Shh." Marquis reminded the boy.

Justin closed his eyes, lips trembling to utter all the sounds building in his chest.

"Ask me if you may come, my boy."

"M-may I come?" Justin breathed. "Please?"

"I am your Master."

"Master." Justin begged, hips straining to buck against the accumulated pressure against his body.

"Let it go." Marquis smiled. "You may come."

Justin screamed, head thrown back against the bed as if he meant to go through the mattress. His legs kicked against the sheets, fingers clinging to open air. The boy shot over Marquis' hand, the muscles in his ass raging with convulsions around the man's probing fingers. "Oh…ungh…"

Marquis pushed himself into the boy, forcing the orgasm to continue until his boy squirmed with overpowering delight. "Now you must sleep, my boy. You may eat when you wake. Rest easily, Justin. I have such plans for us."

Justin turned over on his side, away from the man. His wrists were still shackled and made quiet rattling as the chains moved. Sobs shook his body as shame tightened his gut. Marquis patted the blonde head and left the bedroom so the boy could be alone with his tears. The beautiful tears of submission.

\*

With the thunder pumping a new rhythm into his bitter veins Justin felt like death, a complete nothingness washing over the boy. A terrible black void. Stuck in immortal repetition. As if he could die a thousand times but it would only result in rebirth into the same shell of a human being he had become. Justin thought dimly that maybe he had already succumbed to a kind of emotional death, long ago, and it had taken this long to realize it. \*No,\* He thought. \*I have always been dead. Yes! But now my Master has brought me back to service him. But I am not complete.\* The boy thought it was strange though, that he couldn't remember ever being whole. Or rather, what he was missing that would make him as absolute as he felt he should have been. His troubled mind wouldn't let him remember…too much pain.

Outside the dawn had risen, only to be swallowed by another hopeless storm. Thunder angrily rattled the bare, double-pane window. Justin stepped close to the glass, pressing his aching, naked body against the cold window. Shivering, his nipples turned to stone and he grinned, touching each of them as if for the first time. A thrill of panic knotted his stomach as the boy wondered if he was supposed to be doing this…pleasing himself…if Marquis would allow such a lack of subservience. He was supposed to be sleeping, as his Master was beyond the locked door of the bedroom. Disbelief ran through him and he trembled with a chill not brought by the storm. His will was gone, he was beaten, a victim. Again. Worse, the boy felt so terribly empty and had no want to better the situation. Justin invited the soothing chill to caress his forehead, chest, stomach and upper thighs. He was a vessel, nothing more than a slave to a man who knew exactly how to break him. Justin pushed the fury downward, into himself where it deserve to be directed. He was not strong enough to withstand Marquis. He was the one who let this happen. But somehow it felt better this way: stripped of anyone and everything he ever knew. He wasn't allowed to feel the pain of what happened any time before this. Marquis was his world now…

Marquis would take care of Justin. This was what the blonde needed, his Master said so. As long as he behaved, the boy had nothing to worry about in life ever again.

Justin squeezed his dry, burning eyes closed and wondered where all the tears had vanished to. Was he really not upset enough to cry? Or too empty to do so? The boy slid his cheek over the glass, pressing his ear against the window. Things must not be so bad here in Marquis' kingdom, if he couldn't cry about it.

The boy listened to the rain, the rivulets of water pouring over him in enlarged shadows like the careless fingertips of forgotten lovers passed. Justin knew why he couldn't shed one bitter tear amid all the horrid emotion flowing like acid through his body. It was because he was really, truly, dead.

His vision blurred with fury and Justin screamed, a sound closer to a roar. He shoved his fists through the glass with the strength of every ounce of rage burning him from the inside out.

Marquis burst into the room, a royal purple bathrobe flying behind him like a cape. The man grabbed a hold of his blonde concubine before the boy could force his arms farther into the dripping shards. The man had woken minutes before to bring breakfast to Justin. Anger coerced through the man and he slapped the blonde, letting his anger show in his dark eyes.

"What the fuck are you doing? I told you to sleep!"

Justin stayed silent, as he'd been taught. He didn't rub the sore red patch on his cheek for fear of more retribution, his hands staying at his sides until he was told what to do with them.

"Answer me!"

"I…" Justin stammered. "I needed to know if I could still bleed…" The boy answered in a small voice. "If my heart was still alive." His eyes were open, but saw nothing through the wall of shame his Master put him in.

"You are alive. Do you know why?" Marquis asked. Justin shook his head. "Because I say you are. You will never do this again, Justin. I will punish you. Do you want that?" He asked, pulling the blonde close to him and wetting his fingers.

Shame…

The boy shook his head no again, letting the man's fingers trail down his shivering body. Marquis thrust his slick digits into the boy's tense hole and Justin gasped with pain, falling against the man.

Cruelty darkened Marquis' eyes. "You deserve to be punished. Are you sore, my boy?"

Justin nodded.

Pain…

"Good." The man pushed deeper, his dick hardening as the boy whimpered. "You are very sad for upsetting me, Justin. You need to cry because you never meant to make me cross with you." Marquis said, working his way deeper into the trembling opening.

Submissive…

Justin stared at the man and nodded, tears slipping over his cold cheeks as his Master wished. They were tears as void of emotion as his heart. He winced as Marquis turned him around, pushing him onto the bed so his cock pressed against the edge of the mattress. He felt himself grow firm on the bed.

Whore…

"You need to be punished." Marquis repeated breathily, removing his fingers from the boy and smearing his juices over his twitching hard-on. The man pushed himself against his slave's constricted hole. "Let me in, Justin." He said threateningly.

Fear…

Justin pushed his ass back against Marquis, forcing himself to open for his Master. He squeezed his eyes closed as a harsh wind whipped into the room from the shattered window. Marquis pushed into Justin, one hand twisting itself into the boy's shaggy blonde hair and pulling until Justin's body was bowed backwards. The boy's arms shot out in front of him to hold the position as his controller rocked violently upwards, into the unwilling caverns of Justin's ass. The boy bit his lip as his sore muscles protested the severe contortion, sending quivers of exertion through his arms and arching back, traveling to clench around Marquis' raging cock. The man groaned, a grunt of feverous pleasure. His movements sped up instantly as his boy's tight hole gripped his hard-on.

"You're sorry for making me angry, aren't you?" Marquis asked, his hot breath stinging Justin's ear. "Answer me."

Confusion…

"Yes…" Justin flinched, fingers clutching at the bunching sheets. His knuckles turned white with the strength of his grip. "So sorry." The boy whispered.

Release…

Marquis brought his fingers to curl around Justin's dick and the boy threw his head back against the man's shoulder. "You will never do that again. I am your controller, your Master. You belong to me. Your mind, your memories, belong to me." The man shoved harder, faster into Justin, his words coming in quick gasps. "You. Are. Mine. You. Don't. Think. Without. My. Permission!" He shouted, jerking Justin's cock roughly in tune with his own thrusts. "You. Don't. BREATH. Without. My. Say! Do. You. Under-" Marquis cut off with a feral moan, a primal scream of ecstasy as he emptied into his boy. "Stand?" He whispered, speeding up his assault on Justin's dick, staying inside of his victim and feeling the tightness of the blonde's coming orgasm surround his cock.

"Ask me." Marquis warned.

Justin knew what the man meant. "May I come?" He said, voice thick with overwhelming sensations.

Pleasure…

"Master." Marquis said.

"May I come, Master?" The boy asked. "Please?"

Marquis growled into his prize's ear and nodded against the tender flesh. He felt Justin's body react with the granted permission, the tight balls sending a flash of warmth through the boy's cock and entire lower body like a jolt of tingling electricity, exploding over Marquis' hand in a wash of fire.

"Ungh!" Justin moaned, body convulsing with wave after wave of pleasure. He felt Marquis inside of him, clenched by the shuddering muscles.

Ecstasy…

The man pulled out of him, pushing his face to the bed. "Stay right there." He said, going to the bathroom. Justin braced himself for the icy water to spread over his body like it had time and time before whenever Marquis visited the room's tiny bathroom, but the man returned with a small first aid kit. He stretched Justin's hands over the bed and cleaned the wounds left by the boy's fight with the window glass. The blonde didn't move from where he was put, his face hidden in the mattress. Only Marquis' touch leading his hands, and only his hands, comply.

"You were very bad today, and still I rewarded you. I must love you. You must be my favorite."

Belong…here. Home.

Justin's body warmed with a proud blush. He chanced a look at the man and smiled softly, waiting and hoping for Marquis to return the look. When the dark torturer's lips curled into a tender smile, Justin's face lit up. It was approval. Once sought from Brian, the emotion sent butterflies of excitement through the pit of the boy's stomach. He pressed his face back into the mattress and smiled dazedly while Marquis finished. The boy wanted the man to touch him again, to lavish him with kisses and support, protection, love. Love. Justin was his favorite of all the boy's he had in his club. The favorite! And Marquis loved him. He would never hurt Justin unless it was deserved. The boy knew this now.

And the thought that all of this was terribly wrong never entered his fragile psyche.

Forgiveness.

"It's time to get your strength up. You are hungry." Marquis said and helped the boy off the bed. "Stand there. I want to clothe you." The man told Justin, and like a mannequin, Justin stayed. Marquis went into a small stand-alone closet and opened the double doors. The boy's eyes watched his Master thumb through extravagant garments because that was what he was supposed to see. The wretched devices strung along the open doors, waiting for the blood of a disobedient victim, stayed away from the blonde's distorted reality. He didn't fear them because Marquis would only use them if Justin made him angry, and by then the boy would fully welcome new pain in place of his Master's forgiveness.

Justin watched Marquis bring a deep blue lace vest from its hanger and held his arms out when the man made a small motion with his hands. The fabric felt good against his sensitive skin and his body struggled to stay still while Marquis trailed his fingers over the vest as it slid easily over the blonde head. It was a snug fit and brought out the calm, devoted emptiness of the boy's deep blue eyes. The man then slid another pair of black vinyl underwear over the boy's slim hips, this time the straps tied in the back to showcase his fabulous ass in a crisscross of cords.

Marquis kissed Justin softly on the lips. He brought the boy into the bathroom and powdered the bruises around the blushing lips until they were no more than faint hints of abuse. The man brushed a thumb over Justin's eyelids and left a trail of the smallest musing of blue eye shadow to further accentuate his treasured blonde's irises.

"I will protect you from this horrible world, my boy, but you must never leave me. You know that now."

Justin nodded, his stomach more than ready for food. If his Master so wished him to eat.

"Say thank you, Justin."

"Thank you, Master." Justin smiled, and the two left the cold bedroom for a much more normal looking kitchen.

Marquis sat the boy down on plush purple carpeting and Justin rest his head on the nearby white couch where his Master would sit. The man went to prepare their breakfast, his eyes watching the adoration in Justin's face. The boy was truly his now, and it hadn't taken nearly as long as he had prepared for. The time would soon come when they would travel back to New Orleans, where Marquis could introduce the newest concubine to kneel and be destroyed a breath at a time at his feet under the throne of The Tormented Gardens.

But then, maybe the boy wasn't to be shared like so much meat. As Sullivan Kinney had done. Marquis couldn't help but feel selfish when it came to those salty sweet tears, the smooth white flesh, the dazzling blue eyes…the blonde was quite the prize, a treasure that had at least four men hunting him at the same time, for different reasons. But those men didn't know where the boy was being stowed away, and they would never know. Justin was content with where he was, and Marquis certainly wasn't going to tell them. No, Marquis decided, he would not share Justin.

The boy beamed at him expectantly, as if he could read his Master's mind. It was rather unnerving, that look…like the blue eyes were staring right into his soul. Marquis smiled at his golden treasure and turned back to the task at hand: Food.

\*

Sullivan charged up the stairs, wishing that there were an easier way to get to the seventh floor besides on foot. The elevator was apparently broken…coincidence or preventative escape foiling? The man shook his head and stopped to catch his breath at the door of Marquis' hiding place. He listened, forcing the pulse in his ears to subside.

No screaming.

The man listened closer, his body trembling with the thought that the fine ivory skin held no more of life's passionate heat. Was Justin dead? Already? Had Marquis been overzealous when presented with such an ample prize?

No crying.

Sulli let out a deep breath and pressed his ear to the door. Soundproof? No…there were noises in there…the low rumble of a voice, clinking of silverware against china. Laughter. Laughter?

Laughter!

The man shook his head and listened again. Yes, laughter. Not only the subdued, conservative laughter of the dark man who insisted he was from royal blood either. There was another tone of giggles, but they couldn't belong to Justin. There was no brightness, no contagious air of happiness to the sound. Marquis had already moved on to another guest…he was through with Justin Taylor.

Sullivan reared back and kicked the lock of the door, shooting wooden splinters into the now exposed room. He stood in the doorway prepared for battle but sunk against the shattered frame at what he saw. Justin had leapt onto the couch Marquis was sitting on when the intrusion broke their quaint breakfast into a disaster of wooden shards. The boy huddled in his Master's arms, trembling.

"I don't want to know how you found me, Kinney. Just how you're going to replace my door!"

Sulli stammered, his mouth hanging open. Surely, that couldn't be Angelface in that lace top and vinyl underwear…willingly clinging to the horrible man…Sullivan had heard stories of just how powerful Marquis' persuasions could be when left alone with a young mind but…on a boy as strong as Justin?

The blonde peeked one eye from the protection of his corruptor and looked at Sullivan as if he had never seen the man before. He pressed his face back against the Marquis, inhaling the sweet perfumed aroma of the man's purple robe. The boy crawled onto his Master's lap and curled his fingers into the expensive fabric and the dark hair combed just slightly over his collarbone.

"Ange?" Sullivan managed finally.

"Is there something you need, Kinney? My boy and I were having a peaceful breakfast before you arrived to destroy our morning."

"Angelface, look at me." Sullivan said sternly. He couldn't believe this! It hadn't been twenty-four hours! It was he who had exposed the boy to Marquis, and he who had delivered the blonde to the dark man's arms.

"Justin, dear, look at the man." Marquis said softly.

Justin obeyed. His eyes seemed to stretch forever in pain and torment, and still managed to be blank. Slack. Empty as they stared at the trespasser.

"Oh…fuck…what have you done!" Sullivan screamed at Marquis. The boy's body was there, but no one was home upstairs that even recognized Sullivan as anything more than a person he was instructed to look at.

Justin cowered against his Master, hiding his face.

"Justin, dear, take the dishes to the kitchen." Marquis patted the boy on the head and Justin got up as if he had been sitting there waiting for the direction, not afraid and shuddering from Sullivan's wrath.

Sulli watched Justin move and noted how sore he must have been to walk so slowly, so carefully. His stomach sunk, weighted with guilt and vengeance. "You son of a bitch! What did you do to him!"

"He is my toy now, Kinney. You gave him to me for a few snuff stars and two shots of Cataleptic. You have no business here. Justin is mine. Aren't you darling? Answer me, please."

"Yes, Master." Justin said, staring into a space where no one else existed but the man giving him orders.

"You see, Kinney, the boy will do nothing without my permission. To take him away from me would mean utter destruction. He is my favorite, aren't you my boy?"

Justin stayed still, swaying ever so slightly as if blown by a gentle breeze.

Marquis smiled proudly and said through the wide grin, "Answer me, Justin."

The boy smiled proudly, though it was without Sunshine, instead replaced by a competitiveness over the Marquis' devotion with boys he had never met. "Yes. I'm your favorite."

"You see? He likes it here."

"You broke him." Sullivan seethed through gritted teeth. His hands balled into tight fists at his sides. "He wasn't yours to break."

"He was already broken when I got a hold of him, Kinney. I just picked up the pieces and put him back together as he should be: mine."

"Not yours. Not mine." Sullivan shook his head. "He belonged to himself you bastard! That's what made him so goddamn special!"

"I think he's pretty damn special as he is, Mr. Kinney." Marquis stood up and stepped within an inch of Sullivan's chest. "And that's all that matters now. He is gone to you. He does not know you, or anyone else. Get. Out. I am not sharing. You overused him and you can die with that regret!"

Sulli pushed Marquis back onto the couch and the man let out a surprised yelp. "You can be a powerful bully to young boys when they're chained down and have nothing to fight back with, but let's see how well you back up your threats against a man out to spill your blood!"

Justin screamed wordlessly and threw himself at Sullivan, nails clawing at the Southern man's hazel eyes. The attack was so unexpected that the two toppled to the ground in a heap. Sulli brought his arms up to defend his face as the blonde raged above him, scratching the man who threatened his lover, his Master.

"Enough, my boy." Marquis gently lifted Justin to his feet and the blonde clung to the robed-man as if they had been apart for an eternity.

Sullivan propped himself up on his elbows and stared in disbelief at Justin. "Oh, God…"

"I told you, Kinney. He is nothing to you anymore. Leave us now." Marquis stroked Justin's hair.

Sulli got up and shook his head, backing out of the room. He was not about to lose the game when he was so close to winning the blonde prize. The man had no choice but to bring out the big guns.

The man drew his cell phone when he was on the stairwell below Marquis' makeshift royal retreat. He dialed the only person he knew Justin would recognize and go to beyond anyone else. Sullivan had to call Brian.

\*

Brian had just reached the faux address when his cell phone rang. His hand faltered on the doorknob as he looked at the caller ID.

"Fuck. Shit." Brian hissed. Sullivan. "What?" He asked.

"I need your help, cousin."

"I think we've had enough of each other's help. I'm not telling you where I am, Sullivan."

The Southern man scoffed. "You fool. I set you up. I'm with Justin as we speak…well, actually, he's not really…well he's…Marquis…" Sullivan stammered, furious at himself for stumbling over the words. It had been so much easier to be cruel when Justin's safety had been a tactical move in his game. Now that he knew that the boy was absolutely NOT safe, or sound, he was falling apart. "The rumors are true." He said finally.

"I haven't heard any fucking rumors. Where are you, Sullivan? Better yet, why the fuck should I trust that you don't just want to get me away from here?"

"Marquis has the power to break anyone, Brian." Sullivan said, his tone so serious that Brian didn't dare second guess his cousin. "He's already destroyed Justin."

Brian's legs collapsed beneath him and he fell to the cement stoop of the empty house. "De…stroyed?"

"His mind…yes. His body is…appears to be in one piece." Sullivan said, voice nearly a whisper. This was not a game anymore. He never meant…perhaps once he did intend to completely demolish everything his cousin held dear but now, with Justin, Sulli felt regret for the first time in his life. "But he's gone. Justin s no longer the person you…loved."

Brian sniffled, holding back his tears. "Love. If he's alive, Sullivan, than there is no way in hell I'm going to let him go that easily. Tell me where the fuck you are."

Sullivan sighed with relief. "I hoped you would say that. And Brian?"

"What?"

"For what it's worth…I'm so-"

"Apologize when you're begging for your life at the end of a gun, cousin. Right now, help me save Justin."

\*

When Brian raced up the stairs, Sullivan met him on the last landing and put his hands up to stop the rushing man. He held Brian back, shoving him against the wall to stop his ascent.

"What the fuck are you doing?" Brian demanded.

"I'm warning you." Sullivan said. "When you see him, sugah…it's like seeing someone else. He's got dead eyes. It's the stuff nightmares are made of."

"I'll worry about what I see later, Sullivan! If I have nightmares from this, then I will have Justin to comfort me. I'm more concerned with making the dead eyes go away, getting Justin back."

"That's what I'm trying to tell you! Justin isn't coming back!"

Brian bit his bottom lip. "If you thought that you wouldn't have called me. Now move out of my way before I tear out your throat and shove it up your ass." Brian snarled.

Sulli held his hands up, away from Brian. "Lead the way. But don't say I didn't warn you."

Brian charged into the shattered doorway. He didn't see Justin anywhere but Marquis was sitting like a content cat on his white couch. "Where is he?" The man demanded, sensing Sullivan at his back.

"Oh, he's here. He's resting. Do you want me to wake him?" Marquis purred.

"Yes." Brian said through gritted teeth.

"Justin, dear, come here." Marquis called into the bedroom. A moment later the boy appeared and went directly to his Master waiting for his next command. The man held a hand out and Justin took it. "Look at the new man at the door, dear." Marquis said, eyes devouring the boy as his free hand went to stroke his stiffening dick.

Justin obeyed, watching Brian with the detached air he had viewed Sullivan. Brian saw what his cousin meant by 'dead eyes', and for the first time since the boy's kidnapping, his lover wondered if there was anything to recover. The blue irises seemed to float in pools of too much white, dark to the world.

"Baby, it's Brian…you remember me?" The man pleaded, wishing his voice had not sounded so small and wounded.

"He doesn't remember you because I told him not to." Marquis said proudly. "To break him from me now would unravel his mind. I think it's time to leave, both of you." The man said, his free hand going to the vinyl cords tracing over Justin's ass. He brought the boy in front of him.

"Don't you dare." Brian seethed, his breath coming in ragged gasps of rage and pain.

Marquis ignored the intruders and set the sides of his robe to the sides of his hips. He impaled Justin quickly on his hard cock in a blur of downward motion. The boy gasped and winced, resting his head against his Master's collarbone. His fingers convulsed against his corruptor's robe and he fought a tear from sliding down his cheek.

Brian bit his tongue until he tasted blood. Justin was still there. He saw him, vulnerable, helpless, forced onto his kidnapper's cock, but the boy was inside of that shell. He was ashamed, embarrassed, that Brian had seen him this way.

"I can technically call the police and have you arrested for breaking and entering." Marquis said, moving his hips ever so slightly to further his ascent into Justin's sore hole. The boy trembled and swallowed a sob. Heat traveled into his cheeks, but his eyes turned to Brian with the forced emptiness his rapist drilled into him.

"I would love to get the police involved in this." Brian said in a low growl. "I happen to have a friend in your neck of town who would love to kill someone else for me."

"You have some powers of persuasion of your own then. I'm almost impressed."

"Justin, look at me." Brian tried.

The boy stared straight passed him, unmoving. His eyes watered with unshed tears, his chest tight with agony. Marquis moved inside of him again and Justin forced his mind to blank, his emotions disappearing.

"You can't keep him here, chained by fear!" Brian shouted. "He has to work through this and you're not letting him! That's your so-called power! You strip a person's dignity away and hurt them until they have no choice but to obey you! You're nothing but a common thug!"

Marquis tensed and pushed deeper into Justin, making the boy cry out. He knew hurting the boy would scathe Brian like no words could. "I am NOT common!"

"You are more than common! You are nothing!" Brian screamed. "You have no power, just pain!"

"Pain is power!" Marquis argued. He relaxed against Justin and soothed the boy with tender kisses over his cheek. He whispered, audible to Brian and Sulli, "I'm sorry I had to hurt you, my boy. He made me do it, don't you see? He has hurt you."

Justin nodded, a tear sliding down his cheek.

"Do you forgive me? I love you. Do you forgive me for hurting you? He wants to take you away from me. You don't want that do you? Answer me."

"No!" Justin gasped. "Please protect me from him." The boy begged, grinding his hips against the man's groin. "Please, Master, make them go away. I don't want to hurt anymore."

"Justin…" Brian trembled, falling against Sullivan. "Don't push this down, don't listen to him. I know it hurts, you hurt, but we were going to make it better. We can work though this together." He pleaded.

"Justin has nothing to work through now. I took that pain away from him, didn't I, darling?"

The boy stroked his Master's face behind him, nuzzling into the crook of Marquis' neck. He heard the man groan with his movements on his lap and smiled. His Master was pleased with him, that was all that mattered. Not the shouting, the voices…that voice. Brian…Brian…Brian.

"NO!" Justin shook his head. "Make him stop." The boy begged, shaking his head. "Get him out of my head! PLEASE!"

"Justin, don't fight this! Come back to me!" Brian grasped at the unraveling threads of Justin's psyche. "I can help you and you won't ever have to call me Master!"

"Master, please!" Justin shrieked, tears streaming down his face. "Protect me! Protect me! It hurts!"

Sullivan closed his eyes. He knew Brian's attempts were only making it worse. He was forcing Justin back to Marquis because the boy did not want to feel the pain in his head. He would rather pain outside than the agony of his mind.

Marquis pressed Justin's head against his chest. "Feel me inside of you, know you are safe. We are one. Calm down. Stop crying." He ordered and the boy stilled instantly. "I am protecting you."

"No." Brian's legs wobbled and it was Sullivan who caught him, the two falling against the doorway. "Justin, baby, please don't let him do this to you."

"He does only what I say. And why would I tell him to not let me be his Master, hmm? It doesn't make sense really." The man pushed into Justin and ran a hand down the front of the vinyl underwear, eliciting a soft groan from the boy. "My condolences on your loss of this game, Sullivan. It was hardly a challenge to beat you."

"This game, yes." Sullivan said, helping Brian to stand. He led his cousin out the door. "But I will start a new one, Marquis, bet your life on it. We will get him back."

Sunshine's Night

Dark gray-green eyes studied his father angrily. Mark sat at the foot of the stairs, watching Brian pace the living room hopelessly. The man had returned with the bad news that Justin was hurt. Sad, as Gus put it as the boy set himself beside his brother. Yes, sad. Beyond the reaches of happiness’ cure.

“FUCK!” Brian shouted, throwing his fists against the wall. Sullivan and Michael ran to tear him away from the plaster before he broke his hands. The two restraining men looked at each other, one glaring, the other indifferent.

“We’ll get him back.” Sullivan whispered.

Mark got to his feet and led Gus upstairs. “It’s time for bed, Gussy.” He said, sitting the boy on his bed. “We don’t need to be down there for this.”

“Daddy’s sadder than Jussin now, huh?”“A different sadness. Dad’s angry-sad. Justin’s…I think he’s broken.”

“A person can break?”

“Sure. Like if you put too much mud in a bucket, and then leave it out in the sun, it’ll crack right?”

“I did that once.” Gus nodded.

“Well when you put too much bad things in a person, they can crack too, only it doesn’t show much on the outside.”

“Mommy taped my bucket when it bwoke.”

“We don’t have people-tape, though.”

“Is Jussin broken fowevah?” The boy asked, tears pooling in his eyes.

Mark hugged his brother. He didn’t know how to answer that, so he stayed silent. Was Justin broken forever? Until the day he died? The teenager didn’t want to think about that. He turned his eyes to the stars, glad that the rain had finally subsided. They had another storm to worry about now, inside of Justin’s mind.

\*

Justin stirred the soup, watching Marquis dreamily. It was lunch time and he was starving, their breakfast being interrupted by those…men. All that pain had simmered back to the surface, but Marquis had taken that away. Marquis had taken all of it away, and Justin couldn’t be happier. He had been waiting for this, needing this, a way to escape.

“You look beautiful when you’re lost in thought.” Marquis said, and it caught Justin off guard. The boy had lost himself thinking, when he wasn’t supposed to do anything without permission.

Marquis stood and walked to the kitchen. He took the spoon from his boy’s hands and kissed the stammering mouth. “Shh. You’re alright now. It isn’t your fault those terrible intruders frazzled you. I can forgive you a few indiscretions. Because I love you.”

Justin relaxed against the stove, his fingers curving around Marquis’ and the spoon. “Permission to speak, sir?” The boy whispered delicately, his eyes searching his Master’s.

“Granted.” Marquis smiled. This one learned so fast.

Justin stood on his tip-toes and whispered in Marquis’ ear. “I would like to thank you.” His voice was husky with lust and he showed the man how eager he was to please by pressing his growing erection against Marquis’ groin. “Please, may I thank you?”

Marquis purred low in his throat, his head falling back. “Yes, you may.” The man’s fingers twirled into the blonde hair as Justin lowered his head, tongue flicking out across the bare expanse of Marquis’ robe. The afternoon was still of an early light and neither man had changed their clothes. It just made what the boy wanted to do easier.

Justin spread his fingers under the purple cloth and pushed it from his Master’s shoulders, the expensive robe falling to the floor. The boy licked around Marquis’ nipples, drawing each one into his mouth and tending to the sensitive flesh with his hot, strong tongue. He heard his Master groan, the man’s fingers convulsing in Justin’s hair. The boy’s hands clutched at Marquis’ back, massaging the arching spine. Justin moved downward, lightly kissing the tightening flesh over Marquis’ quivering belly. The blonde sucked gently, sensually, over the flat abs, tasting each muscled ridge. A smile broke over Justin’s lips as the man’s musky scent invaded his senses. His nimble fingers played along Marquis’ hips and traveled down, caressing the sensitive flesh lining the crevice of his Master’s muscled ass. Marquis grunted with pleasure, thrusting his hips and thick, hard cock against his boy’s neck. Justin didn’t tease, his tongue reaching the shaft and trailing a line from the base to the responsive, leaking head. The boy lapped at the semen like a cat with cream, the tip of his tongue slipping over the slit. Marquis’ body trembled with pleasure, his hands convulsing into Justin’s hair. The boy took Marquis’ entirety into his mouth, relaxing his throat so the man was engulfed to the hilt inside of him. He let his Master slid slowly out of his lips, wrapping his mouth tightly around the shaft until only the head remained. He pulled Marquis back into him, slid him out, took him back, quicker, sliding in and out with the thick pre-cum as a wanted lubrication. Justin’s fingers played at the hole of his Master, teasing, tantalizing, tickling the twitching opening. Marquis growled with satisfaction, falling against the countertop, his back pressed against the marble corner without feeling an ounce of pain over the intense sensations consuming his every nerve.

“Oh, such a good boy.” Marquis grinned, a slight laugh escaping his throat as Justin stroked the head with a masterful tongue, flicking it back and forth until Marquis thought he would shatter into a million tiny pieces of pleasure.

Justin breathed heatedly over the slick cock, shivering at the delightful taste of gratifying his Master. The boy lowered his mouth and worked the man’s balls into his mouth one by one, warming and wetting them, releasing each, going back to the first, returning, until the flesh tightened against Marquis’ body aching for release. Justin went back to the trembling cock before him, working his tongue over the head, down the underside of the raging hard-on, around the thick base, faster, turning around, around, tasting every inch of flesh like it was his last meal. Marquis breathed in quick gasps, trying to pull in more oxygen to ward away the dizzying stars that blurred his vision. His legs threatened mutiny, shivering under the weight of his body. Justin continued his appreciation for the man’s protection, bringing his hands from the hot, quivering hole to stroke Marquis’ agonizingly tight erection, his lips raining kisses on the sensitive, sticky head.

“Uh! Ungh! Gaaaawwwwddddd…” The man murmured breathily, the truth to his Louisiana roots coming out in a thick accent. He was not royalty by any blood, but he was getting treated more like a king than any man he imitated.

Justin worked faster, his hands gripping the man’s cock in a fury of speed, his tongue twisting around the head, breath hot on the leaking flesh. He felt Marquis shake and welcomed the white explosion into his mouth. The boy swallowed his Master’s seed eagerly, not releasing his hold on Marquis until he was sure the man was completely empty. He then kissed the head one last time and whispered, breath like fire to the convulsing slit, “Thank you.”

The boy looked up at his Master and smiled, getting slowly to his feet. He wrapped an arm around Marquis’ waist and led the man to the bedroom, knowing there was no way his lover could walk on his own now. Not without rest.

Marquis let himself fall onto the bed, watching the boy tuck the blankets around him. His dark eyes fluttered closed as warm lips left a caressing kiss on his forehead. Sleep came easily to him after such exertion, and the man knew that he needn’t worry about his prize escaping. No one did something that amazing unwillingly. It was not a technique any threat could produce.

Justin went back to the kitchen and stirred the soup again, blowing steam from the extremely hot liquid. He turned the heat off and stepped away from the spitting, boiling broth. The boy tasted the soup and grimaced. He had just eaten something much more appetizing, and wanted seconds as soon as the man was awake. Their intended lunch would have to do for now, but without Marquis watching over him, Justin had no appetite. The blonde decided to leave the soup and join his Master in bed. It had been too long since he’d slept soundly, with the protection of someone’s strong arms around him. Now was a good time to get back into the habit.

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Brian lifted his dripping face from the ice cold water, hands gripping the porcelain sink until the fingertips were white. He dunked himself again to mask the sob that clutched his chest, aching to get out. The man swallowed, not breathing, his mind reeling with the loss of the one person he had tried so hard to love. Had succeeded in loving. Now the boy was…

With Marquis.

Jealousy flared up in the man, a red-hot fire starting in his loin and shooting flames through his trembling legs, shaking arms, throbbing head. Brian raised his head and stared at himself in the mirror angrily. He squeezed his eyes closed, cutting off the world. Brian didn’t want to look at a man who had let his one and true love go without so much as a whimper. He had just…left! Justin was trapped in that body in his lace and vinyl, in so much pain that he would risk his sanity and dignity to be forced to forget. Brian had seen the boy, for a breath of a second, in that one tear sliding down his cheek. When Marquis had shoved himself, unprepared, into the troubled blonde…Justin had resurfaced before hiding again behind the broken exterior. Brian stared at himself again and knew what the boy knew: Marquis was everyone’s worst nightmare because of the powers he held over his subjects, but if Justin embraced the man, he had nothing to fear. No one would go near the sadistic fuck to catch the blonde because the Marquis was worse than anyone else who had ever hurt Justin. He was safe in the eye of the storm.

“Fuck.” Brian whispered, the rage and jealousy subsiding. Justin was hiding from everyone, even himself, behind the knowledge that nobody would fight Marquis.

Nobody except Brian.

The man wiped his face on a towel, inhaling the aroma of fresh laundry. His mind washed to Justin, dripping from a steaming shower, shivering in the winter air outside the steamed glass walls. Brian had come to him, wrapping a large fluffy towel around the boy and just…holding him, warm flesh soaking into the terrycloth, against Brian’s skin. That bond had held all the chill at bay. The man couldn’t remember how long they stayed standing in that embrace, but it was long enough to wipe life’s miseries away for that moment, frozen in time. The boy had smelled so clean, as if he was made of pure soap. Brian had leaned down to kiss him, he had to know what Justin tasted like with such an unscathed scent.

“Fuck.” Brian repeated into the towel, letting it fall back to the wall. He could deal with rage. Anger was easier than sorrow, and usually got things done much more effectively.

A soft knock on the door alerted Brian that he wasn’t the only one in the house, that there had been a reason he had fled to the bathroom to cry. Mark cleared his throat and spoke quietly through the door, as if afraid talking any louder would damage his father.

“Dad?”

Brian opened the door. “I’m alright, Mark.”

“Are you hungry? Deb’s heated up some food…”

“That’s okay, not right now.”

“Are you going to come out of the bathroom? You’re the only one who isn’t imagining ways to kill Sullivan right now.”

Brian took a deep breath and nodded. “Yeah. Yeah.”

“Michael thinks that if we all go over there, we could get Justin back.”

“No. If he…recoiled from me…doesn’t want to remember me…a group of us will force him farther into the hiding place he’s in. That Marquis has got him in.”

Mark sighed. “I guess you’re right. But we can’t just sit here and do nothing!” The teenager threw his arms up in frustration, his voice rising an octave.

“Calm down, Mark.” Brian put a comforting hand on his son’s shoulder. “We’ll get him back, but we can’t force him or it will be worse. I’ll think of something.”

Mark nodded. “Sure.”

“You trust me, right? That I’m going to do everything I can to save him?”

Mark smiled softly and wrapped his arms around Brian’s neck in a quick hug. The two were still working out what kind of father-son relationship they had. A quick hug or pat on the shoulder was the level they were comfortable at now. “Don’t worry. I don’t think you deserted him. You left because you had to. Live to fight another die, type of thing.” Mark looked into his dad’s eyes. “You love him. And you’ll save him.”

Brian smirked. Mark had been taking Brian-deciphering 101 from Justin. The boy knew exactly what the man needed to hear. “Thanks.”

“Eh.” Mark shrugged it off.

Brian tousled his son’s dark blonde hair. “Come on, let’s go see what they’ve left of Sulli.”

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Justin danced his fingers over the naked flesh of his Master, the afternoon sun shining over his baby face, making his light blue eyes pale and bright. Marquis turned slowly and wrapped Justin in his arms, groaning from his heavy sleep. It had been years since he slept so well, so enveloped in warmth and desire. He opened thick-lashed eyes, blinking at the blonde boy basking in the sun. Marquis returned the contagious smile. He couldn’t help but be proud of such a prize. The boy was tracing a delicate finger over his Master’s nipples, lips slightly parted as if awaiting the tongue of his lover. Justin felt Marquis harden against his nude thigh and the boy pressed his stiffening groin against the man’s stomach in reply.

“Please.” Justin mouthed, careful not to sound his requests until told to do so. He moved wanton fingers gently over Marquis’ lips, feeling the heat swell over his fingertips. The boy giggled as Marquis pretended to bite the tickling digits.

“You want me to fuck you? Answer me, boy.”

Justin grinned, full of craving. He let Marquis take his wrists in one hand as the man drew their bodies to kneel on the lofty bed. The boy rest his head in the hollow of his Master’s shoulder, laying tender kisses along the flesh. Strong hands probed down the curve of the boy’s spine, cupping his round ass and reveling in the feel of the firm globes. Marquis moaned, echoed by his boy’s murmur of wordless approval, the young hips pressing into his Master’s thighs with wanton need. He pulled away to gaze at the man, blue eyes gleaming with pleasure. His deep irises begged the man to be gentle, to go slowly this time, to mind his sore opening.

The man kissed Justin carefully, fingers traveling to the tender hole. The blonde winced, a sharp inhaling of breath, and Marquis pulled away. “Alright.” He said gently, turning the boy to his hands and knees on the bed. The dark-haired man pulled a tube of KY-Jelly out of the bedside table and rubbed his fingers into the mess until the thick coating was nearly dripping from his hand. Marquis spread his boy and trailed his lubricated fingers over the throbbing hole, around it, barely gracing the surface with his touch. Justin moaned, pushing his ass back toward the man. His Master entered the boy slowly, so slowly, preparing the tight opening with the utmost concern.

Marquis rubbed his cock with his free hand, watching his fingers move in and out of Justin’s deep core. Desire clouded his vision and only the heed of not causing the blonde pain kept the man from plowing into his treasure. Throaty, breathy moans escaped from the boy’s lips and Marquis knew if he didn’t take the boy soon, they would both die from the intense yearning of flesh to flesh. The man pulled out of Justin and molded his body the length of his boy’s, whispering with heated breath into one tingling, burning ear. “Better?”

Justin thrust his hips backwards in reply and Marquis chuckled, low, a sound reserved for the intimacy of lover’s in the bedroom. The man brought himself down to kiss one round white globe and Justin trembled, a breath catching in his throat. “Yes, much better.” Marquis decided, leading his leaking cock to push at Justin’s hole. “That’s it. Oh yes.” The man moaned, gently pressing his twitching member into the hot core. Justin gasped, a noise not entirely built of pain. He braced himself, falling down to rest his head on his forearms, ass in the air ready for his Master’s entirety. Marquis closed his eyes, bliss already washing through him in pulsating waves at the fiery grip of his servant’s opening. The man pulled out slowly, so very, very slowly, and pushed back in, shivering with the control it took to keep his movements steady, lethargic. He brought his strong hands to grasp Justin’s hips, guiding himself inside of his young lover once, twice, out, in, oh so carefully. He heard the blonde groan, could nearly see the boy biting the pillow beneath him to keep from crying out, and Marquis nearly lost it. The blonde was so wonderfully willing, so adamant about conforming to his Master’s every whim. Marquis felt himself swell harder inside the boy and he had to pump his dick faster into the blonde’s dark confines to retain the little control he had over his feral body. Justin shouted into the pillow with ecstasy, short, gasping cries of pleasure as his Master took his thrusts to the next level. The boy nearly collapsed, his knees wishing to spread-eagle to either side of their bodies. Only Marquis’ untamed grip on the milky-white flesh of Justin’s hips kept them both from falling into the bottomless void sucking at their pulsing minds. Marquis’ voice was high, nearing an animalistic howl, when screams of bliss tore from his throat. At every thrust, each more intense than the last, both men cried out sounds rivaling the previous night’s thunderstorm.

“Please! Please!” Justin screamed before he could help himself. He pressed his face into the fluffy pillows and hoped the insubordinate cry would not get him punished. Marquis reached around the boy’s body as if he didn’t hear, or didn’t care about, the momentary burst of assertiveness. The man grabbed Justin’s ready cock and pulled it along with his rapid thrusts. Justin bit into the pillows and screamed, loud, long, wordlessly, as his Master manipulated his dick. He felt the end nearing with every gasping breath, his limbs quivering, jolting as if shocked by a massive amount of electricity. His muscles spasmed with energy, convulsing around Marquis’ thick cock. The man grunted, breaths coming in heaving pants. His body responded to the sensual stimulation, cock ready to explode, hand jerking Justin with enough power to punch through a wall.

“Please, may I come?” Justin begged before he was asked. Marquis nodded, realized the boy couldn’t see it, and mumbled, almost inaudibly.

“Yesss….”

Justin complied with the permission, pressing his face deeper into the pillow to stifle the shout of ecstasy as he shot his load over his Master’s hand. Marquis felt the hot juices cover his hand and his dick answered with its own explosion deep inside of the boy. Their bodies worked as one, emptying amidst trembling muscles and gasping, ragged breaths.

Marquis pulled out of Justin with a slack smile of happiness masking his countenance. His arms couldn’t support him once the boy’s body was no longer under him, and the man collapsed onto the bed. Justin fell beside him, spooning himself against Marquis. The boy tilted his head backwards and looked at his Master lovingly. Marquis kissed the blonde’s forehead and snuggled against him, pulling the body closer to him, wrapping his arms around Justin’s chest.

“Sleep now, my boy. You’ve been very good to your Master today. I can see fit to reward you, once…we…sleep some. You’re so very young body has put me to shame.” The man whispered, drifting off to sleep.

The boy felt restless, not tired. He watched the slivers of warm light drift over the walls until he couldn’t bear the stillness any longer. It hadn’t been ten minutes before Marquis’ soft snores of deep sleep riled over the boy’s body and he couldn’t sit still any longer. Justin rubbed his ass against the softened flesh of Marquis’ groin and rest his head against the man’s collarbone. He took a deep breath through his nose, let it out through his mouth, his heart refusing to calm it’s frantic beat. The boy pressed his eyes closed and bit his tongue, warding his dick to stay limp. His cock listened to his head’s commands as well as a wild dog obeyed an order.

“Fuck.” The boy whispered, not wishing to disturb his Master but knowing he had no other choice. He could not touch himself without permission, for fear of incurring Marquis’ wrath.

Marquis murmured, one eye opening. “No, baby. No. I’m too tired. Must rest.” He shook his head. Justin stopped his movements and whimpered. “You’re ready. Again?” Marquis asked in disbelief.

“Yes, Master.” Justin said softly.

“Sit up.” Marquis ordered and the boy winced, but did as he was told. He didn’t know what his lover was going to do for his sexual prowess. “Now…” The man turned on his back with a weary sigh. “Touch yourself.”

The blonde blinked and stared at the man. “May I?”

“Yes.” Marquis nodded, “please do.” He waved a hand and watched the boy push the covers around his ankles. “Let me see, that’s it.” The man smiled as Justin spread his legs, bracing his back against the railing at the foot of the bed.

A cautious hand moved to stroke his hard-on, eyes warily watching for his Master’s approval. He had never had an audience before. He closed his baby blue eyes and let his head fall back, a low moan escaping his mouth. Justin opened his eyes and gazed seductively at his Master, hand finding a steady and comfortable rhythm, his grip tightening around his cock. His legs opened further, stretching, his hot hole pulsing a thunderous song in time with his pounding heart.

“That’s my boy. Good. Very good.” Marquis purred, watching the blonde’s toes curl along the silk sheets. “Go slowly, touch the head.”

Justin obeyed, too lost in the passion, the sensations coercing through his veins like liquid fire, to be nervous. He ran a thumb over the slippery slit, once, twice, pushing against the throbbing cum-covered hole. The blonde stuck two fingers in his mouth and trailed them over his nipples, around, around, trailing down to his puckering vortex. He groaned feverishly, toes convulsing, curling, relaxing, his hand moving faster, thumb teasing the head.

“Slowly. Slowly.” Marquis whispered. Justin forced himself to settle down, nearly releasing his dick to regain his composure.

The boy whimpered, biting his lower lip, teeth grazing the swollen pink flesh. His tongue flicked out of his mouth, wetting his mouth. He stared at Marquis through heavy lids, eyes hidden behind a curtain of long blonde lashes. Justin thrust against his hand, watching Marquis devour his every move. The boy slipped his slick, nimble fingers inside his twitching hole and gasped, moving in as deep as he could, dancing his fingers against the tight muscle ring.

Marquis licked his lips, hand behind his head as he stared at the marvelous youth. The boy was so hot, so ready, gazing at his Master with only the reverence to please. The man smiled at the blonde as Justin’s face scrunched in bliss, his mouth hanging open, lips trembling. He was so close. So very close.

“Faster.” Marquis permitted. “Faster, boy.” He said, sitting up and crawling over to his treasure. The paradise was too exotic to simply watch. As Justin’s hand moved along his shaft with the rapidness of his raging heartbeat, Marquis lowered his face, lips enveloping the slippery cock head with unbearable heat. Justin gasped, hands falling to his sides as his Master took over. Marquis drew the boy deeper into his mouth, moaning around the hard flesh at the sweet taste of Justin’s pre-cum.

“Master.” Justin whimpered, fingers tangling themselves into the dark curling locks of the Marquis.

The man brought his fingers into his mouth and slid them down, pushed them into the boy’s trembling hole. Justin cried out with pleasure, his head flipping forward, backward, uncontrolled. The blonde spread his legs wider, thrusting his cock into his Master’s face impatiently. He whimpered, a high whining sound of desperation. The boy bucked against Marquis violently, shaking the bed. So close…so…close….

“Ungh. Ohhh…ple…unh. Ugnh! Ah! Ahhhh!” Justin screamed, hands clutching at the sheets, drawing them around his wildly seizing body as Marquis dipped faster, pushed harder. The boy was caught off-guard with an orgasm so fitful he shoved his back against the metal bed frame. As the support behind him creaked, breaking, Justin was spilled onto the hard floor, legs splayed on the bed with his Master staring at his spent boy with amazement.

“You are amazing, my precious child.” Marquis whispered, trailing a finger over the arch of Justin’s bare foot. The boy shivered at the touch, his body tingling with the aftermath of such a shock.

“Thank you, Master.” Justin closed his eyes.

“Are you ready for bed yet, my dear?” Marquis asked, still stroking the boy’s foot and watching goosebumps dance over the flushed skin.

“Please.” Justin nodded slowly, a dim smile lighting his face as Marquis took the boy’s wrists in hand and pulled him back to the bed. Justin was dead to the world, limp in so many ways. His body stayed where Marquis lay him down. The man molded his body against Justin’s round ass, postured back, sweet-smelling neck. He listened to the blonde’s soft breathing and couldn’t help but succumb to the exhaustion beckoning at the edges of his subconscious.

Sleep sucked both men away from reality, wrapped in each other’s arms, uncaring for the world outside and the growing plot to separate their heated embrace.

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Sullivan stood in the corner as Will Taylor balled his hands into trembling fists, his lips a tight line of rage. The Southern man had never seen Justin look so angry, but it looked strangely familiar on Will. It was one of the few things the Taylor boys didn’t share, that look of dark malice. Sulli cocked his head to one side and wished that no one had told the young man about what had happened once his brother was finally found.

“You gave up! You just fucking let him stay with that monster!” Will shrieked in a voice so high it had woken Gus and brought the boy wailing down the stairs.

Lindsay held her son as Brian tried desperately to calm the blonde.

“There’s nothing we could have done! He wasn’t ready to face the world that caused him so much pain! Whatever Marquis did to him in that short amount of time was enough to send him over the edge. Sulli and I had to regroup, we were only causing him more pain by being there, forcing the memories back on him.” Brian nearly sobbed, holding his breath and releasing it. Once, twice, soothing the shaking in his limbs and chest.

“He would have gone to you if HE wasn’t there!” Will accused, pointing at Sullivan. “It’s his fucking fault!”

“You wanna place blame, sugah?” Sulli kicked away from the wall. “Why don’t we fucking start with you? Who brought Hayden Kriegg raining fury on the boy? He’d never been fucked by anyone but Brian before that! Who brought Justin to Dark Starr in the first place? Your Master, and then, your fucking BROTHER! Don’t you dare snub me, you self-righteous asshole! It’s his family that has caused him so much pain, not me. I was just there to pick up the pieces of what the Taylor problems brought upon him.” Sullivan rest back on the wall smugly, satisfied.

“You are the one who brought him to that deviant fuck who holds him now! You raped him, kidnapped him, nearly killed his spirit! You broke Justin and Brian up, for fuck’s sake! You made him hide away, afraid of love and comfort and human fucking contact! So fuck you! FUCK YOU!”

Sullivan sneered. “Justin and I were having a good time. It was Bear, your FRIEND, that made him hide away from the people who supposedly love him. He came willingly with me to Naw’lins, sugah. The fucking we did on the way there was like nothing I’ve ever had…that ass.” Sullivan moaned low in his throat. “No matter. You weren’t there with us, and you don’t know. I KNOW! I fucking know, you little prick, and Brian knows, too, what went on with your brother and Marquis. You should go back to the hospital and play nurse maid to your big sister while the ones who are in the fucking loop decide how to play commando. Let the big boys handle this, sugah. We’ll let you know how many pieces we find Sunshine in when we’re done.”

Will screamed and lunged at the man. Brian grabbed the blonde and threw him over the couch.

“That’s fucking enough you stupid assholes! Where are your heads, up your asses? This isn’t about blame. If Justin dies, you two can fight it out until you join him on the other side, but until then shut the fuck up and listen to me for one Goddamn second!” Brian shouted. Mark wiped his tears away with the back of his hand, angrily. Sullivan sunk against the wall, only slightly, relief that Will hadn’t been able to attack him washing through his limbs. One hand fell away from his hidden bowie knife hooked in its sheath on his belt loop. Brian continued. “We all know that Justin is hurting, and we all have a great idea how to save him, but nothing is going to work unless he’s willing to meet us half way. Right now, Marquis has convinced him that he can blank out the rest of the world, and that’s what Justin wants. Protection from you,” Brian pointed to his cousin, “and you,” to Will, “and from me. From love, from life, from pain and suffering and trauma. Marquis is letting him forget whatever happened to him for the price of servitude. What we need now is a reason for Justin to remember, something good from his past that holds more joy than pain. If anyone has an idea as to what that is, without shouting, I’d love to hear it.”

Will sank down on the couch, head resting on the back of the sofa with exhaustion. “Cam’s going to be okay.” He sighed. “If anyone wanted to know.”

Sullivan smirked. “Did you leave Bear guarding her? We know how well that—”

Mark moved fast and kicked Sullivan in the shin. He pointed to the door. “Go on, we don’t want you here. Come back when you decide to be useful!” The boy hissed.

Sulli looked at his cousin, then back at Mark. “Little shit. You fucking little shit.”

“You heard him, Sullivan. Get out.” Brian said, crossing his arms. His son had bigger balls than most of the people he knew, and that was saying something. The kid was fifteen years old and willing to fight with anyone for what he wanted, no matter what the person’s strengths were.

“Now.” Mark said. “I won’t tolerate your fucking mouth in my house. Out.”

Sullivan scoffed. “Well okay then. Pray you come up with a plan before I do, cousin.” The man walked to the door. “Because I won’t send you the leftovers if I get to him first.” He winked, and slammed the door behind him.

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Justin woke in the arms of his Master, listening to the soft snores of the warm man behind him. The room was bathed in a golden dusk and the boy turned against Marquis with a content smile on his face. He caressed his Owner’s cheek, bringing him out of his sweet dreams.

“Hmm? Justin, have I been sleeping too long for you once again?” The man teased, running his fingers through the baby-fine blonde hair. “Your stamina is too much, even for the Marquis.”

The boy frowned. Had he displeased his protector by being too sexual? Marquis tilted the blue eyes to look up at him. He kissed Justin’s full lips and smiled approvingly.

“It’s not a bad thing, my boy. I have yet to meet one besides you who matches me with such…prowess. It’s a welcome change.” Marquis kissed the boy again, probing the open mouth with his tongue. He drew back from the blonde. “I never want to see you frown again, Justin. Do you understand me? Answer.”

“Yes, Master.” Justin bowed his head, tongue flicking out to tease Marquis’ nipple.

“Ah ah, first I think we are both in dire need of a shower.” Marquis chastised, mock-seriously. Justin let the worry travel to his eyes, but didn’t frown. He didn’t understand the tone of his Master’s voice, didn’t get the teasing. “Justin?” Marquis asked with concern. The boy held back his tears, blue eyes glassy with the unshed dread, his lip trembling. “No, no. Don’t cry, dear. I’m not mad at you.”

Justin sobered, a smile once more lighting his face. Hot and cold, distraught and ecstatic. He was falling apart, confused, not daring to turn one way or another for fear of reprisal. The boy let Marquis lead him to the bathroom and sat upon the marble counter where his Master set him while the man prepared a bath. He admired the rather exquisite tub with a detached smile. It was huge! Big enough for four people, at least! The man had obviously been planning a visit to Pittsburgh for quite some time! Just for him. For Justin.

Sullivan crept into the living room through the derelict door, the cracked wood not yet replaced from his last entrance. The Southern man drew his wide, polished knife and pressed the cold steel to his forehead with a smile. He lowered it to his side and listened to the bathtub fill with water in a room out of view. The scent of roses and vanilla filled his senses and Sulli felt himself grow hard thinking about Justin’s naked white flesh washed with the delicate fragrances. The man purred low in his throat and rubbed his leather-bound crotch with the broad side of his knife, sliding against the wall as a soft, soothing voice caressed his ears.

“You believe your Master, don’t you, my boy? I am not angry with you. You will know when I become agitated with you. Speak.”

“I worry, Master. That you will leave me.” Justin answered gently, almost tearfully.

Sulli smirked, rubbing his dick harder with the bowie knife, the friction bringing memories of sweet bliss driving down Highway 59 with Justin grinding on his lap. He leaned against the outer door of the bathroom, just inches away from his prize. The man slipped out of his pants, his shirt, shoes. It had not been an idle threat to Brian that he would find a way to take Justin before his cousin could.

“The only thing that will part us is death, my young worrier. Are we dying? Answer.”

“N-no?”

“Wrong.” Sullivan said, arm outstretched so the knife crossed over Justin’s neck. He slipped around the corner and adjusted his position, wrapping one arm under the boy’s arms, over his chest, the other hand pressing the knife a breath’s touch above Justin’s fragile flesh. “Someone is going to die tonight if I don’t get my way.”

Marquis snarled, crouched on the wide bathtub rim like a wild, cornered animal. “Leave us be you vial man!”

“Is it going to be your boy that dies tonight, Marquis? Can you bear to see his ivory skin marred with fresh crimson? His death is on your hands.” Sulli tightened his grip on the boy until his victim uttered a terrified, trembling gasp. “And so is his life.”

“What do you want, you bastard?” Marquis growled.

“I want Justin.”

“You’re not getting him. He belongs to me.”

“He’s about to belong to no one.” Sullivan sneered, pressing the knife against Justin’s throat. The boy whimpered, staring pleadingly at his Master for help.

“Let him go!”“I’ll fucking do it!”

“You don’t have the balls!”

Sullivan smiled, as if that was what he was waiting for. He brought the knife to Justin’s face and pressed it against his forehead, cold steel over one eye. If the man wouldn’t relinquish his hold on the blonde for the sake of his young life, he would do it to preserve the boy’s beauty.

“Fuck! Stop!” Marquis shouted angrily.

“Master…” Justin whispered, shivering, naked, exposed.

“I’m going to fuck him.” Sullivan said, walking forward with the boy as his shield. “And you’re not going to stop me. I’ll tell you what you -are- going to do, Marquis. You’re going to order him compliant to a second Master.”

Marquis glared at the man as he stepped into the waiting bathtub.

“You’re going to tell your boy to relax, because you want him to enjoy this.” Sullivan ordered, as if Justin wasn’t right there in the room. “If he doesn’t, your protection isn’t going to be worth shit because you’ll both be dead. Now why don’t you get in, the water’s nice and warm.” Sulli smiled seductively, adding under his breath. “Make him stop shaking, Marquis, or I will.” He threatened, sliding the knife over Justin’s face, the barest trace of metal against flesh. Sullivan lowered himself into the water, taking Justin with him. The boy’s knees buckled only when Marquis joined them in the tub.

“Justin, relax.” Marquis soothed, and the boy forced the rigidity of his body to slacken. Sullivan smiled at how easily the blonde let the orders govern his actions.

“That’s better, Angelface.”

“Don’t you hurt him.” Marquis warned.

“You’ve got nothing to stand on.” Sulli shook his head. “You cannot order me, and think I will obey.” The man grazed Justin’s skin with the knife, never leaving the face that was so precious to Marquis. “Tell him to do what I say, Marquis, or he’ll bleed.”

The darker man snarled, baring teeth. Breath hissed through his mouth, through the gritted grimace. “Justin…”

The boy looked away from his Master in shame. No one could protect him now.

“Look at me, boy!” Marquis said, regaining his composure with the strength of command. Justin snapped his head back to the man. “Don’t you dare look away from your Master like that again!”

“Keep him controlled, Marquis.” Sullivan smiled, rubbing his hard cock over the wet crevice of Justin’s ass.

“You belong to me, and through me, to this man. You will do what he says as long as he is our guest.” Marquis said, his voice low with authority. He reached out and touched his boy’s face, a gentle apology for letting his guard down and not bringing a weapon to the room. “You don’t want to upset me, boy. Do you?”

Justin shook his head, tears streaming down his face.

“Stop crying, you like this.” Sullivan tried his first taste of Mastering the boy. Justin swallowed his tears and waited silently, ready for his next order. “Oh, I like this very much.” Sulli smiled.

“Don’t hurt him.” Marquis warned again. “I’ll get the lube.”

“You leave this room, I’d hate to see the condition of my boy when you get back.”

“He’s sore. He needs it.”

“He’ll enjoy the pain because I say he will.” Sulli bit his bottom lip with excitement and whispered to Justin. “Right, Angel? Answer me.”

“Y-yes.” Justin whimpered.

“I thought so.” Sullivan said, rubbing harder against Justin’s ass. He bent the boy slightly, hand falling from the guarded position under Justin’s arms to cup the blonde’s firm globes.

“Son of a bitch.” Marquis growled, staying against the edge of the tub.

“Oh, shut the fuck up.” Sullivan smirked. “When you take something that’s not yours, it’s free game to anyone else.” The man kissed a hot trail down Justin’s neck and the boy shivered.

“Just get this over with, Kinney.” Marquis said, face taught with anger.

Kinney. Kinney. “Brian…” Justin whispered, the sound seeming to echo in the tiled room.

“Oh, that’s unacceptable!” Sullivan raged, slamming Justin’s face into the deep water. The boy struggled, thrashing his arms. The Southern man held the blonde head under and pointed the knife at Marquis. “See what you fucking started!” He shouted angrily, then with a feral, long awaited growl, Sullivan plunged into Justin’s ass.

“God!” Marquis turned away in disdain.

Sullivan brought the blonde above water, impaling the boy with the last inch of his being. Justin choked and sputtered, coughing through the tears of pain. The man growled in the blonde’s ear. “We will have none of that!” He thrust inside the boy and licked a trail over Justin’s earlobe as the boy winced. “You will not speak until I tell you to, is that understood?”

Justin nodded feverishly, desperate to please his tormentor to ease the pain. He held back a whimper as Sullivan rocked inside of him, pitiful eyes turned to Marquis for help. The man met his boy’s gaze and the look was one of revenge, painful and dark, for Sullivan’s future. Justin bit his tongue to keep from crying out as Sullivan dunked his head back underwater.

Sulli grunted, holding Justin’s blonde locks and watching the beautiful gold hair sway in the water. “Does he still taste as good as he did when I first gave him to you?” Sullivan asked, hammering into the boy’s hot opening over and over, throwing his head back with the returning sensations of being inside of Justin.

“He does. Let him up for Christ sakes!”

“I’ll let him up when I want to.” Sulli growled, thrusting, plowing into the tight ass. He wrapped his fingers into the long blonde hair and yanked the boy back against his body. Justin gasped for air as Sullivan pulled his hair violently, thrashing the blonde into the wall as he fucked him, harder, pushing him deeper into the tile with every drive. He made it a point to rest the knife against Justin’s cheek while their backs were turned to Marquis.

The dark-haired man watched Sullivan conquer Justin, jealousy rising in his throat like liquid fire. His hands balled into fists underwater while his foe jerked the boy back from the wall and shoved him into the bath. Justin didn’t have time to cry out as his attacker held his baby face under the hot rose and vanilla-scented water.

“Yeah. Oh fuck, yeah.” Sullivan moaned, pushing deeper into the boy. “Still so tight. So fucking tight. So afraid. I feel it, you’re tense. Ungh…yeah.”

Marquis bit his tongue until he tasted blood, his cock hard with the promise of vengeance and torture to the other man. He kneeled in the water and watched Sullivan menacingly, the man paying no attention to him, but still holding Justin victim to his blade.

Sulli turned suddenly to the man. “You want to join, I see. Go ahead. Fuck his mouth underwater.”

Marquis glared at Sullivan.

“Do. It.” Sulli snarled, lifting Justin’s head so the boy could gulp for air, then shoving him back down. Marquis went to the boy and laced his fingers with Sullivan’s into the blonde hair, lifting slightly to push his dick under Justin’s face. The boy tried to get away from both men by struggling, flopping, flaying in the water against them. Both men held him tight and Marquis brought his fingers to grip Justin’s chin. He fought Sulli to lift the boy’s face out of the bath.

“Open.” He ordered and Justin released a long, low sobbing breath. But the boy obeyed, dropping his jaw so Marquis could enter his mouth.

Sulli forced the boy back underwater as Marquis grunted, the heat enveloping his cock like a vise. He thrust his hips in the deep water, glad to get any piece of his prize at all.

“Yeah. Oh fuck, yes.” Sullivan smiled, feeling Justin’s head jerk back as Marquis forced his way down the boy’s throat. His own dick was gripped with the stressed muscles of Justin’s core convulsing around the hard flesh. He threw his head back and fucked Justin with all his strength, thrusting with every rapid, ragged breath.

Marquis matched his thrusts with a groan of delight, hand winning war with Sullivan’s to lift Justin out of the water. The boy breathed heatedly through his nose, nearly gagging on the massive shaft pushing into his esophagus. He closed his blue, blue eyes as the water rushed back at him, Sulli beating Marquis’ strength.

Both men grunted, working feverishly into Justin as if they could meet in the middle. Justin tensed, his cock rubbing over the bottom of the bathtub, painfully hard. Stars filled his vision of fuzzy blackness and the boy’s hands flailed around him for something, anything, to grab onto. His right hand landed on the rim and the blonde tried desperately to lift himself back into the air. With Marquis’ help, the boy succeeded in breathing once more. Sullivan slid the boy’s hand into the water and thrust deeper, faster, into the pulsing hole, knocking him back under.

“He stays under until we come.” Sullivan ordered. “Work fast.” He said, following his own orders and pushing quicker, harder, into the boy.

Marquis followed suit, plunging into the blonde’s throat, both hands gripping the flowing wet hair for leverage as his hard cock traveled farther down.

Justin moaned underwater, dick sliding over the smooth porcelain. He entire body felt tingly, on fire, ready to explode into a million tiny overwhelmed pieces. The boy knew it was coming, but didn’t want it, didn’t want the satisfaction that these men were giving him. Suddenly Marquis was rocking, shuddering, slamming into his mouth with bruising force, pulling his hair so fiercely the boy feared he would lose scalp. Sullivan was pushing Justin harder against Marquis as he, too, neared his point of no return. Justin’s head swam, the warmth of the water seeming to invade every inch of his body, enveloping his sight with shooting white stars. Liquid fire erupted into his throat and Justin had no choice but to swallow his Master’s cum, his body slack and only semi-conscious. Marquis pulled out of Justin with a heavy, sedated sigh. Sullivan released his seed into the boy’s shuddering hole with a scream so wild it infiltrated the boy’s dulled world. The Southern man lifted him into the air with a waterfall glimmering over the blonde. Justin snapped back to reality with the new oxygen, gasping and choking, struggling to fill his lungs. Sullivan wrapped his hand around the boy’s dick and jerked him violently, still inside Justin’s throbbing hole. The blonde groaned, head against Sulli’s chest as the orgasm shook his body like a strike of lightning. Justin cried out, unable to keep the scream inside. His hips thrust against Sulli’s hand until he was empty, drained. Justin shuddered and started to cry miserably, trembling in the cooling water.

Sullivan smiled at Marquis victoriously, pressing the knife against Justin’s forehead as if it could silence the hysterically gasping, sobbing youth. He pressed the boy’s body against his own and settled back into the water, wrapping his legs around Justin’s.

“You can’t be unhappy, you’ve pleased both your Masters. That makes you very happy.” Sullivan stroked Justin’s hair softly. “Stop crying.”

Justin whimpered, slowing his cries but unable to completely quiet the sobs. He huddled in Sullivan’s arms, trying to pull inside of himself, make himself as small as possible in the unwanted embrace. He was dimly aware that Marquis had drained the tub and begun filling it with new water, the heat reaching his trembling toes like acid. The boy recoiled and a sudden wave of nausea rolled over him. He pushed away from Sullivan and the man seemed to sense the urgent need to escape because he let the boy slip out of the tub. Justin landed by the toilet and threw up until his mind reeled and unconscious darkness welcomed him with open arms.

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“I was running all seven stories, and I remember thinking to myself that there was no way Justin was gone. I told myself that Sullivan had to be lying. Maybe pulling me into a trap, I didn’t know. Didn’t care.” Brian put his head in his hands, sitting miserably on the couch. “ ‘Fifth street and Telshore, it’s all abandoned loft housing, you’ll see it when you get there. I’ll be waiting. Sugah’.” Brian shuddered and continued with a shaky breath. “Sullivan was so serious on the phone. I didn’t know what to expect. I thought that maybe Justin wasn’t there, that he had escaped…or that it was all a bad dream and when I woke up he would be there in the morning telling me I was having a nightmare...But when I saw him…FUCK!”

“There has to be something in that that we can use.” Will sighed.

“You don’t think I’ve been over and over it? You don’t think I’m going to have terrible dreams about it for the rest of my fucking life?”

“Dad, language.” Mark said simply, a sly grin on his face. His father looked up at him and couldn’t help but return the smile. A silent tear slipped down his cheek. The boy looked more like Justin than he did his own bloodline.

“You really love him, don’t you?” Brian whispered, as if suddenly realizing his son’s adoration for Justin.

“I don’t believe in love.” Mark winked. “But if I don’t get him back heads are going to roll.” He shrugged.

“Like father like son.” Melanie said. “But that doesn’t get us any farther from point A than we were at the beginning of this.”

“Do you have anything better than wallowing in shock and self-pity? Because I would love to hear it.” Will said sternly.

“Watch it, or you’ll be the next to get the boot outta here.” Mark threatened.

Will cocked his head at the boy. “I’m terrified, truly. Why don’t you go upstairs and tuck yourself in—”

“That’s enough!” Debbie scolded. “It isn’t helping.” She told Will, and turned to Mark, her look wiping the victorious smile from his face. “That goes for you, too. I know things are tense, but remember that we all want to help him. Fighting each other won’t help. Anyone who has a suggestion, please speak up. Everyone else, sit down and shut up until you can help.”

Everyone sat in silence, looking around the room. It was going to be a long night.

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Sullivan lifted Justin off the floor and brought the boy to the bedroom, laying him down on the mattress. Marquis came behind him and lay a cold sheet over his tortured treasure.

“You overdid it.” Marquis said, his voice so low and intense that it turned Sulli’s spine to ice.

“I didn’t hear you complaining when you shot a load down his throat.”

“You can leave now, you got what you wanted.”

“Oh, that was only the tip of the iceberg, darlin’. If you get to keep him, then you get to share him.”

“This is not a permanent situation!” Marquis stamped his foot, standing a breath away from touching Sulli’s chest.

“Then give him up, because I’m not backing down!”

Justin stirred and moaned, his cheeks flushed from the hot water and vomiting.

Marquis put his fingers to his lips for quiet. “Other room, now.” He whispered, pushing the other man out and closing the door behind him. “I am not going to let you kill him!”

“Well I’m not going to let you destroy his mind. His disobedience was what made him worth fucking.” Sulli shrugged then, nonchalantly. “That and his tight ass.”

“This is my home. I can call the police and have you arrested.”

“I’d like to see that. Gee, officers, I don’t know what he’s talking about. Why, yes, he IS the notorious Marquis of The Tormented Garden Torture Club. Oh, I’m sure the boy in the bedroom is alright, he’s just been brainwashed and kidnapped is all. That isn’t ILLEGAL, is it?” Sullivan batted his eyelashes and smiled a smile that made his opponent wonder if he was wondering what his throat tasted like.

“They would arrest you, too! I’d make sure they knew you tried to drown Justin! And he would vouch for me!”

“He’s a fucking zombie. They would call his mother and SHE would not vouch for you, Marquis.” Sullivan glared. “His siblings are hired assassins. Do you really think you’re going to get off of this without a scratch? They will kill you. You don’t have the knack to hide like I do. You’re the most lifelike dead man I’ve ever seen, I’ve got to give you at least that much.”

“Why don’t you have a drink, hmm? Calm down. We can talk about this like rational men.” Marquis purred, a sound void of warmth and compassion. A sound of instant death.

“And have you poison me? Give me the Cataleptic? I think not.” Sullivan scoffed.

Marquis smiled. “Well I’m having a drink.” He went to the kitchen and frowned at the cold soup on the stove. “You can watch me pour it if you would like.”

Sullivan followed him into the kitchen. “One of us has to be better than the other, Marquis. We aren’t allies. I was wrong to ever think we could even do business.” The man glanced to the closed bedroom door. “We were too fixated on the same thing.” He said, watching Marquis pour his drink in a fine carved crystal wine glass and took it before the man could even look at it wrong. “But now that we’re sharing…we’re going to have to…trust each other.”

“Cheers.” Marquis tipped his glass to Sullivan’s. “To trust.”

“Trust.” Sullivan grinned. He knew who was the better of the two, it would just take a little while to convince Marquis of the truth. He drank the expensive liquor down and tossed the glass to Marquis, who caught it with the grace of someone prepared to catch his foe’s castaways. Or of someone who was waiting for something brilliant to happen, every sense on alert.

Sullivan stopped moving, catching onto the counter when his knees turned to mush. A vicious scream tore from his throat and the man’s fingers released their grip, spilling Sulli to the floor in a heap of searing red pain. NO! He had watched Marquis pour his drink into a clean glass and…the man had not touched a drop of his own wine…NO!!!

Marquis stepped over Sullivan and kicked him onto his back with a delicate tap of his bare foot. He stood on the man’s chest and kneeled over him, speaking very softly as if he didn’t care whether or not Sulli heard him over his own peeling screams.

“You shouldn’t have hurt my boy. No one touches my boys unless I say so. No.” Marquis stood up and dragged the paralyzed man to one wall. “Exceptions. I don’t take orders, Mr. Kinney. You just found that out the hard way.”

Sullivan screamed again, as fast as he could take breath. His world was fading in a thick velvety blackness of agony and he knew, his last thought one of irony, that Justin had stayed awake much, much longer than this on his first dose of The Cataleptic.

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Marquis stroked Justin’s sweat-soaked bangs from his forehead, concern lining his brow. The boy had stayed out the entire time Sullivan was shrieking, hadn’t moved an inch. His baby face was tensed into a less-than peaceful wince, but his eyes were moving behind the squeezed lids. REM sleep. The blonde was dreaming, but it wasn’t of happiness in paradise.

“Justin. Justin.” Marquis whispered gently, sliding the covers off the boy’s naked flesh. “Justin. Justin? Justin. Juuuusssstiiiiinnnn?”

“Humph? Hmm.” The boy stiffened away from the man’s hand.

“Shh, shh. It’s me, it’s Marquis. I’m here now. Wake up, Justin. Open your eyes for me.”

Justin shifted on the pillows, as if struggling to pull himself back to life. He opened one eye, cautiously, fear tearing through the sky blue irises with intense panic. The boy shot up, whipping the sheet toward Marquis as he fought to get as far away from the man as he could.

Marquis grabbed the blonde’s wrist and yanked him back, pressing the boy’s forehead against his chest. Justin screamed, wordlessly, pulling away as best he could.

“No, no, no.” Marquis soothed. “Listen to me now. I’m sorry I had to do that to you. I’m sorry that man hurt you. But he has not gone unpunished.” The man whispered, relaxing as his boy lost some of the tension in his fight. “I am truly sorry, my love. You did not deserve that. I tried to save you, you know I did, don’t you? Answer me, please dear.”

“H-he-he…”

“I know. I know. I begged him not to, but he was going to cut you, Justin. You don’t want to be cut do you? If you scarred, what would I do with you, hmm? Listen to me, precious darling, and know that I speak the truth.” Marquis turned Justin’s face up to look at him. “Do you remember me lifting your head above water? I tried to be so very gentle with you, Justin, but you are so wonderful that I lose my head with passion.”

Justin managed a weak smile.

“That’s what I was looking for.” Marquis kissed the wan lips and helped the boy to his feet. “I will show you proof of my devotion to you. Come see what I have done to your attacker.” He said and took Justin’s hand. The boy wobbled on his legs and Marquis picked him up. “Come.” The man repeated, bringing Justin out to the living room.

Sullivan was upright, spread-eagle against the wall on a rack that had not been part of the original décor. His body was strapped against the iron in every possible bend, crevice, or movable part with thick leather ties. Many of the belts, the ones on his wrists and ankles, knees, elbows, shoulders and thighs, were beaded with sharp metal spikes. The man was on display, more for the torture he had exacted on Justin than for inducing pain on the tanned body itself. He was there to remind himself, if not any other intruders, that no one was to hurt the boy.

Justin rest his head on Marquis’ chest, hiding one side of his face from the atrocity. There was one device meant to punish Sullivan for causing the golden blonde boy strife, and it wasn’t pretty.

The Heretic Fork was a medieval torture apparatus meant to prevent all movement of the head, its four sharp points on either end shoved wretchedly into the flesh under the chin and into the bone of the sternum, a strap fixing it around his forehead. Sulli, if his mind ever roused from his bout with the Cataleptic, couldn’t speak more than a slight mumble.

“See, baby, anyone will think twice before hurting you again.” Marquis soothed his prize.

Justin nuzzled into Marquis, content. “Thank you, Master.”

“You’re welcome, dear.” Marquis set the boy down. “Now go and wake him up, alright?”

Justin went to Sullivan and peered at him, as if seeing a new and strange species for the first time. He reached up and touched Sulli’s face and the man jerked away before realizing the prongs dug deeper every time he moved. His eyes shot open, wide, showing too much white as he stared down at Justin.

The boy smiled cruelly. He looked back at Marquis, who nodded. Justin pinched Sullivan’s nipple spitefully. “That’ll teach you to hurt me.”

Sullivan winced, but could do nothing to help himself. He glared at Marquis and the man laughed.

“You didn’t really think you would win, did you? I don’t think I will ever stop laughing if that’s the case…” Marquis stepped up beside Justin and trailed a finger over the man’s taut stomach. “Too bad you’re going to stay up there to remind you of your wrongdoings. I would have loved to let my boy fuck you. Watched you…squirm.”

“I want him to stop breathing.” Justin said nastily, turning a childlike pout and innocent eyes to his Master. “Like he made me.”

“All in good time, my boy. All in good time. Now, let’s get some food in you. I want you strong enough for me to take you again.”

Justin beamed at the man. “Yes, Master.” He said, leaning close to Marquis.

Sulli rolled his eyes. Could this be any more surreal? Somehow, dreadfully, he feared it was only going to get worse.

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Brian moaned, thrashing about on the couch. He had fallen asleep without even realizing it, and now he was trapped in a terribly vivid dream.

He saw Justin, at the diner. Working late. The boy slipped the last of the dishes into the soapy water and wiped his hands, a smile showing he was glad that he was only busboy and not in charge of washing the filthy plates after the animals of Liberty Diner got through with their dinner. He gave a short salute to the kitchen staff and grinned with the freedom of his shift’s end. Walking out the side door, Justin balled his apron and shoved it into his backpack.

“Hey.” Brian’s voice startled him and he jumped, nearly falling into the dumpster. He stood propped against the wall, the faint ember of a cigarette the only light on his shadowed face.

“Christ, Brian! Do you plan on taking ten years off my life at one time?” Justin gasped.

“Sorry.” Brian kicked off the wall he was leaning on and flicked his cigarette. “I didn’t mean to scare you.”

“What’s up?” Justin asked, quickly regaining his composure.

“I need to ask you a favor.” Brian stepped forward and Justin took a few steps back. Afraid. He was afraid of his lover. No, terrified.

“What kind of favor?” He asked, and his voice trembled.

Brian smiled, taking pleasure instead of pain in the effect he had on the boy. “Relax, would you? I won’t hurt you.”

“What’s the favor, Brian? I have to get home. He’s waiting for me.”

“That’s the favor.”

Justin stared. “WHAT’S the favor?”

“Don’t go home to him. Come home with me.”

“You’ve got to be out of your mind!” Justin scoffed. “He protects me and loves me. I expect so much from him, to clear my memory! And you want me to leave!”

“I think you’re saying that more to convince yourself than anyone else.” Brian went forward until Justin was pinned against the chain link fence and had nowhere to go.

“Brian, stop.”

“Do you mean it?”

“Yes, I mean it. What are you on?” Justin demanded, hands pressed against Brian’s chest to prevent him from closing the breath of space left between them. “Marquis will kill you.” The boy whimpered, quivering. “I want to go home and…forget you.”

“You can’t forget me. I won’t let you get rid of me, Justin!”

“I’m already rid of you, Brian! I don’t even remember you! You’re gone. GONE! Now get off of me before I scream!”

Brian grabbed the younger man’s cock with a rough jerk, forcing a moan from Justin’s lips. The blonde’s body reacted without asking permission from his more rational mind and he felt his lower body tighten with readiness.

“Please…don’t do this.” Justin begged.

“Don’t do what?” Brian asked, giving a slight squeeze to his prize. “That? Isn’t this what you let him do to you? For his memory cloud?”

“Brian…I said no.” Justin fell against the man’s chest, one hand weakly attempting to pry Brian’s hand from his hard cock. He sniffled weakly and began to sob.

“Does that hurt? Can I still make you hurt, Justin? You’re with him, but he can’t protect you. In here.” Brian tapped Justin’s forehead.

“Please. Please let go. I don’t know you.”

“Then I guess I had better let you go.” Brian said and released Justin, stepping back so the boy could collapse to the pavement.

“What the hell is wrong with you? It’s you who fucked up, you. Not me. Not ME!” Justin sobbed, catching his breath in hitching cries.

“When you die, I’ll come after you.” Brian said and stalked into the darkness. “He won’t.”

Brian screamed as a cool hand pressed against his cheek. He stared up at Michael, panting. “CHRIST!”

“It’s okay. Shh.”

Brian pressed his head into the pillow. “Justin.” He whispered. “Fuck. What time is it?”

“Almost midnight.”

“Who else is up?” Brian sat up, scanning the dim room.

“Just me and mom.”

Debbie waved silently, attempting to calm her prodigal son with a small smile.

“He told me he didn’t know me, that he forgot me. It was that easy. He’s gone. Fucking gone…” Brian said, in a voice so tiny it was painful to listen to.

“No, no. It was just a dream.”

“He didn’t have to say it out loud back with Marquis. I just…didn’t want to hear it. He isn’t coming back, Mikey.” Brian shook his head.

“We can’t give up.” Michael coaxed. “He doesn’t deserve to go out this way, voluntary amnesia…you helped him remember before, you can do it again.”

Brian looked at his best friend with sad eyes. “I don’t think I can…stand it…if he started screaming at me again. As if I was the most painful thing he had ever known. It would destroy me, don’t you understand?”

Michael draped his arm around Brian’s shoulder. “We’ll get through this. No matter what happens, we’ll land on our feet.”

Mark sat on the steps, hidden in shadow. He swiped angrily at the hot tears streaking down his face. He was not going to let them let Justin fade away. The teenager dialed Brian’s cell phone with Justin’s, finding the device left when his friend went for a picnic with his dad. If the younger man had known Justin would run into such trouble by getting better, Mark would have suggested a picnic inside.

Brian shook his head of the dream and looked at the caller ID. He gasped. “It’s Justin.”

“Answer it!” Michael stated the obvious excitedly.

“Justin?”

“Brian?” Mark said, voice almost inaudible.

“Justin, are you alright?”

“Help me.” Mark answered.

“I’m coming, baby. Hold on.”

Mark hung his head, shaking it back and forth. He hated to fool his dad like that, but it was the only way. The only way. Justin needed help, but couldn’t ask for it. The only way…

Brian raced out the door, grabbing his jacket and telling Michael to sit and wait.

The boy slipped back upstairs, allowing the silent tears to fall into the midnight darkness.

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Justin lay on the clean sheets, water from the cold shower beading across his delicate, pale, naked flesh. He smiled up at Marquis, who hovered above the boy with a bunch of dripping green grapes perched over the rising and falling chest. The blonde giggled when each icy droplet bounced off his skin, squirming away from the chill. Marquis chuckled softly, trailing the fruit over his boy’s swollen red lips. Justin moaned as his Master straddled him, pushing his achingly hard cock against the boy’s.

“Mmm. All better, hmm? No more pain, no more hurt.” Marquis soothed, bringing a hand through his treasure’s blonde hair. “Like silk. So beautiful. Soft. Gold.” The man leaned down and inhaled the boy’s fresh scent. “Such a clean, good boy.” He said, pleased, grating his hips over Justin’s. The boy threw his head back, lips slightly parted as he gazed at the man through half-slit, dreamy eyes. Marquis caressed his blonde’s cheek, rolling a grape into the slack lips. “Tell me what you want, my boy. I know that look in your ocean blue eyes. Tell Master what you would like.”

Justin pushed himself up on his elbows and smiled maliciously at Marquis. He said in a breathy, sultry voice. “Fuck me. Fuck me until I can’t remember my name.”

Marquis winced with the intense, raw sexuality emanating from the boy. His teeth trailed over his bottom lip as he struggled to keep the instant gratification from escaping his dick. The unprovoked orgasm subsided, tingling through his veins like fiery claws. He knew he had to keep control, that if he lost himself again he would cum before Justin’s even touched his cock. The man kissed Justin, softly, his lips a heated breath over the boy.

“Do you know what you do to me, little boy?” Marquis asked, tongue flicking out to taste the clean, fresh, unscathed skin along Justin’s collarbone. “You drive me wild.” He said, gruffly.

“Mmm.” Justin smiled, a small laugh lilting from his throat. He thrust his hips against the man hungrily, murmuring, “please, please.”

Marquis licked the boy’s throat greedily, circling the Adam’s apple with a hunger unknown to him before Justin entered his life. No one had held him in such a state of elated grace, given him such a reason to rethink his evil, malicious deeds than this youth. He felt Justin’s hands glide over his back and knew he would not chide his boy for ever moving out of turn again. This blonde was…happiness, radiance, heaven contained in tantalizing flesh. Marquis rose above Justin, knees on either side of the boy’s hips. The boy offered a delighted smile and opened his legs for his Master, eager for the entrance that had once been a dreaded, paralyzing horror.

“Please.” The boy said again, eyes twinkling with need.

Marquis licked two fingers and held them over the twitching hole, feeling the heat from the boy enveloping his wet skin. He grinned at Justin. “Yes?”

“Yes!” Justin moaned, pushing himself toward the waiting digits.

Marquis circled the tight opening and Justin groaned carnally, writhing on the bed, pulling the silken sheets around him with clenched fists. The man lowered his face and whispered against the throbbing hole, breathing silent promises of pleasure. He brought his hot tongue to push against Justin, inside the boy. Marquis worked the hole as Justin gasped, bucking against his Master’s mouth. Tremors wracked the young body as the man lifted his mouth and again traced his fingers around the slick opening, dark eyes watching Justin’s transformation from timid slave to powerful equal. Marquis thrust his fingers into the boy and a wild scream tore from the blonde’s panting throat.

“Yes!” Justin cried as Marquis toyed with the deep vortex. The boy’s mouth hung open, as if he couldn’t get enough air. His legs spasmed, opening wider, impatiently awaiting his Master’s thick cock. “Please, please. Fuck me.” He begged.

Marquis smiled. “Aren’t I fucking you?” He teased, pushing farther into the blonde, thumb coming up against the tightening balls and pressing harshly against the flesh.

“Please.” Justin bellowed, breath hitching in his throat. He had to be touched all over, had to feel the man deep inside of him. His Master, his protector. The blonde’s flesh prickled with a tiny army of goosebumps just thinking about the feel of such safety thrust inside of him, such a way to forget anything and everything.

Marquis pulled his fingers from the boy and Justin groaned at the sudden emptiness. The man returned to the rhythmically beating hole, fingers slick with lube. He entered Justin again fervently, forcing his way deeper than ever before. The blonde cried out with bliss as Marquis found his prostate, pushing, dancing his fingers against it. Justin shouted uncontrollably each time his Master shoved against the sensitive spot. The boy’s breath came in ragged gasps as Marquis brought fiery lips to suck on Justin’s earlobe.

Sullivan’s head perked up at Justin’s incessant screams and wondered just what Marquis was doing to make the boy behave like such a harlot. A smile creased his lips, despite the pain. He knew what Marquis was doing to Justin to elicit such screams. The man was fingering the blonde, pushing his G-spot…and judging by the intensity of the wailing shouts, Marquis had found Justin’s secret sensitivity along his ears.

Marquis devoured Justin’s mouth, probing the boy’s tongue with his own, swallowing the feverish cries as if they were the very air he needed to breath. His cock could not take the disregard it was being paid, and Marquis knew if he didn’t plunge into the boy soon, willingly, he would throw Justin up against the headboard and fuck the first opening he found. The man pulled his fingers out of Justin and the boy moaned in protest. Marquis climbed atop to blonde and found the hole ready and waiting, slick with lube. He grinned and entered the pulsing cavern, hearing the boy gasp with delight, far away, as if in a distant dream. Justin bucked his hips against his Master, urging him deeper, farther, faster.

“Please.” Justin begged again, voice no more than a desperate whisper. He felt strong hands circle his shaft and threw his head back into the pillows, unable to do more than arch his back and wait for the satisfaction he knew was coming.

Marquis jerked the boy’s hard cock, plowing into the throbbing hole. Rough grunts fell from his lips, punctuating Justin’s screaming pleasure. The boy turned his head and shouted something intelligible into a pillow, as if the explicit words aloud would be more than either of them could bear to hear. Marquis rocked violently against Justin’s round, firm ass, vision blacking all else out besides the beautiful blonde beneath him. He saw the miraculous blue eyes gazing up at his Master, shadowed by a lace curtain of light blonde eyelashes and tousled golden bangs. Marquis groaned, but couldn’t hear himself passed the smashing pulse of his heart. He watched the boy’s thick lips move, form a round O of paradise, and knew without hearing that Justin was screaming like a wild animal. Marquis moved his hand faster, keeping up with the thrust of his muscled hips.

Justin reared against his Master, cock leaking, ready, oh so ready. His body jumped, writhed, a storm of pleasure rocketing through his brain. Justin couldn’t move, couldn’t breath, couldn’t see or speak, but never wanted it to stop. Marquis’ mind reeled, the room spinning faster, faster. His every muscle convulsed uncontrollably as Justin shuddered around him. The man cried out, shooting into the boy’s body, sending the lovers in different directions of heaven, separating them into a velvety black oblivion.

Marquis collapsed against the boy, their bodies slick with sweat and sperm, sliding against one another in the scalding-hot bliss of extreme satisfaction. He pulled out of Justin, drawing the boy close to him, spooning. The dark man sighed dreamily and hoped that his treasure would be satiated for at least a few hours. He felt Justin roll his head against his shoulder, so his eyes could see the slack pleasure on his Master’s face.

“Spectacular.” Marquis mumbled, watching Justin smile through sleep-clouded eyes. “Sleep now, please.”

Justin closed his eyes as ordered, wishing he had the strength to feel the immense orgasm again. His body was still on fire, pulsing, throbbing with aftershocks, but he was far away, half asleep, spent.

Completely, utterly gone.

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Brian slipped in the door, forcing his limbs to quiet their trembling. So it was dark. So it was deathly quiet. So his own breathing seemed unbearably loud. So what? Justin had called him, asked for help, and Brian was there to give it. Damn his fear.

Sullivan made a small sound in his throat, a combination of gurgling blood and moaning. Brian jumped and caught himself on the doorframe.

“Justin?” He whispered.

Sullivan groaned, opening his eyes in the pitch blackness.

“Baby?” Brian went toward the sound, hand reaching out to touch Sullivan’s chest, the straps worked over his chest. Instantly, Brian knew this was not his love. But who?

“Brian?” Justin whispered, standing in the bedroom door. He knew the man couldn’t see him, but Brian Kinney’s voice was indistinguishable.

“Justin?” Brian turned in the darkness. “Are you alright?”

“What are you doing here?”

“You called me. I—”

“Yes, I guess I did, didn’t I?”

“Justin, are you…alright?”

“Fine.” The boy smiled wickedly in the secret concealment of shadows.

Sullivan cleared his throat and tried to utter a warning, but nothing more than gurgling sounded to his cousin.

“Who—?”

“It’s…Marquis.”

“You…tied him up?”

“He hurt me. He had to be punished.”

A shiver went up Brian’s spine. That voice was still not the same. “Justin, let’s go home okay?”

“You’re afraid?”

“I…yes.”

“Why?”

Brian stammered. He didn’t like not seeing what shape the boy was in. Was there a reason the lights were turned off? How hurt was he? “I don’t know what to do.” Brian whispered.

“I’ll help you. Come toward me.” Justin said softly, the detached tone returning only as a mask to the cruelty he projected onto his former lover. This man…this INTRUDER, wanted to hurt Marquis by taking Justin. The boy was not about to let that happen. “Follow my voice. I need you.”

Brian muffled the short sob that burst from his chest. Relief washed over him. “Justin, I’m so glad that…that you’re alright.”

“I’m feeling much better now.” Justin said, moving to the kitchen. “I guess…I went a little crazy.”

Sullivan struggled in his bindings, candidly warning his kin. It was futile. Whatever that kept Justin from hurting another living soul had been broken away, drowned in pained confusion and frightened pleasure. He would hurt Brian for Marquis without thinking twice.

Without thinking at all.

“I wouldn’t say ‘crazy’.” Brian tried to lighten the mood as he stepped toward the boy. “Maybe just…bewildered?”

“Mmm.” Justin nodded agreement. “Yes.”

“Are you sure you’re okay, Justin? Can I turn on the lights?”

“NO!” Justin shouted and bit his lip, hoping his Master would not wake. “No.” He said quieter. “I…Brian, I…” The boy whimpered, bringing a quiver to his voice and tears to his eyes on command. “Please don’t.”

“I won’t.” Brian said, standing beside the boy. “Can I…are you?”

Justin nuzzled against the man, who was afraid to touch the shadowed youth. “I’m alright, I told you. Can you help me forget?”

“I don’t think you should forget this time, Justin.” Brian said cautiously, wrapping his arms around the slender, naked frame. “It’s important that you don’t hide away.”

“I want to forget.” Justin stated, a near-laughing lilt to his voice. It was a high sound, insanely shrill. He pulled away from Brian and opened the fridge. Sullivan kicked against his straps, but Justin got what he wanted and didn’t leave the door open long enough for Brian to see who was really trapped against the wall. “I’ll forget you all if I want to!”

“Baby, please.” Brian begged, panic, dread in his voice.

“You’re afraid again. Do I scare you?” Justin asked in a demonic child tone, sinfully sweet and wretchedly terrifying at the same time.

“No. Not you.” Brian shook his head. “What he did to you…”

“Here, calm down.” Justin said, handing Brian the wine decanter. “I’m okay, really. I haven’t slept in quite a long while.” The boy said matter-of-factly, emotions running hot and cold.

“Bad dreams?”

“Something like that.” Justin rubbed his nude arms as if he were chilled.

Brian set the decanter on the counter. “Justin.” He took the boy by the shoulders. “Let’s go home, okay? We’ll send Will to take care of Marquis.”

“Oh, that won’t be necessary. Let’s sit. Let’s drink. I want to see the sunrise with you by my side.” Justin coaxed, taking the crystal decanter of tainted liquor with him as he led Brian to the couch. “Then you can see me, and I can see you, and everything will be just fine. All better, like before.”

Brian shivered again. This was not Justin. But if he didn’t agree with the boy, didn’t follow him, would he risk damaging the youth further? “Justin, please, let me turn on the light.”

“No, please…Brian. I want to sit here for awhile. In the dark. If you don’t want to be with me then I won’t…force you. I would never force you.” The boy whimpered, a soft cry slipping from his deviant lips.

Brian sat down with the boy. “You’re not forcing me, Justin.” He said carefully, nerves on alert. The man truly didn’t know what to do, what would set the blonde into a rage? “I’m just worried about you. Promise me you aren’t bleeding or in need of a hospital and we can sit here, alright?”

“I’m not bleeding or in need of a hospital, I promise.” Justin said monotonously, as if he were reading off a card.

“Justin…”

“Am I that stupid? That I wouldn’t go to a hospital if I were bleeding? Give me some credit, Brian!”

“You aren’t stupid, Justin, but you are hurt. I’m not sure how hurt you are because I don’t know if I can trust the state of mind you’re in.”

“So now you can’t trust me? Because I got hurt?”

“Justin, please—”

“No, I understand. I got this far by myself, I can keep going. You can leave, I suddenly don’t want you to be the first person I see when the sun rises.”

“Justin, no, listen…please. I want to be here.”

“Then why are you interrogating me?” Justin sniffled. If Sullivan didn’t know better, he would have thought the boy was truly upset. But he had seen that evil glow surface when the blonde saw what Marquis did to the Southern intruder. ‘That’ll teach you to hurt me.’ Justin had said. His dark side had wanted to make Sullivan stop breathing, and had told his Master so with a chillingly demonic pout. A devil trapped in a deliciously angelic body.

“I don’t mean to.” Brian caressed Justin’s cheek. “I just feel like this is my fault, that if you had never met me…you never would have gotten hurt.”

“It is your fault.” Justin said cruelly. Brian straightened, muscles rigid. “After all, you made Sullivan hurt me, you told Bear to do the same, you forced Brad to fuck YOU, too. I remember. Oh, and it was all a devious plot against me to have Chris Hobbs smash my head in with a baseball bat and haunt my dreams. That WAS you, wasn’t it? All of it. Kriegg came for me because you asked him to. And most of all, you brought me to New Orleans to meet the Marquis all by yourself. How could I not have seen it before?” Justin rest his head on Brian’s chest wearily. “None of this is your fault, Brian. You just happen to be here to pick up the pieces.”

Silent tears fell from Brian’s hazel eyes as he rest his head on Justin’s soft blonde hair. The boy was warm, almost too warm, the feverish temperature he got after an intense sexual exertion, but other than that he seemed as healthy as he was going to get without the time to heal his emotional scars. “I love you, Justin.”

“I love you, too, Brian.” Justin said easily, able to say the words with feeling to Brian as expressively as he could say them to a rock or tree. “Now, drink. Calm down. It’s over now.”

Brian nodded and took the carafe from his young lover. Sullivan moaned, writhing in his straps. The man looked at his cousin in the darkness. “Is he in pain?”

“Yes.”

“Good.” Brian said, and swallowed a mouthful of the infected liquor. He coughed, gagged, the fire of the poison tearing his veins, shredding his flesh. Brian fell to the floor with a heavy thump, limbs convulsing. His stomach lurched but nothing came up.

Marquis rushed into the room and slammed his fist against the light, flooding the room in unnatural brightness. Justin turned to him with the look of a child who knew he had just done something terrible and would get away with it. The man pulled Justin into his arms and the boy went willingly. The couple stared down at Brian.

Screams ripped from his throat and he saw Justin run devoted to Marquis through blood-tinted vision. His head fell to one side and Brian saw Sullivan tacked to the wall. Brian found he could no longer move, even if he could control his mind enough to order an escape. Justin bent over him, a nasty smile on his treacherous lips.

“Fool.” Justin said, though Brian could not hear him. “You’ve already been forgotten, you had no business coming here. I hope the drink kills you, because you’re heartbreak will be no more merciful than the one you loved.” He caressed Brian’s face. “And I would just hate to see you…suffer.” Justin added, the last word a lingering whisper.

Marquis put a hand on Justin’s shoulder and the boy rose, their lips meeting spitefully. It was the last thing Brian saw as blackness enveloped him, pushed him to the red surface, pulled him back like the steady breath of the ocean. Every chance he got to see, Brian saw Justin in a further state of undress, Marquis’ hands roaming freely over the soft skin. They both gazed down at the man and Brian shrieked, but only in his head.

If only it was all in his head.

Marquis took Brian under the arms and the man screamed louder internally, every touch an overwhelming sensation. Terror wrapped around his mind, engulfing his thoughts. What were they going to do to him? The same as Sullivan? Fuck. NO! NO!

Justin laughed, high and wild. Sullivan winced, and even Marquis looked back at the boy. He was losing it.

“Sit down, dear.” Marquis said soothingly. “When did you last rest for more than an hour? Answer me.”

Justin laughed again, pointing at Brian. “I did that!” He cackled hysterically, sinking onto the couch. “I DID that! I did THAT!”

Marquis propped Brian against the wall and went to cup Justin’s face in his hands. He studied the untamed blue eyes with concern. “I asked you a question, Justin.”

The boy snickered. “Look what I did…” He gave a half smile and curled his legs under him. “To him.” Justin added softly, sadly. “I hurt him.”

“Justin, look at me. At ME. Don’t look at the intruder.”

The boy laughed again, his eyes rolling to the back of his head before coming back to stare widely at his Master. “I know everything. Everything!”

Marquis pushed Justin into the couch and pointed at him. “Stay there.”

“Stay there.” Justin repeated, head lolling over the back of the couch. He stared up at the ceiling, body shaking with unshed giggles.

Marquis returned and crouched in front of the boy. “This will make you feel better, dear.” He promised, stretching Justin’s arm out in front of him. The man pressed a needle against the bend of Justin’s elbow and the boy pulled away, shrieking.

“NO! NO! NO!” Justin protested, kicking against Marquis. “I know what you are! I know!”

Marquis tackled the boy, molding his body the length of Justin. He held the blonde hair with one hand and elongated Justin’s neck. The needle sunk into Justin’s jugular vein. “I had to, my boy. You need to sleep.”

Justin sighed as the morphine floated through his system, eyes fluttering closed. Marquis covered the naked boy with his robe and stood to face Brian with an evil glare.

“You had to come an ruin everything, didn’t you? We were doing just fine on our own, and now look what you did!” Marquis gestured violently at Justin. “You’ve gone and upset him! I haven’t spent all this time conditioning him to have it ruined by your touch! NO! You will pay for this setback, Kinney. If I have to put him back in sensory deprivation all over again it will be your blood shed for his tears.”

Brian’s body tingled as the blood flowed slowly back to his limbs. He moved slightly, testing his fingers and toes. Sullivan tried to shake his head, to tell his cousin not to let Marquis know he was coming off the paralysis.

“Ah, I see someone’s system is used to foreign chemicals. Pity. You’ll wish you were on the drug when I get through with you.”

“I…gungta…” Brian mumbled.

“You’re going to what? Hurt me? Get me? Stop me from making you pay for Justin’s stability?”

“Fuk…yuh.”

“That’s nice.” Marquis patted Brian on the head. “Now I’ll be right back. Don’t you go anywhere now.” He said and vanished into the first bedroom that Justin had been taken to. The window was still broken from when the boy shoved his fists through. It had only been two days but seemed like a lifetime ago.

Brian flexed the muscle on his left leg and groaned. He rolled his face to stare up at his cousin as if the man could help him. He closed his eyes when Marquis returned.

“This will clean up that filthy mouth.” The man purred, fixing the dental retractor behind Brian’s teeth, fastening it with the gag strap. “Justin was so relieved to have me take this off that he let me do whatever I wanted.” Marquis slipped a hand over his stiffening cock as Brian lay before him, silenced. “And I wanted so very much from that sweet little boy. He cried out for you, but I taught him who his Master was. He is a smart boy, a fast learner. But so very fragile.” Marquis stood and put a foot against Brian’s throat, cutting off the air. “I can tell you will be much, much more difficult to break.” He said maliciously, shoving Brian’s body to the floor. Marquis cuffed Brian’s wrists to the radiator and marveled at his new toy.

Brian shook his head, the only part of him feeling the least bit sober.

Marquis laughed and undid Brian’s zipper, reaching a hand inside to cup the man’s balls. “Oh, very nice. Yes, I can see how my boy might fall for your charms.” He laughed again and yanked Brian’s shoes off, throwing them against the wall behind him. Slipping Brian’s jeans down around his ankles, Marquis smiled. “Very nice, indeed. Just think, what I’m going to do to you is nothing compared to what my boy had to go through to sever his love for you.” Marquis licked his tongue over Brian’s lips, his teeth and tongue. “You are so very helpless. You will belong to me and I will destroy you.”

He jerked Brian’s dick into erection and tossed the jeans aside, kneeling between Brian’s legs. Marquis pressed his cock into the protesting hole and hissed in pleasure as the muscles constricted to stop his access. “You will let me in. If I have to give you another dose of Cataleptic, then so be it. What’s your choice, Kinney?”

Brian closed his eyes. Was it better to submit and be free to get away at a moment’s notice, or be drugged and keep his pride? A sinking weight fell in his stomach as he imagined Justin having to answer that same question.

“Open up for me, Brian.” Marquis coaxed. “Be my slave, feel the shame you deserve. Slut. Whore. You know what you are, you know what you want. Open your legs for your Master.” Marquis insisted, licking the metal fixed against Brian’s open mouth. “You have three seconds. Two.”

Brian glared at the man but obliged his entry. He could deal with this sober and get inebriated later, when he and Justin were safe. Marquis chuckled. “I thought so.” He said, shoving into Brian’s unprepared opening. The man grunted beneath Marquis’ thick dick, wrists straining in their cuffs.

“That’s a good boy. You want to please me because I let you. You deserve to make me feel…” Marquis thrust violently deeper. “Nice.” He hissed. Brian wished he could grit his teeth, or move his jaw at all. He settled for squeezing his eyes shut, glad that his lower half was still slightly-numb.

Marquis wasn’t satisfied with the limited reaction he was getting from Brian and pushed harder into the man. A roar of triumph erupted from the darker man’s lips as tears of defeat streamed into Brian’s hairline.

“I don’t want to waste my precious time on you. You don’t deserve my attention. You’re nothing but a filthy little bitch.” Marquis spat nastily, staring at Brian’s face angrily. He shoved deeper, deeper, intent to hurt the man under his scrutiny. Brian growled disgustedly, mouth open and dry making the sound closer to a wretched scream of protest.

“You’re not worth my dick.” Marquis continued, faster, harder thrusts against Brian’s tight hole. “You’re not worth my come. You’re not worth my breath!” Faster, faster, grunting. “You filthy little bitch, you don’t deserve to live!” Marquis breathed in jagged pants. He shoved back and forth into Brian, rocking the man violently against the radiator. “Oh, yeah. Yeah! Fucking stupid whore. Dirty little whore. Yeah. Oh…yeah.” Marquis grunted, face scrunched with concentration, force. “Ugn. Gaaaaaaawd yessssssssss.” His voice came as a barren whisper. “Ugnh! Uhhh!”

Brian braced himself for the man’s eruption, turning away so he didn’t have to see the dark eyes go slack from release. The hard fucking didn’t hurt as much as the knowledge that Justin may have had to hear the same thing, and had believed this volatile man to keep from getting hurt worse.

Marquis shot his load into Brian with a massive, quivering groan. He collapsed onto his victim and stayed inside of Brian until his body calmed itself. “Worthless.” The man hissed in Brian’s ear, getting to his feet unsteadily. It was a hotter than hell fuck, but if he could break the illustrious Brian Kinney his name would be renowned for years. That was the legacy Marquis wanted.

The blonde moaned from the couch, interrupting Marquis’ delusions of grandeur. Justin’s breathing became shallow, panting in short ragged gasps. Marquis went to him instantly and turned him on his side. “You’re alright. You’re okay.” He said softly, checking the boy’s speeding pulse. He was having a nightmare that he couldn’t wake from because his body was lethargic with morphine. Justin was terribly warm to the touch. Marquis glared at Sullivan. “I’m having a horrible time trying to keep his temperature down after what you did.” The man lifted Justin off the couch and brought him to the bathroom, setting him in the tub and filling it with cold water.

Sullivan gurgled, lifting his chin without luck of removing the fork prongs from his flesh. He wanted to tell Marquis that if he hadn’t damaged the boy so thoroughly before, and then gone and drugged him into submission, then his temperature would have been fine. He wanted to scream at Brian that he better have brought reinforcements, but he also wanted to soothe the man. Sulli shook the feeling of comforting Brian from his mind.

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Marquis bathed Justin until the boy murmured wearily and shivered against the touch. He turned empty eyes to his Master, blinking slowly.

“There there, you’re all better now. You went into hysterics, my boy. I should punish you dearly for causing me such worry.”

Justin began to sob, clutching his Master’s arms and shaking his head.

“And for disobeying me by not sleeping when I told you to.”

Justin cried louder, not remembering anything but the need to cause the people around him pain. He wanted to hurt anyone for coming near him, for trying to help a boy that should have been left alone to die years ago. He didn’t know why he was still alive, and didn’t want to be living any longer. Now that Marquis was angry with him…who would protect him?

“But I’m not going to punish you. Do you know why?”

Justin looked up at the man, a hopeful question glimmering in his tears.

“Because you’re very hurt already. The men did that to you, hurt you. I can’t punish you, Justin, you’re my favorite. I worried about you, my dear. I want you to be alright. Now, you are going to sleep and bring down this fever, or I WILL punish you. Understand? Answer me.”

“Yes, Master.” Justin whispered, voice hoarse as if he’d been screaming.

“You are not going to speak out of turn until I feel you deserve such reward. Understand? Answer me.”

“Yes, Master.”

“You know you answer only to me, and that causing me pain is to cause yourself pain, and vice versa. Understand? Answer me.”

“Yes, Master.”

“And to make me lose my authority in front of even the lowliest of captives is going to get you whipped, if it EVER happens again. Understand?”

Justin stared up at the man, waiting.

“Good boy. Answer.”

“Yes, Master.”

“Now let’s go to your bedroom, because you do not deserve my bed yet. I am going to tie you up for now so you can sleep without the distractions of pleasure.” Marquis led the boy to his bed and shackled the boy’s wrists. Silent tears crept from the tormented blue eyes. “Don’t cry.” Marquis said sternly. Justin stopped.

The man caressed Justin’s cock until it grew hard. The boy moaned, more out of fret than delight. He knew his Master was punishing him after all, and that the pleasure would be held in weight. Marquis proved him right by bringing the chastity vinyl underwear back over his trim hips. Justin winced as the man tightened the cords over his erection.

“What do you say, Justin? Answer me.”

“Thank you, Master.” Justin turned his face away from Marquis, fearing he would cry if he had to look at the man’s dark, harsh eyes.

“Look at me, Justin.”

The boy obeyed, forcing the tears down into the void in his chest.

“This is for your own good. You’ve forgotten yourself, your place. I would hate to have to make you remember in a more serious way. You would be forced to weep because I would have to cause you such pain, and you know that it hurts me to do wrong to you.”

Justin nodded silently, biting his tongue to keep from sobbing. The man saw his treasure’s clenching jaw and shook his head. Marquis brought a ball gag to the boy’s mouth.

“Open.”

Justin released a trembling breath and obeyed. Marquis placed and secured the gag, patting the boy on the head.

“That is to keep you from causing yourself harm, you understand. See how much I still care about you, making sure you don’t draw blood from your poor sensational tongue.” Marquis got up from the bed. “The night’s chill will help keep your temperature down.” Marquis gestured to the shattered window glass. “And to remind you how far you had come in my grace, only to fall back to this. Sleep now and later you can beg my forgiveness.” The man said and shackled Justin’s ankles. He left the room and closed the door behind him.

It was such a shame that Justin had to be reprogrammed. Marquis shook his head and went to hook Brian up to the same situation as Sullivan, only with the dental retractor acting as the silencer.

“You sleep tight, now. I’m going to find someone who can fix my door that you both so eloquently broke.” Marquis scoffed. “Don’t make any noise, you wouldn’t want to disturb my boy. He’s very delicate right now. Knowing someone else is here may damage his poor troubled mind. No talking.” The man joked cruelly, walking to his bedroom, getting dressed in his finest clothes, and leaving the loft.

Walking down the stairs, he mumbled to himself. “The things a man has to do to keep his kingdom from falling apart. Honestly.”

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Sullivan woke up and it sent shivers down his spine to know that he didn’t remember falling asleep. Or passing out. He rolled his eyes to the man next to him, who was obviously still out. Sulli heard ragged but muffled sobs and shifted his eyes to the closed bedroom door.

“Ungah, ah, arah…” Sulli moaned, fresh blood welling inside his mouth, the prongs cutting new wounds from below. Brian stirred, blinking, tongue flailing in his dry mouth for any sign of moisture. He looked at his kin, a man so nearly his double that they could have passed as fraternal twins to a stranger who didn’t know the hairline difference between full-out cruelty and outer coldness in the two pairs of hazel eyes. Brian started to attempt futile speech when he, too, heard Justin crying.

Tears shimmered in Brian’s eyes and the man had no strength to hide them. What had Marquis done to the boy in there? How long had that sinister man been gone, or rather, how long had Brian been out?

Brian struggled in his bindings, sighing with frustration. His heart sank to his stomach when his thoughts once again turned to Justin’s suffering. Had the boy been crying this entire time? How long until he dehydrated? The man pulled once more at his leather captors and grunted, straining until his limbs trembled, muscles threatening mutiny if he didn’t stop tormenting them so. His body went slack and he squeezed his eyes closed against the tears. It wouldn’t help anyone if he cried.

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Justin moved in the shackles, unable to sleep and terrified that he was disobeying his Master. He didn’t want to get up, but his body yearned to move, to be touched, loved. Something inside of him was missing, a void was sitting in his chest, black, insatiable. But what it was, the blonde couldn’t remember. Wouldn’t remember. He shifted uncomfortably and watched the sun turn the pitch blackness into dim gray light. Five thirty, give or take five minutes, in the morning. Sobs wracked his naked frame, accompanied by horrendous shivering from the cold. Was his Master so mad at him that he would never return to free him of this terrible restraint, never let him beg forgiveness with a cleverly sinful tongue and ready ass? Justin shook uncontrollably with the thought of…of what? Of letting someone else down, of being unable to complete the simplest of tasks like sleeping, or not crying?

He was a failure, even to the man who wanted nothing from him but obedience.

Justin wished he could bite his tongue through the gag, but chastised himself for the wicked thought of hurting himself though Marquis deliberately told him not to. The boy tried to scream but only met muffled silence. He hated himself for being so inadequate, for being stupid, incompetant, unable to please his Master…for feeling so damned empty inside.

The boy cried for Marquis, screamed behind the gag for the man who had been gone for two hours, at least. Heat rushed through the blonde’s body and Justin closed his eyes, lying completely still until the wave of nausea passed. He looked around the room with round, frightened eyes wanting so desperately to be anywhere but there, tied to the bed. His body fell under a rolling storm of cold, then heat again, and Justin squeezed his eyes shut to the spinning room. He was going to throw up if things didn’t stop moving around him. If he lost the little bit left in his stomach, the delectable grapes, he would choke to death before the dehydration and exhaustion killed him. The boy lay perfectly still, mouth dry against the gag, arms and legs spread-eagle to the bedposts. Dimly he wondered if anyone could be suffering as much as he was.

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Brian’s stomach tightened as Justin’s sobs met an abrupt stop. His dry tongue fell to the bottom of his mouth as he listened. His breathing sounded like a train speeding by, rushing in his ears, too fast, much too loud. The man looked at Sullivan, who’s eyes projected all the panic that rushed through Brian’s veins.

Justin, desperate to get to the toilet before he asphyxiated on shame alone, wriggled his wrists and ankles. Surely he had lost weight since Marquis had left him! It had been an eternity without the devotion and adoration of his Master, and the boy felt so dreadfully empty that he must have weighed next to nothing at all!

The only thing that gave was Justin’s strength. The boy melted wearily into the mattress and shivered violently. Sobs once again tackled his body, this time helpless and much more afraid. Not of dying, the end was something Justin did not fear. He was only terrified of dying alone, without Marquis, without the man’s permission to move on to another place.

Brian sighed as the boy’s sobs returned. Anything was better than the silence, even tears. Where the hell was Marquis? Wasn’t a man with such social ruling able to find a door man no matter what time in the day or night?

Justin coughed behind the gag, bunching the leather against his lips with a forceful tongue. He slid the piece out of his mouth, under his nose, and breathed a great gasping sigh. Then he screamed, throat raw and dry, hoarse from crying.

Brian jumped as Justin gave up sobbing for shrieks so piteous and vulnerable that Brian nearly broke his own wrists trying to get out.

Just then, Marquis rushed into the room. He ran to the bedroom door, the boy’s name on the whispering wind left by his speed. The darker man fell on top of Justin, covering the frozen body with his own. The boy looked up at his Master, wide-eyed, afraid, in shock.

“Shh, shh. I’m here now. I’m here, my boy. No more suffering.” He promised, releasing the shackles and pulling a blanket around the trembling body. The man had gone out in search of a new door and had managed to get distracted enough to lose his time. He knew his breath smelled of bourbon, and clinging to his skin was the salty sweat of eagerness after the viewing of a delectable snuff film starring a boy of no less than nine years of age. Easily, Marquis had forgotten that his favorite boy was exposed to a cold morning’s open window, chained and gagged. “Forgive me, forgive me, my sweet child, I cannot help these things I do.”

Justin sobbed, enveloped in his Master’s arms. He wanted the punishment to be over, to be touched and caressed by the man who now held him in a blanket, still detached from flesh-to-flesh contact.

“Speak to me, my boy. Quiet your cries, your love is here.”

“P-p-please.” Justin shivered. “P-please f-fu-forgive m-m-me.” He managed before falling again into helpless sobs.

Marquis arched an eyebrow. “Forgive you, my boy? Forgive YOU?”

“P-p-please!”

Marquis grinned, a darkness like no hell swimming in his eyes. “I will forgive you, Justin, after one thing you must do.”

“A-an-anyth-thing.” The boy sniffled.

“Did you rest?”

Justin burst into wild, terrified cries. Brian’s body tensed at the tortured sound. Marquis kissed Justin’s head soothingly.

“Justin. Justin. Stop.”

The boy’s face went slack, gone from the world of pain and emotion. He awaited orders.

“We are going to forgive you for hurting me, but you must drink first. Then we are going to show our intruders how well you perform for your Master. You are going to be a hell cat, a beast while I fuck you. I’m going to hurt you and you will love it, because I said so. You are going to call my name and cum so hot and fast that I will make you do it over and over again until I am satisfied. You are going to stare at our uninvited guests and scream your devotion to me. After that, Justin, I will forgive you. Do you understand? Answer me!”

“Yes, Master.” Justin answered mechanically.

“I thought as much.” Marquis lifted the boy off the bed and carried him to the living room, setting him on the couch in front of Brian and Sulli. The day was looking up. At least he didn’t have to reprogram the kid.

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Justin cocked his head from Sullivan to Brian and back again, blue eyes blank of all emotion and memory, mirrors of iced glass. Brian choked back a sob and Justin looked back at him with curiosity. These men were his Master’s playthings, the intruders who vandalized their beautiful loft and hurt Justin.

“I don’t like that.” Justin whispered, staring at Brian as if the man were something exotic, a wild animal caught in a cage.

“Don’t like what, dear?” Marquis asked and Justin jumped. His Master heard everything! The man put a steaming mug in Justin’s hands. “Drink.” He said.

Justin drank. He hated tea, and made a face to prove it. He turned his nose to the hot liquid with a scowl.

“Is that what you don’t like, hmm? You don’t like my tea?”

“I don’t like THAT.” Justin pointed to Brian, to the dental retractor. “Or this.” He pouted.

“Well you know what kind of punishment that retractor is, and it isn’t on you at the moment, though with your wretched tongue I would be out of my mind to keep you speaking.” Marquis said in a low, threatening voice. Justin shuddered. “You will drink this tea because it is from your Master and that makes it more than worthy of gracing your taste buds. Drink it, Justin.”

The boy made a face. “Master…”

“NOW!” Marquis raised his hand as if to slap the boy and Justin jerked out of the way, spilling the liquid over the couch. He cowered, shrieking, holding his head, crouched in upon his knees. The man grabbed Justin and yanked him to his feet. “Look at me! LOOK AT ME!”

Justin turned wide eyes to Marquis. “P-please, Master. Please. Please. Please. It hurts me, it hurts.”

“Did you get burned?” Marquis checked the exposed skin shining out of the dark blanket like perfect white marble.

“N-no, sir. No.” Justin shook his head, averting his eyes from the suspicious glare of his Master.

“What hurts, Justin? Answer me, now!”

“That. That.” Justin pointed at Brian again. “Take it away.” He whispered. “It’s torture, torture.” He sniffled, resting his forehead wearily against Marquis’ chest.

“It’s torture of your enemies. Of my enemies. Don’t they deserve to suffer?”

“No, no, no.” The boy shook his head. “No one deserves it. No one. It’s bad. Bad. BAD!” Justin screamed at the man wildly.

Marquis shook Justin violently. “Hey! Hey! Damnit, boy!” He slapped Justin once, hard, across the cheek. “If you go into hysterics again I am going to hang you up there next to those other whelps!” He slapped Justin again and pulled the boy into a hug. “I don’t want to have to punish you because you’re sensitive heart bleeds for the same men that hurt you for so very long. They kept you from me, don’t you understand? I don’t think you’re stupid, Justin, why do you act like you are? Answer me.”

Justin hung his head. “I’m sorry, Master.”

“How is your Master supposed to feel when you recoil from his drink and turn your nose at his methods of vengeance to men who hurt his beloved boy? Are you going to snub the man who protects you, who loves you, and who made all the awful parts of your life go away? Answer me, Justin.”

“I’m sorry, Master.”

“More than that, please.”

“Tea makes me sick to my stomach. I don’t wanna throw up.” The boy whimpered, voice small and childlike. “That thing…” He pointed again with a trembling finger at the metal spreading Brian’s jaw. “Makes me sick, too. Does my Master want me to be sick?” He asked, staring not at Marquis but at Brian.

“Your sympathy is pathetic. Where is your dignity, hmm? Showering other men with the devotion that belongs to your King! I give you so much and you throw it all away. Why? Hmm?” Marquis pushed Justin onto the couch, an erection pressing painfully against his expensive slacks. “What have I ever done to you to incur such disgusting habits? I give you your strength and you use it against me! What am I going to do with you?” Marquis shouted angrily. He had to do a little reprogramming after all and it did not make him happy. “What?” He continued, slamming his fist against Justin’s collarbone. The boy cried out and tried to hide from his wrath. “What am I supposed to do with such an undeserving wretch? It pains me to think of what I have to do to make you see your impurities!”

“No! NO! Please! Master, please don’t!”

“You know what you’re going to have to suffer now because of these men and your empathy toward them! Are they worth it? To wrong me so?”

“No, Master! I love you, please, please, please let me thank you for all you have done for me!” Justin wailed, hiding his face, pressing himself against the sofa. “Please, oh please, Master. Please. I don’t want to make you angry with me, they are bad men.” Justin sobbed. “They deserve whatever you give them.”

“As do you. You are bad, Justin. You are stupid. You make it impossible to love you.”

Justin shook his head. “Please Master Marquis, please, I’ll be so very good. Don’t put me back under that awful mask.” He shuddered at the thought of not hearing or seeing his beloved Master.

“Who is dominant to you? Answer.”

“You, Master.”

“Who is superior to you, you sniveling infant? Answer.”

“You, Master.” Justin said, the tears subsiding behind a mechanical mask.

“Who is better than you in all ways?”

Justin stayed silent, rocking on the couch, holding his knees.

“That’s it. Now answer.”

“You, Master.”

“Who is a wretched, servile piece of worthless nothing who is so very lucky to have a Master as nice as me to watch over his atrocious disobedience? Answer.”

“I am, Master.” Justin said, turning blank eyes back to the bound men. The tears streaming down Brian’s face didn’t register as sadness, only the prisoner’s desire to please Marquis by showing how much it hurt his heart to defy the great Marquis. He turned his face away in disgust. No one should be able to cry unless the Master directed them too. They did not deserve to shed tears in his presence, only when he left them empty and alone did they have a right to weep for his absence.

“Get up.”

Justin rose.

Marquis examined the boy’s collar bone and gave a soft kiss to the bruising spot. “Why did you make me hurt you, Justin? Why do you make me angry with you? Answer me.”

“I’m sorry, Master. I didn’t mean to spill…” The boy looked at his mess. “I was frightened. Of them!” He pointed at Brian and Sullivan. “I was afraid that you loved them more to put them through such punishment for defying you, when I was left on a bed to the mercy of the night.” Justin squeezed his eyes closed and tears slipped down his cheeks.

“It will be alright, my boy. You are still my favorite. I only wish that from now on, if you desire to fall from grace and rally in hysterical anarchy, then you do it inside your mind and leave your Master to think in peace. I’m going to get another drink for you to warm that cold blood of yours. Sit.” Marquis ordered, and Justin sat, hands wrapped in his Master’s. “And no matter what it is, you will drink it.”

Justin nodded, reaching after Marquis as the man went to the kitchen. The boy stared down at his new bruise, almost proudly. It was a badge from his Ruler, a mark to show that the demons of deceit had been vanquished from his system by the powerful man. Marquis returned, handing a glass of wine to the boy, holding the decanter in his other hand. Justin looked up questioningly at his Master, but drank without question when the man gestured for him to do so.

Brian and Sullivan watched as Justin swallowed the drink, waiting for the boy to collapse into a fit of screams. But Justin relaxed against the sofa, a soft smile on his face. It was nothing but strong wine. But in the decanter, was another story. That was the poison that captured both Brian and Sulli in this inexorable prison. Marquis settled on the couch, kneeling beside Justin. He purred in the boy’s ear, setting the chilled decanter against the smooth pale skin. A soft chuckle escaped his lips as Justin shivered with the new cold.

The man tipped the wine container, dribbling the exquisitely expensive and lethal wine in a thin line down the boy’s chest. Justin lifted his hips gently, arching his back, moaning with pleasure as Marquis trailed his tongue over the wine. The man snarled at the excruciatingly narcotic taste, the barest hints of the liquid flashing through his veins. He brought his mouth to Justin’s waiting lips, pressing the trace of Cataleptic between them.

Justin moaned, his mind blanketed in a thick, fuzzy dusk. It wasn’t terrifying or paralyzing in such a slight amount. Marquis knew how to use his intoxicating creation, and use it, he was.

The man searched Justin’s mouth eagerly with his tongue, confining in his throat every groan, every pitifully erotic whimper escaping his prize. The blonde raised his hips wantonly, pressing against his Master, breath coming in quickening gasps as he grew desperately hard.

“Now.” Marquis knelt closer to Justin, whispering in the boy’s ear. Justin’s every nerve ending flamed, throbbing with the high. “Do you remember what we talked about, how I was going to forgive you?”

The blonde nodded slowly and answered, voice husky with desire. “Please, let me beg your forgiveness, Master.”

Marquis smiled, running his fingers through the soft locks. “You may begin your appeal.”

Justin smiled as if he had been given permission to go through a jewelry store without a credit limit. He slid off the couch, landing silently on his knees in front of his Master. The man rolled his head over the back of the cushions, a smug smile on his face as he met Brian’s furious hazel glare. Marquis closed his eyes happily as Justin’s nimble fingers curled into the waistband of his trousers and opened the fabric to expose a raging hard-on that leapt to greet his thick lips. The man moaned as Justin placed a very soft kiss on the leaking slit, tongue flicking out to taste the salty semen.

Brian closed his eyes, but felt, almost like a creeping chill along his spine, that Sullivan’s mind and body were intent on watching the show.

“You, watch.” Marquis ordered. “Watch or I’ll destroy that which you love.” He said with a grin, stroking Justin’s hair. Brian knew what the wicked man meant, but the boy worshipping his cock had no idea who Brian loved. He had no choice but to witness Justin begging forgiveness of acts where he had done nothing wrong.

Justin licked his tongue up the underside of Marquis’ cock, groaning at the twitching flesh as his Master spread his legs wider for the boy to delve deeper. Justin lapped at the man’s balls as they tightened against his body, bringing his hot tongue to devour Marquis’ pulsing hole. The man jerked as Justin caressed his opening hungrily, probing the tight muscle ring never before punctured by a single soul. Marquis groaned, arching his back, encouraging his boy by wrapping his fingers in Justin’s hair and not letting him move back up the shaft. The masterful tongue pushed deeper into Marquis’ hole, hot, thick, full. Wet. Slick. Marquis gasped, legs tightening around Justin’s head as the boy jabbed into his throbbing hole. The man had never felt anything like this, his fingers sliding away from Justin as the strength left his arms. He bucked against the boy uncontrollably, tremors wracking his body from just a minute under the intense scrutiny of the blonde’s tactful tongue. Just when he thought he would find the quickest release he had ever had, Marquis felt the boy move upward, attention leaving the man’s hole to round the base of his solid cock. The sinister man looked again to Brian, making sure the man was still watching. He smiled at Sullivan, who had a hard on and could do nothing about it. Brian stayed limp, glaring at the man who had taken his beautiful Sunshine away and turned the bright blue eyes to a dead, doll-like stare.

“Yes, oh, such a good boy. Good boy, show me how good.” Marquis whispered. Justin traveled the length of his Master’s cock with ravishing kisses until he reached the head, teasing the sensitive, slippery slit with his wretchedly disobedient tongue. Marquis moaned, slamming his head against the back of the white cushions. Justin enveloped the man’s dick with the hot wetness of his mouth, prepared this time when his Master slammed into the back of his throat as the sensations got too intense for him to control every movement. Justin pulled Marquis free and kissed the head, then swallowed the entirety of the long dick in one fluid motion. Sly fingers danced in the wetness left by his tongue around Marquis’ puckering hole and the man gave a quick gasp, a shout of pleasure too extraordinary to be real. Both bound men knew how good those agile fingertips could be during a blow job, knew why Marquis’ face was twisted into an unrecognizable shadow of its former self. But only Brian had never forced the boy to perform, never asked anything of his young lover that the boy didn’t want to do. He was the only one who loved Justin for being Justin, for being a brat, for being naughty, sad and happy, laughing, teasing, insightful, annoying, brooding, smart, creative, sensitive and strong. Brian loved the boy for being human. The brunette knew his boy had to be there somewhere, in all that submissiveness and pain, torment, degradation. He couldn’t fathom that all he loved was gone, dead, destroyed. Justin was in there. He had to be.

Marquis was panting raggedly, bucking against the boy’s mouth so violently Justin would most certainly bruise. The boy was bobbing faster up and down on his Master’s dick, sliding the man in and out of the hot little mouth while prying his fingers just passed the first tight muscle ring of Marquis’ hole.

“Oh…ungh…” Marquis moaned loudly, legs spasming as the orgasm drew near. The man jerked Justin back by a handful of blonde hair and grinned lustfully at the boy. “Oh…” He fought to catch his breath. “Come here.” He said, sliding to lay on the couch, feet closest to his captives along the wall. Justin let his Master lead him, guide him. Marquis held his slick cock firm as the boy followed his command, perching on the thick member while facing Brian and Sulli. Justin let out a low moan as the beginnings of his tight canal were filled with his Master’s dick, his head lolled back, eyelids fluttering. Marquis kept the boy still for a moment, the tip of his dick barely puncturing the hot hole, relishing the spectacular fire rushing through his nervous system. He rocked against his blonde beauty slowly, pushing slightly deeper, making sure he didn’t come too soon. Marquis wanted Brian to have to watch this for as long as possible. He wanted to force an erection from both Kinney’s, not just one. Justin gently grinded over Marquis, held steady by his Master’s hands gripping his smooth thighs. A shaking breath escaped from the boy’s trembling lips as the pleasure made his own cock grow incredibly harder. Justin did not touch himself, his hands resting on his legs waiting for permission. Marquis deepened his thrusts and Justin groaned, fingers clutching his bent knees atop Marquis as another inch entered him. The man breathed evenly, body under command once more and ready to fuck Justin so hard Brian felt the pain and pleasure. He pulled Justin completely onto his dick and the boy gasped, biting his bottom lip. Marquis pushed into Justin and yanked the boy down, rolling fluidly in and out, in complete control of his golden treasure.

Justin moaned loudly, as instructed by his compassionate Master. Each shove brought a louder and more vibrant sound from the boy’s deepest caverns. His mouth screamed in pleasure before he could think about whether or not it was what his King wanted, fingernails biting into the flesh of his legs as Marquis drove into his ass. Marquis sat up, shoving Justin over the side of the couch, yanking the boy’s hands away from drawing blood and pushing them onto the sofa arm. A rough hand pulled the blonde hair until the boy was looking at Brian. Marquis grunted heavily and Justin’s mouth hung open as the two slid against each other. The boy stared emptily at Brian and the hazel-eyed man knew it wasn’t Justin looking at him through those eyes. It wasn’t his Justin being fucked so rigidly against the sofa.

“Please. Fuck. Me.” Justin screamed. “Never. Stop. Fucking. ME!” He shrieked as Marquis drove deeper, deeper, as if trying to come out on the other side. The boy’s fingers gripped the couch, leaving half-moon streaks of blood from his legs. He looked down at the marks upon the white sofa and rolled his eyes back up to Brian with an evil, morbid glee filling the blue void.

Marquis pulled out of Justin and rammed himself back in, the boy screaming with sensations on the razorblade line between pain and pleasure. The man repeated this movement and Justin pressed his forehead against the furniture as the impact shook him, knocked him nearly over the side. Again, out, slamming in, Marquis grinned at Brian. Violent exit, rash entrance, Justin screaming, out, in, cries of ordered delight.

“That’s it, look at how hot he is. And he’s all mine.” Marquis growled at his prisoners. “I want you both hard!”

Sullivan moaned and though he knew he couldn’t touch himself, it didn’t stop his hands from trying. Brian remained pliant, a stranger staring at some everyday acts, uninterested.

Justin whimpered, biting into the knuckles on his left hand to keep from clawing up the already stained couch. His body rocked back and forward, closer and closer to Brian with each pummeling shove. Marquis wrapped his fist into Justin’s hair and pulled him up, pointing at his former lover. Justin watched Brian, head jerking as Marquis fucked him.

“Master, Master please.” Justin cried out. “Please! Master!”

Marquis understood what his boy wanted and he arched Justin back against him, plunging into the blonde as they kneeled. The man wrapped his hand around the blonde’s leaking cock and pulled, pulled, stretching the skin painfully. Justin cried out and it only made Marquis squeeze harder, more violently.

“More, please Master!” Justing begged. It hurt desperately, but his Master wanted to do it and that made it right. “More! Make it hurt.” Justin whimpered.

“You want me to punish you, don’t you, boy?” Marquis asked, the boy trembling against him, hole convulsing wildly around the aggressive intrusion. He stared at Brian, grinning wickedly, with each stroke of the blonde’s cock.

“Please, please make me suffer for the harm I have caused you!”

Marquis’ fingers grasped Justin’s balls and dug into them, making the boy shout in dismay. Brian’s stomach fell to his feet as the beginnings of tears shimmered in the baby blue eyes. Marquis pushed Justin down, pressing his face to the cushions. His cock begged for release and the man jerked Justin’s balls away from his body, squeezing them, manipulating them with brutal force. The boy cried into the cushions, his ass tightening around his Master’s dick involuntarily. The dark man groaned, biting his tongue as he moved to Justin’s leaking cock, pinching the slit ferociously. His victim began to sob, trembling.

“Do you want this? Answer me!” Marquis lifted Justin’s face from the pillows.

“Yes, please Master. Make it…hurt. Make it hurt.” He whimpered.

Marquis shoved Justin back down and pushed faster into his prize, a sadistic darkness clouding his face with the pain he caused and the anger at Brian’s lack of erection. Yes, Justin would pay for his disobedience as well as his former lover’s detachment. Marquis was going to make the brunette hard watching the blonde’s torture if he had to kill Justin to do it. His body reacted to the agony below him, sending wave after wave of numbing velvet blackness through every last nerve, rage fueling a growing fire. His command was not to be ignored! The man pushed into Justin rapidly, harshly, forcing the boy to utter tearful cries from below. Marquis shouted as he came inside the sobbing youth, rocketing against the round ass until he was completely empty. The man slapped Justin’s firm ass and pulled out of the boy, leaving him empty and crying, still hard, trembling. He violently pushed Justin against the cushions again, as if to tell him again to stay, and went into the bedroom. The blonde clutched the sofa arm and brought his eyes up to scan the room. Where had his Master gone? Had he done something to upset the man? Justin looked at Brian, fear and shame polluting his pale face.

“M-Master?” The boy whispered, a child lost in a crowded place looking for his mother. Justin turned to the bound men, glaring at Brian. It was their fault that Marquis left! They had done something!

Brian rolled his head to look at the boy, eyes dark in pale flesh. That look from whoever was inside Justin’s mind was hot enough to scald. The blonde rose from the sofa, unaware that he was, even now, contravening his Master by moving from the cushions.

“You…displeased the Master.” Justin snarled, the child’s voice returning; pure evil torture. He stood on his tiptoes, body the length of Brian’s, to whisper in the man’s ear. The boy ran sly fingers under the head of Brian’s cock. “He wanted you hard and you defied him. Senseless fool!” Justin grabbed Brian’s dick and felt it thicken in his hand, not realizing it was his touch and not a will to please Marquis that brought Brian to compliance. A cruel smile played at the corners of his lips. “There. Now that’s better. The Master will be pleased.”

Marquis came softly out of the hallway holding a thick mechanical dildo, intent to fuck Justin with it until Brian got hot. Only Sullivan saw the man enter, and he wasn’t talking. He was enjoying the entertainment. A scowl coerced over Marquis’ features as Justin, his treasure, stood on tiptoe and whispered to his former lover. The dark eyes studied his boy and witnessed the pale hands warming over Brian’s cock, bringing the man to erection. Marquis, seething, slipped into Justin’s bedroom and took the latex mask in his hands, grabbing the earplugs on his way back into the living room. He stood behind Justin and cleared his throat.

The boy turned, happily, ready to be praised for making Brian’s dick hard. His gaze fell to the latex mask and he backed away, against Brian, eyes wide, mouth an open O of silent protest.

“Please, please.” Justin whispered breathlessly.

“I see now that you need to be taken back completely.”

“Master, no. Please, anything but that.”

Brian tried to speak but uttered only dry, rasping nouns. “Oh angha eeh.”

“NOW!” Marquis pointed to the sofa. Justin crumpled, crouching on the floor shaking his head. “NOW!” He repeated, screaming, grabbing the boy by the bruised collarbone and shoulder and launching him against the couch. “You will learn what it is to have eyes for another man, you will learn my wrath! I WILL TEACH YOU, AGAIN, WHAT IT IS TO BE STRIPPED OF EVERYTHING. BE ASHAMED, YOU UNWORTHY JEWEL, YOU HAVE FALLEN FROM MY HAND AND MUST BE GIVEN TO THE DEMONS OF YOUR DISHONOR!!!!”

“NO! Please no!!!!!” Justin wailed, breathing in high piteous shrieks. “I love only you!”

Marquis slapped Justin’s face. “SHUT UP! SHUT YOUR FUCKING MOUTH!”

Justin cowered, covering his face with his hands. He knew he deserved his Master’s rage because the man was obviously angry with him, but what had he done? If he could repent before the mask was pulled on, everything would be alright. But to be pulled away from his Master, to be void of the man’s love plus the valued permission to gaze upon and listen to the voice of his King…it was too much to bear! Justin screamed, wordlessly, as Marquis pried his fingers away from his face.

“I have been too kind to you, wretch. It is time to show you what all the others must contend with when they turn against their Master.” Marquis snarled in a voice dripping with cruelty.

“No. Please, please, please Master, I don’t understand.” Justin sobbed, voice a quivering whisper.

“Accept this punishment as a gift from me, boy.” Marquis said in a low growl, pulling the blonde hair so Justin’s head was forced back into the cushions. “Do not fight me again, child! Or the retribution will leave you in a shallow grave. I will not weep for your death.” He promised viciously, pushing the earplugs into Justin’s burning ears.

Justin’s body shook with his miserable sobs, hands trying to cover his face. His cheeks flushed red with the return of the stress-fever. Marquis slapped the boy’s hands away, sliding the mask over the blonde locks, over the wide blue eyes. Justin shrieked, fighting the struggle building in his chest. He had to prove his submission to Marquis, couldn’t disgrace the gift from his Master, no matter how frantic he was to break free and run until darkness overwhelmed him and he fell into a silent grave, never suffering a second more. He felt the man rise away from him and emptiness took all life from the boy’s heart. Justin didn’t speak, though the mouth hole was still open, his hands resting dormant at his sides balled into tight fists.

Brian saw Marquis come toward him but could only watch with tear-blurred vision as the man removed the dental retractor and snapped his jaw closed, holding it so his prisoner could not speak. The vindictive eyes searched Brian’s face with contempt, lips drawn in a tight, spiteful line.

“This is all your fault, you’ve corrupted him and now he must pay.” He released his grip, bringing the metal contraption to hover over Justin’s lips.

“No.” Brian shouted, voice no more than a gasp. He cleared his throat and tried again, more successfully. “No, no. He did it for you.”

Marquis scoffed. “The intent matters not, Kinney. He left where I put him and went to you. I should have put him back under this restriction the first time he acted out. You are inconsequential. My boy needs to learn his lesson!”

“You raucous son of a bitch! He doesn’t need to learn anything from you! You’re nothing but a selfish piece of white trash out to destroy all things more beautiful than yourself!”

Marquis stiffened and turned to Brian after fixing the device, unheeded, onto Justin. “Perhaps you’re right, Kinney. I’ve been going about my boy’s lessons all wrong. He doesn’t need to learn that I will hurt him if he disobeys.” The man mused, danger permeating the room with each tainted breath.

Brian bit his tongue. This couldn’t be good. Whatever Marquis was planning, it gleamed with dark pleasure in his eyes, glowing on his face.

“If he is naughty, I will not fuck him at all.” Marquis decided. “You will.”

Brian arched an eyebrow. It wasn’t the worst he had thought of but…he knew the man could turn even the most sensual of acts between the lovers into a wasteland.

“Do you like that?” Marquis asked, curving a finger under the head of Brian’s cock.

“I won’t hurt him.” Brian said defiantly.

“Oh, allowing you to fuck him is punishment enough. No matter how good…or bad…it feels, he will react to it as an awful experience. It will hurt him. You will hurt him.”

“You’re full of yourself.”

“All the same…”

Sullivan closed his eyes. His cousin thought he was getting the better deal, that Justin would somehow snap out of his obedient trance at the feel of a familiar cock in his ass. The Southern man knew it wouldn’t be Brian’s cock going into the boy, not if Marquis was anything like his brutal notoriety.

Marquis grinned nastily, lifting Sullivan’s knife to the first leather strap. “I rather like your cousin’s taste in weaponry.” He purred, slicing the band over Brian’s chest free.

“Good, you can shove it in your eye and wear it like a crown.” Brian snarled.

“Tsk tsk, Kinney, such words to your Master.”

“Your head is farther up your ass than I thought.”

Marquis sneered and sliced a quick bite into Brian’s arm, making the man hiss. “Oh, so sorry.” He said emotionlessly, releasing the bindings on one arm and stepping back. “Get yourself free and come over to us.” He ordered, sitting on the coffee table beside Justin, sure not to touch the boy and let him know his Master was nearby.

Brian did as he was told, standing on unsteady legs. He rolled his tongue around his dry mouth, wetting it with a rush of saliva. Gathering his composure, Brian stalked to the couch, also wary of touching Justin. He looked at Marquis and the man tossed him a bottle of lube.

“We’re waiting.” Marquis smiled. “Lube up.”

Brian slathered the gel on his cock and Marquis laughed. “No, no, Mr. Kinney. Your cousin is so much smarter. I see the look of knowledge on his face.” The dark man said with a snort. “Your hand. Your arm. All of it.”

“No.” Brian shook his head. “He can’t take that.” A tremor ran through him, his belly filling with ice. He didn’t know whether he meant Justin couldn’t take the physical or the emotional aspects of being fisted, blind and deaf. Or both. Brian didn’t want to know what this might do to a person with Justin’s broken mind.

“He will take whatever we give to him. If you don’t, perhaps your cousin would jump at the opportunity, hmm?”

Brian gritted his teeth. He debated rushing the man, but saw the blade flick to hover above the big vein beside Justin’s groin, as if Marquis could read his thoughts.

“Do it dry, or do it wet, I don’t care. Just.” Marquis grinned. “Do. It.”

Brian sat down next to Justin and the boy recoiled. Marquis pressed the blade against his flesh and the blonde quieted his movements. The man put his other hand on Justin and nodded for Brian to do the same. When the boy felt four hands, one with the knife, he made a small, helpless sound in his spread-open mouth. One of these men, if not both, was not Marquis. A shiver of panic ran through the boy.

Marquis pulled Justin so he was lying on the sofa, drawing one leg up over the back of the couch and spreading the other so the boy’s foot rested on the floor, widening Justin’s hips painfully over their limit. He forced a cushion under the tormented ass, raising him up for Brian’s intrusion.

“You can just let us go.” Brian suggested, though he knew his efforts would be futile. “If you go back to New Orleans, no one will be able to find you.”

“Is that so? And am I so threatened that I must run away? I am in control here, Kinney. Now get moving.”

Brian bit his lip and winced looking at his boy’s exposed hole, still dripping cum from Marquis’ earlier explosion. The man wiped tentative, trembling fingers over the twitching opening, smearing the juices. Justin groaned, bucking his hips against the touch.

“Kiss him. Show him you aren’t his Master.” Marquis ordered sadistically, pressing the cool blade’s flat edge against Justin’s skin.

Brian rose over the helpless boy and kissed his lower lip gently, a shaky breath escaping his mouth. He kissed the top lip and scooped his tongue against Justin’s. The boy tensed, tasting the same man who lingered on the metal retractor pinning his jaw open. Brian sucked on his lower lip, taking it into his mouth, releasing it. A tear slipped and fell onto the blue latex.

“Good, he knows. He is afraid. Get back to it.” Marquis commanded.

Brian slid back between Justin’s legs, fingers splaying over the tight, reddened and bruising balls and erect shaft. His thumb slid down to the pulsing hole while his fingers massaged the boy’s testes.

“No matter how gentle, how considerate, you will hurt him. You are only stalling with foreplay.” Marquis snickered. “Lube him, now, or I’ll take it away and let you work with what’s already down there.”

Brian glared at the man but opened the container, squirting it’s entire contents between his hand and the boy’s ass. Justin gasped, shaking his head, warding off the stranger’s intentions. Brian set a calming hand on his young lover’s lower stomach and waited for the boy to still himself before probing a single finger into the hole.

Justin groaned despite himself, embarrassment coloring his neck and chest. Marquis spread his legs wider and the boy hissed sharply at the muscle strain. He knew the second man was his Master now, could smell the expensive perfume mixed with the Cataleptic.

Brian pumped his finger into the boy, slowly, carefully, watching the blush speckle the pale flesh with concern. He could feel how terribly warm the boy was, and knew the mottling flush of his skin was not a healthy sign.

“Now two.” Marquis sneered.

Brian complied, adding the next finger into the boy. Justin gasped, a sobbing breath tearing from his throat. The man winced, knowing that there was no physical pain at this assault, not yet. Justin was truly pained that his Master chose a prisoner to administer this pleasure. Brian trudged forward, pushing into the boy’s heated flesh, feeling the tightness of Justin’s tense refusal to grant him access.

“Come on, baby. Let me in.” Brian whispered so low that his lips moved but made no audible sound.

“Three.” Marquis grinned maliciously.

“Not yet.” Brian pleaded, stomach knotting.

“Three.” Marquis repeated, pressing the blade edge against the boy’s flesh and making the barest of cuts, leaking a tiny scarlet line.

Brian pulled his two fingers out of the boy and forced three in, flinching at Justin’s meek sobs, at the youth’s desperation to close in around the invasion. Marquis spread the boy’s legs wider and Justin let him, relishing any touch his Master offered in comparison to the man working his ass.

“Four.” Marquis said.

“He isn’t fucking ready yet!” Brian argued.

Marquis brought the knife quickly up to Justin’s throat and pressed down, slicing the latex and exposing a clean swatch of neck. “Four. You are punishing him, he isn’t supposed to be ready.”

“Please, please don’t make me do this.”

“I’ll make you get Sullivan down and pin your eyes open so you can watch how a true admirer of the arts does his job. FOUR!”

Brian eased out of Justin, uttering a silent prayer. He rose above the boy and pressed his own neck against the blade in order to kiss Justin again, devoting himself to the boy’s thick lower lip. Brian whispered an apology to his young lover and backed away. He pushed three fingers back into Justin, pulled out, and hesitantly added the next. Justin stopped moving altogether, reflexively taking the digits into himself but not bucking, not squirming. Something had changed in him, told him to relax, that slackened his entire body and allowed Brian in. The man thought perhaps Justin could sense Marquis at his neck, with the knife, and knew this was what his Master wanted to happen. He continued working the hole, preparing the boy for what was to come. Never, not at this point late in the game, did Brian think that Justin tasted the love, the caution, the reluctance in that one kiss, and remembered a part of what true love had been. He couldn’t see the confusion dawn light into the deep, sorrowful blue eyes, couldn’t see the question simmering over the immense pleasure coming from another person besides Justin’s King.

“Do it. All of it.”

Brian pulled out of Justin once more, caressing the boy’s inner thighs with his clean hand. He closed his eyes, opened them, and obeyed the Marquis’ demented orders. Brian met no reluctance from Justin and sighed with relief the farther inside he traveled. Passing the prostate, Brian jumped as Justin shouted with pleasure, thrusting his hips up to meet the extreme touch. The man worked his way into Justin, sliding back out, sure to bump the boy’s sensitive spot up, down, back, forth.

Marquis purred, stroking the latex over Justin’s eyes. “That’s right. Feel shame for this punishment. Know this isn’t your Master inside of you and feel sadness deep enough to never escape from.”

Brian ignored Marquis, and so did Justin, the boy bucking wildly against the man’s push. The brunette growled low in his throat, his arm enveloped in the velvet warmth of his boy. His boy. Justin, at least for the time being, belonged completely to Brian. The man could feel a different heat crawl over the blonde, flushing his skin with a heated glow, a sheen of glistening sweat, instead of the dappling his fever had produced. Small, hurried, guttural sounds came from Justin’s heaving chest as Brian pushed his fist deeper, playing over and over the throbbing prostate. The boy spread his legs wider without provocation, not feeling the pain of straining muscles, only the pleasure this man gave him.

This man.

Brian.

Justin groaned, hands clutching at the white cushions below. He rolled his tongue in his mouth, tasting Brian. Every breath burned like acid in his chest, every vein pulsed with a fire hotter than any match flame. Brian thrust in, slid out, pushing the prostate with eagerness. He brought his lips down on Justin’s cock and licked along the underside of the thick expanse, kissing the pulsing slit and coming away with slick juices shining on his swollen lips. When Marquis didn’t stop him, convinced that Justin was suffering with this pleasure, Brian went down again, whetting his dry mouth with the boy’s hot moisture. Justin groaned as his lover swallowed his pre-cum greedily, sucking the skin that Marquis had so angrily damaged with bitter pinches. Brian bathed the boy’s cock with kisses, hearing the rasping breaths of his young lover only raring him to go faster and farther than ever before.

Justin thrust himself against Brian, begging wordlessly for the man to make him cum. Brian trailed his tongue over the dripping, throbbing slit, caressing every rise and fall, every crevice and vein with an expertly pointed tongue. Justin sighed deeply, heavily, his balls tightening against his body as a wave of delight rolled over him, curling his toes, clutching his fingers into the white fabric. A gasping scream tore from his open mouth as his body convulsed around Brian’s hand, emptying his cum into the man’s hungry lips. Justin’s legs rocked, back arched, and he screamed again with a second and more intense orgasm. Dimly the boy wondered if he would ever be empty of his thick juices.

Brian slowly, so slowly, drew out of Justin and the blonde sighed with regret. He had never felt so full before…and now he was again alone, nearly unable to move as lethargy plagued his spent limbs. Tears slipped from his eyes and a great sob ripped through him. Brian crouched at the end of the sofa, clutching his knees, as Marquis drew Justin’s legs together and the boy slowly rolled onto his side curled into a tight ball.

The dark man smiled cruelly, stroking the latex. “Very good job, Kinney. I really believe he felt that at the base of his skull.”

Brian scowled at the man and wanted desperately to rain kisses on Justin, to make him know that he was sorry for having to do that. He hated that he was still erect, hiding behind his legs.

“Do you think he’s been punished enough?” Marquis mused.

“It doesn’t matter what I say, you’ll still do whatever you want to him.”

“Oh no he won’t.” The shrill voice said from the doorway. “He’ll never touch him again.”

“Mark, no!” Brian cried.

“Ah, young flesh.” Marquis purred. “So nice of you to join us. How are you, Mark?” The man asked lightly, stroking Justin’s throat lightly with the knife. “Why don’t you come in and join us?”

“Get away from him.”

“Why should I do what you say if I don’t listen to anyone else, child?”

“You can have me, just leave him alone.”

“Mark, don’t!” Brian gasped. The boy had always wanted to repay Justin for putting his life on the line for Mark and Gus. Now he had his chance.

“Ah, but I’ve already had you now haven’t I?” Marquis sneered. “If I recall, your step-father brought you to me many, many years ago. You know what your friend is going through, no?”

Brian’s eyes widened and Mark looked away with shame. The teenager seemed to wilt under the revelation, his strong bravado washed away with the hurt he had suffered as a child.

“Russell traded you to me for half a year’s use of another boy. It was an unfair barter, wasn’t it? You were still so impossibly tight…are you still so wonderful? I look at you and I see a frightened little boy charging into a situation unprepared, much like you had been when we first met, running around my club trying every exit. So young. Is that why you are so adamant about rescuing your blonde friend?”

Brian trembled with rage. He didn’t need the Cataleptic to see red. The man was so angry he couldn’t speak, couldn’t move.

“NO!” Mark shrieked. “NO! I hate you!”

“Do you want a drink, Mark? I could spill his blood and have you lap it up like the hungry dog you are!” Marquis said nastily. “Foolish child, you haven’t changed a bit. You’ll do what I tell you to do no matter how old you become. Barging in all alone, I weep for the youth of America.”

“Don’t bet on it.” Bear said, stepping into the room. “He’s got a calvary for you, Marquis. Who’s foolish now? A man who doesn’t even lock his door…I‘m disappointed. I really wanted to break something.”

“You can break his ribs. His legs. Arms. Face.” Mark whispered, glaring at Marquis. “You can break his spirit.”

Bear patted Mark on the head and Brian shivered, knowing that for now the massive, huge enemy was on their side. He wished he hadn’t been so explicit about directions to Marquis’ home, but was glad that his son was smart enough to call for reinforcements. He just didn’t know why Mark chose Bear.

Marquis pressed the knife to Justin’s throat and the boy whimpered. “I’m not giving up. I do not lose.”

“You have already lost.” Bear growled.

“He will die without me!” Marquis shouted, making a move to bring the blade across Justin’s neck with an angry, quick slice. Brian lunged and grabbed the man’s hand, yanking him away from Justin, the boy falling to the floor. Bear joined Brian, taking Marquis’ wrists and drawing them behind his back, jerking upwards, popping both shoulders out of socket. Marquis shrieked.

Brian let Bear take Marquis and looked at Mark. The boy wasn’t watching the fight, his gaze fixated on the floor. Brian gave one last look at Justin, seeing the blonde sobbing with confusion but not bleeding. They had to get Marquis out of the room before even attempting to release the mask and reveal Justin to his old life.

“Mark.” Brian said softly, lightly touching the teen’s shoulder. “Mark?”

The boy jumped. “Dad…”

“It’s okay. Bear won’t let him get away with this. Any of it.”

“Is Justin…”

“I don’t know.”

“Are you?”

“I’m fine.”

“So am I. It was a long time ago.”

“You’re not that old.” Brian took Mark by the shoulders and made the boy look at him.

“I feel that way.”

Brian bit his lip. “Is there anything I can do?” He asked, though he knew the answer. Once more, the man was helpless to make the bad things go away from the boy’s he loved.

“No.” Mark cemented his father’s thoughts.

“Can anyone?”

“Justin.” Mark sighed, staring at his friend.

Brian nodded as Bear left the room. It was time to take off the mask.

\*

Brian stepped cautiously to stand over Justin, looking uneasily at Mark. “He knows it was me that…”

“I know, I saw.”

Brian paled. “Why…didn’t you say anything?”

“He had the knife…I thought he would slip. Or you might have torn something if you got distracted.”

Brian nodded. “Fuck.” He whispered, suddenly aware that both he and Justin were naked.

“Take it off of him, dad!” Mark snapped him out of his reverie. Brian sighed and released the gag strap, removing the dental retractor. Justin slammed his mouth shut instantly, getting breath before opening again and screaming. Brian quickly removed the mask, popping the earplugs out. Justin’s eyes were squeezed closed.

“I’m so sorry, Justin.” Brian whispered, prepared for the boy to recoil and go running for his Master.

The blue eyes flashed open, wide, and stared at his lover. Justin pulled himself up and searched the room frantically.

“He’s gone, Justin. We took him away. I…I’m sorry. He can’t be with you. It‘s not your fault…”

Justin groaned, eyes rolling to the back of his head, then returning to stare at Brian and Mark. He jumped at the older man, wrapping his arms around Brian’s neck, sobbing, desperate for the touch that had been torn away from him. It had been Brian, not Marquis, who pleasured him, who made him feel better. Suddenly, Justin could see no other way of life. Brian had been forced to hurt him and it hadn’t hurt at all.

“Justin, oh, Justin.” Brian cradled the boy, still in shock. “Baby, please look at me.”

Justin obeyed, but not submissively. He let the light of relief wash over the blue pools, let Brian see the boy underneath.

Brian pulled Justin into another hug. “Thank God.” He sighed.

“I felt you.” Justin said softly. “I tasted you. I started…to remember and I couldn’t figure out what was going on. I knew he chained me up and put that mask on me but…I feel like I’ve been under water forever. I’m hungry, like I haven’t eaten anything in days. And it’s like I’ve been crying a lot but…when did you get here? I realized you were there and Marquis was holding a knife to my throat…I thought I was going to get doused with more ice water and then I was on the floor, reeling…I’m so confused. Why don’t I remember?” Justin trembled.

“You’re not supposed to.” Mark said. “Not until you close your eyes in the darkness. Then you’ll see what happened.”

Justin turned to the boy, wincing at the bitterness in the words. “Mark?”

“He had you calling him Master and begging him to fuck you.”

“Mark…” Brian said cautiously. He didn’t know if remembering all this was good for Justin before he had time to rest, to eat.

“You were a zombie, that’s why you don’t remember. Because you were tired of the pain and suffering everyday life caused you, you were feeling sorry for yourself and let him do that to you because of it! You let him! You made it obvious where your weaknesses were and he devoured you!”

“Mark!” Brian warned, Justin clinging to him but staring at the verbal abuser. He had stopped crying as Mark started.

“It’s your fault that you let him beat you, Justin! You are stronger than this! I thought nothing could break you but I was fucking wrong! You went upstairs to hide and then you let him put that mask on you and welcomed his praise and sat by his throne like a good little mindless drone! In front of all those people at that club…A fuck toy! You had love before this! You had everyone’s goddamn devotion like an angel on a pedistal and you let him take you down and throw you in the dirt! How could you?!” Mark shrieked. “Everyone loves you, Justin. People need you to feel safe.” He added quietly. “You can’t just throw me away to be with his lies…he’ll kill you.”

Justin crawled away from Brian and held Mark against him, making quiet shushing sounds while stroking the boy’s dark blonde hair.

“You can’t run away from life, it never stops.” Mark sniffled. “The people around you keep suffering even if you forget.”

“I’m sorry.” Justin whispered.

“I’d die for you, Justin. If Marquis ever comes back, I won’t let him near you until I stop breathing.”

“And maybe after that, too?”

“Yeah.” Mark gave a soft laugh. “He’ll have to cut off my head and split my heart to the four corners of the world.”

“I’d die for you, too, Mark.”

“I know. You’re a fucking martyr.”

“And you’re a drama queen.” Justin smiled and Mark stared up at him.

“But we’re alive.”

“Yeah, amazingly.”

Brian cocked his head to one side and watched his boys. As long as someone else was hurting, Justin didn’t concentrate on his own pain. When he got bashed at prom, the boy had come to Brian to help him heal right from the hospital, telling Brian that it wasn’t his fault until he believed it. Now Mark was upset and Justin forgot about his own terror. But was that another way to hide, or did it help the boy to heal himself?

“Can I sleep in your bed tonight?” Mark whispered. “I’m going to have nightmares.”

Justin smiled. “I don’t know where I’m sleeping tonight, but you’re welcome to be with me.”

“You’ll have nightmares too.”

“I know. It seems a constant thing these days.”

“You’re sleeping with me.” Brian said, getting up. \*I am never letting you two out of my sight.\* He added silently to himself as he helped his boys up. He turned to Sullivan. Justin and Mark were already heading out into the hallway.

“Well you’re in quite a predicament, aren’t you cousin? I remember saying something like ‘once this is over, your life is forfeit’?” Brian sauntered over to his kin and grinned wickedly. “You would have fisted him, wouldn’t you? And taken him from Marquis all for yourself…well, that’s brilliant. Works well for you. I should really let you die, but I’m not like you. I’ll never be as cruel and vindictive as everyone else in this Godforsaken family. Lucky you.” He said and started to walk away.

Sullivan moaned in protest.

“Oh, I said I wouldn’t kill you. But I’m not starvation. I’m not dehydration. Am I?” Brian chuckled, a vengeful sound low in his throat. He cleared his voice and said in a thick Southern accent. “No, Sugah, I won’t leave you here. I called an old friend down in Naw’lins when I left the jeweler’s with that fake address. I didn’t know how, but I knew you’d screw me in all the wrong sort of ways. You remember your old flame who you cut up and nearly killed? Well he’s been dyin’ to pay you a visit.” Brian clicked his tongue. “Say hi to Jeff Reeves for me, cousin. I’ve got a happy life to tend to.”

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Justin didn’t dream about Marquis at all that night. Spooning Brian with Mark taking up most of the rest of the giant bed, the boy dreamed about his true love. In the dream he could feel Brian’s hot breath on his cock, willing him to open his legs as two fingers darted inside his puckering, twitching hole. Brian was fisting him, gently but quickly, only this time Justin could see the man’s eyes, could hear his grunting, hurried gasps and the wild smacking sound of the thick lips gliding over his cock. Brian wasn’t sorry in the boy’s mind, his hazel eyes glowed with a feral fire that only promised more, more, more.

Brian opened one eye, glancing at the clock. It was almost four in the morning. He reached back and took ahold of Justin’s raging hard-on and the boy groaned sleepily, not waking from the extravagant dream. Brian could feel the wet spot in the boy’s boxers, hand massaging his lover’s dick through the silk. The man smirked in the silent room, hand behind his back tightly wrapped around Justin’s cock to keep his boy from poking a hole through his ass and out his front. Brian turned around, hand sliding into the boxers, thumb slipping over the slick head.

“Justin?” Brian whispered.

The blonde’s eyes shot open, face flushed, lips parted hotly as if he had been kissing all night. His hand rested on Brian’s and he had to bite his lip to keep from crying out with pleasure.

“Do you want to?” Brian asked, voice barely audible to a normal world but seemingly screaming in the pre-dawn silence.

“We…can’t. Mark might wake up.” Justin answered conspiratorily, checking over his shoulder to make sure the boy was still sleeping.

“Not here.” Brian shook his head. “Out there.”

“Where? The couch?” Justin asked, ready to get up and relieve the building pressure in his cock.

“No, no. Out there.” Brian said. “Shh. Come on.” He slid out of bed and brought Justin with him by the dick, grabbing the lube as an afterthought. The couple hadn’t used a condom since Sullivan and Russell had taken Justin. The blonde didn’t think it was fair that they hadn’t used one and Brian couldn’t.

The boy chuckled softly, feet shuffling over the hardwood floors as Brian coaxed him along, a wide grin lighting his face in the silver moonlight.

“You look like a kid.” Justin giggled.

“A kid who’s about to get some.” Brian laughed, turning around, still gripping Justin’s dick, as he reset the alarm and clicked the door open inch by inch trying to be quiet.

Justin beamed at the man and his attempts at subtlety. “Where are you taking me, you brute?” He teased in a normal voice.

“Shh! Out here.” Brian said, swinging Justin into the elevator.

“Dirty man!” Justin said, nearly shouting.

“Justin, Christ!” Brian shushed him with a kiss, pressing the boy into the wooden beams. Justin groaned as their rock-hard dicks pressed against one another masked with very little cloth. The boy wrapped his hands into Brian’s hair freely, unhindered by rules or fear.

“Brian!” Justin shouted, breaking away from the kiss and throwing his head back.

The man growled and brought Justin back against his mouth, swallowing the moans eliciting from the boy. Justin began giggling, softly through his nose, body shaking as he tried to hold it in. Brian had to pull away from their bond just to see what was so funny.

“I…feel like that time we were at my parent’s house and got stuck in the pantry when they came home early…And you were stuck inside of me for three hours and didn’t even lose your hard-on.”

“Mmm. Yes. I do seem to recall that once upon a time.” Brian pushed his groin against Justin and devoured his mouth again to swallow the moan. He pulled back again. “It was a very…close space. Couldn’t move.”

“I remember some movement.” Justin pushed his hips against Brian and the man bit his tongue to keep from shouting with desire. “A little thrust here…” He grinded himself over Brian’s crotch. “A little biting my shoulder to stay quiet there…”

“A little dread that your father came within inches of us and decided on an iced Vodka straight instead of the new bottle of bourbon above our heads…”

“Yessss.” Justin purred. “I think he would have left your dick in me but pulled the rest out and thrown you out on the lawn.”

“Mmm.” Brian nodded, kissing Justin’s earlobe softly. “Something along those lines.”

“Something.” Justin moaned, goosebumps traveling down his neck and arms.

Brian sucked the boy’s neck, tasting the gooseflesh and marveling at how clean Justin tasted. The blonde had been in the shower for nearly two hours when they got home, scrubbing himself. He had let Brian come in with him, had almost begged the man to. But he didn’t cry or shake, just wanted to forget the horrible days Marquis had put him though.

“I love you.” Brian whispered, lifting Justin’s undershirt over his head.

“I know.” Justin smiled. “It feels good to be home.”

Brian stroked the boy’s bangs back from his forehead. He smiled but didn’t say anything. Words had never mattered between the two as much as the eye contact they shared. Brian curled his fingers into the waistband of Justin’s clothing, sliding the silk boxers over the boy’s ass and letting the fabric whisper down his slim legs. Justin stepped out of the blue pool and smiled a bright, luminous grin at his lover.

“I’m going to be loud.”

“I’m going to stop you.” Brian countered, matching the grin. He hoisted Justin onto his hips, the boy’s ankles crossing at the small of his back.

“You’ll try.” Justin smiled wider, licking his lips expectantly.

Brian slithered out of his sleep pants, not bothering to step out of them as his hard cock bounced with freedom. He thumbed open the lube and playfully squirted the pina colada flavored gel onto Justin’s nipple. The boy laughed, slapping Brian lightly on the chest before wiping it away. Justin licked his fingertips and smiled.

Brian nodded, coating his throbbing cock with the stuff. “Are you sure?” He asked seriously, pausing before the boy’s opening.

“Brian, God yes!” Justin almost laughed. “I’m not going to let anyone scare me into not having sex. It feels good, so it can’t be wrong.” The boy said, and then added as an afterthought in a shrilly excited voice. “GOD, FUCK ME!”

Brian pushed into his boy and got Justin to shut up, a gasp of delight filling the open mouth. The blue eyes searched Brian’s hazel ones with tenderness, his hand coming up to stroke his lover’s cheek. The man kissed Justin, thrusting into the more than willing hole. A shared grunt slipped between them and neither knew who it originated from. Justin chuckled sofly, resting his head on the crook of Brian’s neck.

“Feels so good.” Justin mused, fingers playing delicately with the curls at the base of Brian’s skull. “To be home.”

Brian smiled and kissed Justin’s head gently. He lifted the boy up and away from the wood, resting himself against a corner with Justin on the outside.

“Down.” Justin said. “On the floor.” He smiled.

Brian nodded, kneeling slowly with Justin still perched on his dick, watching the soft flow of hair rest around Justin’s head like a halo. The man kissed Justin as he pushed against the narrow hips, ingesting the groan he knew was coming. If Justin tried to pull away, if he truly wanted to scream, Brian would not stop him.

“God…” Justin moaned into Brian’s mouth, hot breath whispering inside the man.

Brian smiled above his boy, pulling out, pushing forward, slowly, sensually. Lovingly.

Justin wrapped his legs tighter around Brian. A wry smile played across his lips. “Is that the best you can do?”

“Oh, you want my best hmm?”

“You won’t hurt me.” Justin kissed his lover, looking upwards with complete trust. “Show me what I’ve been missing.”

Brian closed his eyes and tried to calm his rapidly beating heart, his panting breaths. He felt himself grow impossibly harder inside of his boy and knew there was no turning back. Justin purred with pleasure as his lover began to move, slowly at first but easily gaining momentum and strength. Justin pressed his head to the floor, hands grasping at the shaggy brunette strands rocketing above his body. The brilliant trademark smile graced his lips, showing all his teeth. Brian pumped himself against the boy furiously, delving deeper, faster, harder with each thrust. Justin shouted, raking his nails into his skull, and Brian couldn’t think straight enough to stop him. The man felt his body slide over Justin’s, their abdomen’s slick with the boy’s hot cum. Brian quickly wrapped his hands under the blonde’s strong legs and brought his knees to rest above his shoulders bending the boy as he lowered himself for a kiss. Their tongues united, wrapping around each other as if the lovers themselves rested in that singular muscle. Brian gasped as his world fell away and all that existed was Justin, being inside of Justin, belonging to Justin for eternity. The man held onto Justin’s golden hair, bucking wildly into the pulsing hot vortex, listening to the feral groans escaping the boy’s long, smooth throat. The sounds only made Brian hotter and urged him to move faster than a mortal man could ever dream of going. Not that he didn’t try.

Justin swallowed the scream building in his chest, his cock screaming, on fire, waiting desperately for release as Brian slammed over it with his body and pushed against the boy’s pounding prostate. Brian pummeled Justin eagerly, head thrown back, arms straining at either side of the blonde’s head to keep his body up.

“Oh…ungh, yeah.” Brian moaned, each breath gasping for air. Justin answered his cry with a long, wordless howl.

Brian thrust in, pulled out until only the head remained, and pushed back inside to throbbing hole. Justin’s back arched under his lover, his hips bucking wildly, toes curling, ankles crossed, drawing the man deeper inside.

“BRRRRIIIIIAAAAAAAAAAANNNNNN!!!!” Justin wailed, an untamed beast writhing beneath his true protector. “OOOOOHHHHHHHH GOOOOOOOOOOOODDDDDDDDDD!!!!!” He screamed as stars laced through his vision, blanketing him in rich, heavy darkness. His cock pumped the explosion outward, clearing the boy’s vision, warmth tingling through his body.

“Uuuuuuuugnhhhh….oh…. Ohhhhhh…….ungh….Jus….Jus….” Brian breathed, hair sticking to his forehead in a glimmering sweat. “Juuuusss…..”

“Come on, baby, oh yeah.” Justin gasped, tightening his muscles around his lover’s hard cock. Brian groaned, pushing faster, knees scraping over the elevator floor.

“OOOOHHHHHH……….JUSSSSSSSSSTTTTTTTTTTIIIIIIIIIIIIIINNNNNNNNNNNN!!!” His voice was more shrill than Justin’s had been, a release that had taken days of wait to finally flourish. No one could make him cum like Justin, and he wasn’t about to let anyone try.

Brian collapsed onto his boy, unsteady breaths threatening to asphyxiate him before he had time to catch up, his raging heart thudding loudly in his ears. He felt, more than heard, the soft sobbing from Justin’s chest. Worriedly, he looked into the soulful blue eyes, watching the tears leak into his messy blonde hair.

“Justin?” Brian whispered, not sure what to say or even if he had enough air to say it.

“I’m alright.” Justin said gently, caressing his lover’s cheek, wiping away stray chunks of the chestnut brown locks. “Just happy.”

“I like when you smile to show you’re happy.”

“Get tears near any manly-man and…”

“No, of course it’s okay Justin.” Brian raised himself on one elbow.

“But it terrifies you. That’s okay. My mom once told me that tears from a woman is like man-repellant.”

“And she wonders why you’re gay, telling you stuff like that.” Brian laughed, glad that the tears were nothing more than relief. “You’re sure?”

“Positive.” Justin kissed Brian’s collarbone, his Adam’s apple, working his way along the man’s strong jaw line. “I’ll smile for you.” He said, and did.

“If we woke Mark we’re never going to live this down…”

“Brian, if we didn’t wake every corpse in Homewood Cemetery I am going to be very disappointed…”

Brian nodded, resting his head on Justin’s chest, controlling his breathing by focusing on the boy’s easily rising and falling chest. He could feel the heat rise through the blonde, permeating deep into his bones, his soul. It was the kind of warmth only true love could bring, a heat that could melt the iciest of hearts.

Mark smirked from the doorway, holding back his laughter. The thought crossed his mind to ask if he should make some popcorn for the second showing…but didn’t. It was beautiful, this scene in front of him. He had never seen two people actually making love and meaning it before. The fact that it was his dad, well…Mark wasn’t about to stick around until Justin made top. Brian was falling asleep and Justin was way passed that point. The teenager cocked his head, watching the way his father held Justin, one leg wrapped protectively over the boy’s groin and thighs, an arm curling above the blonde hair and one tucked delicately underneath Justin’s ribcage. Mark wished that one day he would find someone that made him as happy as these two made each other. Until then…Mark would have to work to make sure the lovers stayed on their toes.

The teenager, tongue shoved to the side of his cheek, tiptoed out into the elevator, picking up Justin’s undershirt, his silk boxers, and Brian’s pants. He went back inside and closed the door softly, pressing his mouth to the cold metal to mask the laughter. Mark locked the front door and set the alarm, shaking his head and going back to the bedroom.

They would get him back, oh yes, but that night they would be thinking of much different things to do with their time. Like how to explain to old Mrs. Hamil on the fourth floor why there were two naked men in the elevator when she came out to take her poodles for a walk….

Nightmares and Flowers

Brian's tongue was masterful, its strength a hot liquid trail of excruciating magma as it licked a long line down Justin's spine. A short gasp erupted from the blonde as he buried his face in the overstuffed throw pillows on the sofa, his fingers clutching the material so desperately that the cloth had torn long ago. Brian changed direction as he hit Justin’s tailbone, turning around to follow his original path. Only this time he used short, determined strokes on his way to Justin’s neck. A cruel smile played upon his open mouth when his young lover mirrored his abrupt licks with moans of barely controlled ecstasy. Justin couldn’t help but cry out as Brian leaned pitilessly over him and breathed a husky whisper in his ear.

"You’re going to pay for ripping my cushions," the man said, purposely breathing a second, hot exhalation before returning to the task at hand.

He trailed downward once more, relishing in the salty sweet taste of the boy; a taste he never tired of delighting in. His hazel eyes caught Justin squirming beneath him; the pale, lithe form a flushed and sweating bundle of tingling nerves ready to go off at any moment. Brian’s smile widened. He knew he had Justin at his mercy, to do with whatever he wanted.

Tonight, what he wanted was for Justin to explode all over his couch.

Brian acted with a lightning-quick strike, hands pulling the ample cheeks away from the prize and plowing his tongue straight into the boy’s twitching core. Justin screamed at the surprise, head thrown back, voice far from muffled in the pillows.

But they weren’t finished yet, not by a long shot, Brian decided. His tongue left Justin’s opening to play, teasing along the puckering center. Justin thrust his hips backward urgently as Brian devoured his ass like some elegantly expensive dessert, desperation clouding his already hazy night vision as his head fell back to the pillows.

"Please, please," Justin begged in a hoarse whisper, his achingly stiff cock on fire with need as each thrust against Brian’s face brought his dick to rub over the sofa under his belly.

Brian grabbed Justin’s hips to steady the boy as he shoved his tongue as far as it would go, his saliva slick and glistening in the silver-white moonlight bathing the living room from the open curtains. He suddenly, roughly, flipped the blonde onto his back, gazing lustfully into the deep blue eyes. Justin gasped quickly, his breathing fast, shallow, ragged.

"Yes, fuck me. Brian, fuck me," the boy mouthed, hooking one knee invitingly over the back of the sofa.

Brian brought his mouth down to Justin’s navel, tongue dipping into the boy’s belly button. Justin moaned excitedly, bucking his hips madly as Brian lifted away and traveled lower, lower, his fiery breath sending shivers of goose bumps over Justin’s taut stomach. The man sloped his tongue into the glittering drop of pearly precum at the boy’s slit with a groan. Visions of the blonde’s face —eyelids fluttering at half-mast, ruby red lips parted only enough to swallow a decent breath, sweat glistening over his glowing skin — made Brian’s pulsing cock jump and tighten in anticipation. Brian braced himself on trembling arms and rose again; savoring the taste of Justin’s cum as he met the boy’s lips. His tongue was met eagerly as the blonde yanked his lover’s hair to pull him into an earth-shattering kiss, relishing the salty flavor together.

Brian let his right hand fall down between their bodies, trusting the back of the couch would support him. He entered Justin’s pulsing core and curled two fingers into him, making the boy jump with a scream of pure pleasure.

Justin tore savagely away from Brian’s mouth, fingers tangled in the sweat-soaked chestnut brown locks. He growled in a feral voice, "FUCK ME, GODDAMN YOU!"

Brian removed his fingers from Justin just as wildly and grabbed a fistful of long blonde hair, bringing his lover back into the kiss. He swallowed the boy’s intense groan as he guided his cock into the waiting hole. Pulling out to only the head, Brian broke the kiss and stared at the boy beneath him.

"Yes," Justin begged, somewhat more subdued, almost languorous.

Brian grinned, shoving himself to the edge of his being so full that Justin could have tasted him at the back of his throat. The boy shouted wordlessly into the empty room with elation, tight muscles pulsing encouragingly around Brian’s dick.

Close. So close. Already, so damn close …

Brian plowed into Justin, his cock disappearing inside the boy over and over again, inch by agonizing inch, faster and faster until the world spun so severely that it threatened to throw the lovers from its realm.

"BRIAAAANNN!!!" Justin howled, clutching the man’s shoulder blades, hanging on for dear life. He locked his ankles over Brian’s hips, nestling into the crook of his lover’s neck and planting small, passionate bites along the tender flesh of his throat.

"God, God, God," Brian muttered with each breathless, mindless thrust.

Justin couldn’t wait any longer. His balls were tightening so viciously against his body that they were threatening to fall off. Justin screamed as a steaming load of glory shot through to the head of his cock.

Brian felt the slick juices erupt between their bodies, heard Justin’s howl of finality, and his dick exploded in a rolling wave of starry delight, sending the man’s brain to the nether-regions of bliss. His muscles refused to hold him any longer and Brian collapsed onto Justin, slack-jawed and tingling from head to toe. He had no mind to regulate his breathing and he didn’t even try. If this was what he felt right before death, then there was nothing to fear. His heart thudded like a caged animal in his ears, blood pounding through his veins.

A sudden thought struck him and stole away his afterglow. Four months ago, Justin would not have been there with him.

\*But he is now,\* Brian reminded himself, settling his ear against Justin’s chest where the boy’s heartbeat rivaled his own. Gentle fingers toyed lazily with Brian’s hair as the man drifted on the edge of sleep.

Four months ago, Justin was almost lost forever.

\*But I found him,\* Brian thought forcefully at the stray tangent, \*I brought him back home.\*

Four months ago, Justin was not living; not as he was now. Free, clean, happy and safe, the things most people took for granted were not afforded to the boy.

\*But that was four months ago, he’s fine now.\* Brian argued with his own inner voice, \*No nightmares, no word of retaliation from the men who tortured him. Whatever Bear did with Marquis, I don’t want to know. Sullivan…\* Brian shuddered quietly as Justin’s soft breathing filtered to him, a form of comfort in the darkness as the man’s wide hazel eyes scanned the room with fear. \*God, please let Sullivan be in jail. Please let him rot in there for what he did to Justin…\*

Brian closed his eyes as tears tried to force their way to the surface in the pale darkness. Justin’s fingers were still entwined in his hair, small movements of lethargic dreams moving the caress ever so slightly. Brian made himself calm down despite the racing sorrow of apprehension, the fear like a lead weight in his stomach over what could have been. Justin wasn’t gone. He no longer had the haunted look of a broken mind shadowing his sparkling blue eyes. He had been raped on several occasions, but Justin showed no signs of sexual inhibition. Quite the opposite, in fact. It was as if the boy was making up for lost time with Brian, proving that he could do what he wanted with his body and no one would ever scare him into disbelieving that ever again.

Brian sighed, the warmth of the sleeping boy beneath him finally settling into his bones, his troubled mind. Justin seemed to have moved on with the horrific events, so why was Brian still so wrapped up in loss? Why did he feel like every time he saw the boy, it would be his last? He knew deep inside that Justin was home, that he wasn’t going anywhere, but after so many times of nearly losing his love, his smile, Brian could hardly deal with the thought that at any second it could all be over.

The phone rang, a shrill scream slicing into Brian’s mind. Only his heart leaping into his throat kept him from screaming in fright. Justin, oblivious to his lover’s thundering pulse, reached over his head to the side table and dragged the telephone to his ear.

" ‘ello?" Justin answered dimly. "Yes?" he became more alert. "What? Who?" he asked, sitting up as far as Brian would allow.

Brian, concern a tightness of unshed panic in his chest, got up and switched on the lamp. The look of disbelief on his young lover’s face was enough to make his stomach sink.

"No, when? Really, Julian, I…no…no, listen to me. No, absolutely not! I…go stay with Will! This place isn’t mine," he paused and repeated, "It isn’t mine! How did you know where to find—oh, Will told you to call me, how sweet of him. What about—?" he paused again, "no, you’re right, you’re right, I wouldn’t stay with them either." Justin pinched the bridge of his nose. "Hold on, I’ll ask."

Brian’s heart jumped into his throat once more and he wondered if he would be able to speak now that he was finally being involved in the conversation.

"Brian," Justin said cautiously, cradling the phone against his thigh to mute what they said, "Remember…" he hesitated and sighed, "remember when you asked me if I had any more siblings and I said no?"

"Justin!"

The boy bit his bottom lip, "I lied."

"Justin…" it was Brian’s turn to squeeze the bridge of his nose to ward off a headache. As far as he had believed, Justin was the younger brother of Brad, a now-dead sexual psychopath snuff porn director with a tendency toward trading young blonde boys (including his baby brother) to paying perverts, Cameron, the first female assassin Brian had ever met with balls bigger than the sun, and Will, the most normal, besides Justin, as a runaway former con-artist. Now the boy was claiming another? What would Julian be like? A pyromaniac? A klepto?

"Can he stay here a few days?" Justin asked meekly, lifting the phone only slightly before putting it back down. He knew his family’s track record was not a good one where sanity was concerned.

Brian stared uncomprehendingly at Justin. Things had finally gone back to normal. They didn’t need another addition; not only to their lives but to the loft! To their privacy, their sanctuary.

Their place to hide.

"Is there a reason you didn’t tell me about him?" Brian asked, surprised at how calm his voice was.

Justin chewed his lip and nodded.

"Well, what’s he like?"

"He’s … like me …"

"Like you?"

"Kind of …" Justin shrugged, eyes downcast.

"Kind of? I need something more solid than that, Justin."

"It’s a really, really, REALLY long story, Bri."

"Then I hope he’s not on a cell phone because the tack on all the minutes it will take for you to tell me such a long story will be a real bitch and I have a feeling he won’t have much of a day job where legality is concerned," Brian said, crossing his arms over his chest. This wasn’t just for his own safety but for Justin’s as well. Brad Taylor had been as hazardous to Brian’s health as his cousin Sullivan was to Justin’s. It was better to leave any new relations out.

"Brian…" Justin sighed, "I didn’t tell you about him because…I was…jealous…"

"Jealous of Julian?" Brian asked, curiosity almost outweighing his practicality.

"Of how you would react to him. He was a bastard when we were growing up…older than his age but never more mature. He left with Brad when dad kicked him out; those two were the most alike. He was claiming that he had already had sex with many men and didn’t care about living on his own. I kept in touch with him for awhile out of sheer stupidity that any family was good family but then everything stopped. Knowing what I do now about Brad’s love of underage flesh peddling I had thought that maybe Julian had been traded off … but I guess he has Will’s traveling spirit and he just up and left Brad’s place, too."

"So what does that have to do with how I see him? I’ve met the rest of them and survived, he sounds pretty mild in comparison…"

Justin looked at Brian seriously and said, "Because he’s my twin."

\*

Brian’s mouth dropped open but no words came.

"Only … that’s the only thing we ever had in common. Take Brad’s … entrepreneurial interest in sex, Cam’s knack for bloody vengeance, Will’s eye for vulnerable people to take advantage of, and you’re still nowhere near how vindictive he can be. Even as a kid, he knew how to make people do exactly as he wanted. It’s the only reason Brad agreed to take him along, I bet. Add the worst parts of Sullivan to the mix and it’s a lot closer but—"

"And you want him to stay HERE? Justin, I don’t even want the guy in fucking Pittsburgh! How long have we struggled to get back to how things used to be?"

Justin raised the phone suddenly so Brian was screaming into it.

"NO! Abso-fucking-lutely not!"

Justin smiled. It had been the answer he had tried to get across to his highly manipulative brother from the start. Now that Brian said it, there was no way for him to twist Justin into saying yes. He got back on the phone, leaving Brian stunned and perplexed at his side.

"Sorry, Julian, he said no. I really tried. Give Cameron a call, maybe she can put you up."

Brian arched an eyebrow curiously. He sidled next to Justin and listened to his brother’s response.

"Sounds like you’ve got quite a paradise all to yourself, Jus. I guess maybe I’ll leave town and continue on my merry way." He said but didn’t sound convincing or convinced that there was not a way back into his brother’s life. But Justin had stopped listening as soon as he told Julian ‘no’. It had been a very hard thing to do when the boys were growing up, to the point of impossible. Now, with Brian at his side and after everything that had happened, Justin found saying no to anyone was not only a privilege but a right to every human being.

"Sure, good to hear from you again. Know you’re alive and all that. Another time. Later," Justin hung up and said, "Yeah, MUCH later. Did I mention that he’s more of Marquis than anyone BUT Marquis can ever get? You see why I don’t add him to my lineage now, right? He may look like me but …"

Brian kissed Justin, "Yes, I do see. Same reason you never told me about the other three: they’re all fucking nuts. Must get it from your dad’s side."

Justin laughed, almost nervously. "Brian, you have no idea."

\*

Two weeks later, the boys had all but forgotten about the pre-dawn phone call. Neither man mentioned it again, to their friends or otherwise.

Justin ran his fingers through the long wet strands of his freshly washed blonde hair, a smile brightening his face. He had many other things on his mind at the moment, and none of them had to do with anything more than Brian returning from work and joining him in a little soap-down.

The shower pelted him with water that had gone from nearly scalding to frigid ice during the last hour he had stood beneath it. The smile widened as Justin’s hands slid down his slick, scrubbed chest. He rubbed his fingers over his cold-hardened nipples and moaned from the deepest recesses of his body. Justin’s hands traveled lower, passed his navel, over the soft flatness of his stomach to settle in the soaking wet public hair around the base of his twitching erection. Another moan echoed against the glass shower stall as his fingers curled around his cock. His mind drifted to Brian, the way the man made him feel with just a look, a breath on his skin…Justin stroked himself slowly, letting the icy water spill down his body over trails of prickly goose bumps.

\*Brian\* Justin thought, \*touching me, running his hands over my body, hovering over my hard nipples…\* He took a shuddering breath as his free hand pinched one nipple and then the other, imagining his lover’s hands in place of his own.

\*Brian\* Justin thought again. Nothing else mattered now. Nobody else.

Justin bit his lip to muffle the cry of pleasure as his hand increased in pace, his thumb swiping up to the head of his dick to slide in the bead of white wetness gleaming at the pulsing slit.

\*Brian\* Justin thought once more with a throaty moan, centering on the man’s hot tongue; the way it felt in his memory in comparison to the cold water as Brian trailed down the smooth expanse of Justin’s chest was almost as good as reality.

He heard the loft door open and slam shut, heard Brian launch his briefcase into the far regions of the living room. Justin knew his lover would be tired after a long day at work, sweaty from the heat of grid locked traffic. The blonde could see the weathered form of the man already; his tie loosened, shirt unbuttoned, zipper down, shoes kicked away. Perfect.

Justin grinned, reluctantly dropping his hand away from his achingly tense organ. Brian would fix it for him. Justin stepped out of the shower but didn’t turn off the water, padding with bare feet over the bathroom floor with anticipation to meet Brian. To his surprise, Brian stood in the bathroom doorway, propped against the frame, a right cheeky grin on his face.

The man grabbed a fistful of Justin’s hair and pushed him back into the shower, tie still around his neck, pants riding loosely on his hips, shirt flapping around him, socks instantly drenched. Brian gave a surprised yell at the temperature of the water but Justin was too tempting a prize to wait for more hot water.

The blonde let himself be thrown against the stall, eagerly accepting Brian’s tongue into his mouth while his rough hands jerked Brian’s clothes away from his body. Justin didn’t dare breathe as he fought to stay connected with their tongues entwined. He was glad his lover wore a button-down shirt and not anything that had to go over his head.

The pants fell easily enough, as if accustomed to the actions required of being in Master Kinney’s services. Justin slid the sodden shirt off the man’s tan shoulders; the cloth landing with a muffled splat on the tiled floor.

"Mmm…" Brian muttered into Justin’s mouth, feeling the boy’s cock slipping provocatively against his thigh.

Justin whipped the tie from around Brian’s neck and let it fall like a limp snake to meet the shirt. It was by far the only thing flaccid inside that shower.

"Missed you," Justin smirked as he finally broke away.

"Cold water does nothing to deter a hard-on, they all lied." Brian replied gratefully.

"Right." Justin nodded, licking a thin line under Brian’s jaw. "You’re all sweaty." He said. "I can take care of that," he promised, taking the bar of soap from its ledge and sliding a slick line over Brian’s hairless chest.

"See that you do." Brian grinned. He pulled the boy close again, the soap between them jumping with a wet pop into the air. It landed at their feet, spinning wildly.

"Let me get that." Justin mused, rubbing his cheek over the afternoon shadow of stubble on Brian’s chin.

"I have no intention of stopping you…" Brian whispered huskily, unable to keep the lust from clouding his voice. His eyes devoured the boy as Justin leaned slowly over, pressing the back of his milky-white thigh over Brian’s cock as if there wasn’t plenty of room to maneuver in the shower without touching. The man groaned with ecstasy and grabbed Justin around the waist, pinning him against the wall once more.

"Forget the soap," he muttered, grabbing the lube from it’s special place beside the shampoo and thumbing open the lid.

Brian growled, a low and feral sound that raised the hairs on the back of Justin’s neck. He leaned against the boy, his body the entire length of his young lover’s and thrumming with an energy only Justin could bring forth. Rubbing his cock back and forth teasingly over the wet crevice of Justin’s ass, Brian nipped playfully at Justin’s earlobe.

Justin gave a cry of shock but could do nothing to stop the raucous smile that showed Brian just how much he enjoyed being trapped beneath his lover.

"Ready?" Brian asked, squirting the flavored lube between his twitching cock and the blonde’s plentiful cheeks.

"You have to ask?" Justin moaned, thrusting his hips backwards. "You really must be tired…perhaps we should stop —"

Brian answered by shoving his dick passed the first ring of muscle and pausing so the blonde could adjust, putting his mouth right up against Justin’s ear. "I never want to hear you say that again," he hissed sibilantly.

"I promise," Justin whispered against the shower stall, lips trembling with a tremor that had nothing to do with the water temperature.

Brian pushed further into the boy, a low chuckle rumbling in his throat, "Oh, and I missed you, too."

Justin answered with a soft laugh of his own, craning his neck until his lips met Brian’s. The two seemed to suck life right out of each other, sharing the same breath in and out, in and out in time with Brian’s purposeful thrusts, desperate for any and all contact to each other’s bodies. The blonde moaned and it was swallowed by Brian, echoing in his deepest caverns and ricocheting back into Justin’s mouth.

Suddenly, Brian had to pull away; he could no longer breathe enough in through his nose. His limbs shook violently. The cold water did not produce steam but the air was suddenly thick, dizzying, pulling against every string of consciousness the man had. He felt his forehead press against Justin’s slick back but he couldn’t stop there, his legs giving up and shoving him against his lover. Justin’s knees buckled out from under the added weight of Brian’s limp body despite the help of the wall beneath him and the two toppled in a heap to the shower floor, panting for a gulp of clean air.

The remnants of the airborne chloroform dissipated sullenly, slowly, wafting away in small increments but the man who introduced it into the small enclosure walked into the bathroom to survey his prizes without hindrance. He wore the collar of a thick turtle-neck sweater over his mouth and nose and that was enough. Brian and Justin weren’t so lucky.

Justin’s hair fell into his eyes, over his cheeks and forehead, his breathing shallow, his mind and body forced to sleep. Brian’s eyelids fluttered open in time to see a dark, lone figure standing just outside the glass doors. As his vision fell under a thick gauze of gray film Brian thought dimly, ‘…drugged us. He drugged us…did a damn good job, too.’

And then he, too, went out.

\*

"I thought you had class today, honey," Emmett said, a forkful of scrambled eggs halfway to his mouth, forgotten for the moment it took to stare at the blonde.

Julian beamed at the man with a dazzling, light-up-the-room smile. He knew enough about Justin to fill his twin’s shoes perfectly. All it took was a little coaxing to his father that he was a changed man, that his behavior as a child was all Brad’s doing. Craig Taylor seemed more than happy to blame Brad for everything that went wrong with his sons.

"Canceled. Somebody spilled paint thinner all over the second floor studios and the entire building reeks of it," the blonde shuddered and sat down in an empty seat behind Emmett, the booth being full already despite the lack of morning rush and the nearby deserted tables; Ben, Emmett and Ted on one side, Lindsay and Melanie on the other with Gus between them in a booster chair. Michael was nowhere to be seen.

"Of course," Julian added thoughtfully, "if I had stayed any longer I would have come up with something worthy of competition with Dali or Picasso…" Julian rolled his eyes back in the lids, eyelids fluttering to demonstrate how intoxicating the make-believe fumes were.

"Where’s Brian?" Lindsay asked.

Julian looked at her. The only thing he didn’t know was who was who. His father knew their names but wasn’t forthcoming in detailed descriptions. As far as he knew, Emmett was Brian.

"He’s missing," Michael said suddenly from behind them, Will Taylor at his side.

"What?" Julian asked, "I just saw him."

"Well he’s not at work and he isn’t answering his cell. We tried the loft. Nothing." Michael said sternly, worry already creasing his brow.

"Justin, you knew Julian was in town, right?" Will asked.

"Julian? Yeah, but I—"

"Why didn’t you say something?" Michael demanded.

"Michael, I’m sure he’s fine, I—"

"What’s going on? Who’s Julian?" Lindsay asked, mirroring Michael’s concern.

Will answered, "Julian is one more person we’d like to forget."

Julian scowled but quickly recovered before his big brother noticed. "He’s my twin."

Michael nodded, "And he and Brian didn’t tell us."

"I didn’t think he would do anything. Fuck, I still don’t think that he…Michael, how many times have you tried to get a hold of Brian over the passed years and not been able to?" the blonde asked, purely guessing but skilled at reading the reactions of other people, professionally able to read their pasts by what knowledge they provided unconsciously.

"I guess you’re right," Michael sighed.

"Try him again in a half hour, I’m sure he just stopped off at the gym before work. He mentioned something about getting some aggressions out," Julian smiled, thinking back to Justin’s lover’s positively rude negative on providing a place to stay.

"Isn’t it your job to work those out for him?" Michael joked.

"Isn’t it yours to stay out of our personal lives?" Julian countered easily, arching an eyebrow at the small man.

"Obviously someone isn’t doing something at that loft to reduce stress…" Emmett quipped to Ted and then said to Julian in defense of Michael, "no need to jump down his throat, Justin, he was kidding."

"What’s his name?" Will asked, nodding to the dark haired boy between Melanie and Lindsay.

"What?" Julian asked.

"The baby’s name. And who’s the father?"

"What the fuck is your problem?"

Will shook his head and tried another angle, "What side did Jacob Maloney hit you at prom?"

"The right, dummy! What the fuck—" Julian stopped, the crowd around him in shock. Obviously he hadn’t learned enough about Justin to escape another seasoned pro in the con world. It was useless to keep up the act. He got to his feet and shrugged with a grin. "It was worth a try."

"Everyone, this is Julian. Julian, where is Brian?"

Another shrug, "Don’t know."

"Where is Justin?"

"Don’t know,"

"Bullshit me and see what happens!" Will snarled seriously, wrenching his brother’s shirt at the shoulder and dragging him to the counter, slamming him down on one of the stools.

"I’m not bullshitting you!" Julian yelled.

Debbie came out of the kitchen at the sound of Sunshine shouting and gasped, "Will, what are you doing?"

"It’s not Justin, mom! It’s \*Julian\*, Justin’s brother! Like we needed two, but this one is even worse than Justin…" Michael said, surprise still prevalent on his face. "You’re never going to believe what Will told me on the way over! When he couldn’t get a hold of Brian to check up on them, Will got worried and called me instead…well, look!" he gestured at Julian.

"Howdy, ma’am," Julian nodded to Debbie.

"Oh, my…" Debbie sat down at the nearest booth.

"I don’t want to ask you again, Julian,"

"Then don’t ask again. I don’t know where they are. I figured I would play for awhile before Justin got here and then say hello. No harm in saying hi to my brother, is there?"

"Why didn’t they tell us about him?" Debbie asked no one but herself.

"Like I said before, he’s not a person we want to remember. Not much better than Brad, are you, Jules?" Will scowled.

"Fuck you, Will. You’re no angel. Quit acting like the saint with unsullied robes!"

"Can you call Justin’s cell, maybe he did go to class." Lindsay suggested.

"Tried. Nothing from Justin at all. I tried him first. They’ve been so damn private these last few months that I didn’t want to spoil their fun. But Justin usually calls me at least once a week and I haven’t heard a thing from him since this asshole called me looking for Justin’s number. Bet you found a way to get it, didn’t you? Because I sure as shit wouldn’t give him to you!" Will growled, looking suspiciously at his father.

"I heard Brad fucked Brian, is that true?" Julian smiled sweetly. "Is he a good piece of ass then? I guess he would have to be if my other half—"

Will twisted the shirt in his fist until it pressed against Julian’s neck and stopped his words. "You listen to me, little bastard. Justin is nothing like you, he couldn’t be more of your opposite if he looked completely different. There is love between those two and it is nothing you or Brad or anyone else could ever break. \*He\* has standards."

"If you don’t let me go, I’ll scream."

"And so what if you do?" Will asked maliciously, frantic to hold onto the one member of his family that had done nothing to merit all the shit rained down upon him, even if it meant demolishing the rest of his kin. "Say someone calls the cops. Do you think I care? Do you think they’ll make it in time to save you from having a luxury seat in the trunk of my car as we go see Bear?"

Julian’s eyes widened at the mention of the name but he put on a brave front. "Bear would never hurt me. I look too much like Justin, that alone would deter him."

Will leaned into his younger brother’s ear, "Guess what, hot shot? Bear no longer plays by those rules. I use him for killing only. I’ll throw you to him and drive away laughing. Bear fucked Justin because he couldn’t resist but he did feel remorse for it. What do you think he would do to you if he got a hand on some of that ass? To him, you are Justin without the sweet innocence and post-coital regret. You are someone he could play with for a very long time and feel nothing for while he destroys you."

"I’m telling you, I don’t know where they are! Honest! Will, please don’t take me to Bear…"

Will bit his tongue until he tasted blood, "If I find out you did anything to harm them I will track you down. I will find you. I will feed you to Bear, Julian, and I too will feel absolutely nothing for your torment. Now get out of here before I change my mind."

"Is he really that bad?" Lindsay shook her head, "I’m having a hard time thinking that someone who looks so much like Justin could merit an assault like that…"

"Trust me, what he can do is nothing compared to anything Brad or Bear or even Sullivan and Marquis could come up with. That kid has a knack for draining a person of every ounce of emotional life and he’ll do it for fun. He looks innocent and that is where his victims make the first mistake, by trusting him they invite him into their lives and he eats them from the inside out. Brad’s little protégé was too much for even him to handle. He is above no torture to get what he wants. He will do to Justin what he does to everyone else if it suits him, brother or not. Fuck," Will sighed, running his fingers through his hair, "if he’s got Brian and Justin then it’s only a matter of time before he takes what he wants and discards the rest like so much waste."

\*

Justin’s body came awake inch by inch. His arms and legs were still numb by the time he found energy to inhale a fresh breath of air. It took quite some time for his brain to recognize that the scent around him was that of safety; the smell of Brian. One eye opened, then the other. But what he saw wasn’t even close to his home. It wasn’t even a decent room, really; its walls were pure cement and cinder block, thick and dead to the world outside. There was one window high above their heads showing that morning had come in a white sliver stretching across the ceiling.

"Brian?" Justin tried to speak but his voice cracked, parched from the air and hours without water. He cleared his throat and said again, "Bri?"

"Hmm?" Brian moved and it was only then that Justin could tell the man was by his side, slightly under his anesthetized limbs.

"Wake up, please," Justin said, desperate to retain control in his quivering voice. \*I don’t want to be alone in this place\* he thought dismally.

"Unamm…." Brian groaned, forcing open eyes that were determined to stay asleep. "Jussinnn…."

"Here we go again," Justin said bitterly. "Bri, did you see who it was?" He scowled. Justin had a pretty good idea exactly who it was behind their kidnapping.

Brian tried to roll onto his side and ended up pulling Justin further onto him; they were bound together at the wrists and ankles.

"Yeah, we’re tied. Are you hurt? I’m not feeling any pain…" Justin said.

"Fuck!" the man hissed and tested the ropes between them. "No, just dizzy. Where are we?"

"I don’t know. I just woke up but it feels like a mattress in a basement. Some concrete structure. I wonder why he’s not here to gloat?"

"Who?"

Justin sighed, "Julian."

"I saw a figure in the bathroom, was it Julian?"

"Who else?" Justin replied bitterly, "Brian, we have to get out of here! I cannot handle—"

Brian cut Justin off before his voice could rise anymore in the panic that was already trying to overwhelm the boy. "We will. We will, baby," he promised. "If we work at it, I think we can get to our feet. Maybe find something to use to cut these ropes?"

"Okay," Justin agreed, believing in his lover’s words.

"Ready? Roll on top of me—"

"Brian!" Justin teased, his mood definitely brightening, "this is neither the time nor place!"

Brian smiled. "Roll on top of me and then keep going so we fall off the bed. Mattress. You said it was a mattress, right? So we’re not too far from the ground?"

"I think we’ll be fine. I can’t feel a head or footboard so, yes, I think it’s not a full frame."

"Julian…he isn’t, you know…he wouldn’t…to you?"

Justin shivered and it sent enough energy through to Brian that the man knew the answer. Yes. Julian would fuck Justin if he decided to. The sick asshole would sodomize his own brother, his twin, if the thought struck him. Brian was not about to let that happen. He had to get Justin out of there.

"Come on, roll." Brian encouraged, pulling Justin toward him by shifting his front against the bed.

Justin did as he was told, sending the lovers crashing onto the floor with a surprising force that stole their breath away. The ground was not only much further than they had planned, but was also made of concrete.

"No head board…but it’s propped up on something." Justin winced, resting his body against the ground with Brian cushioned from most of the blow on top of him. The two fought their way awkwardly to their feet.

"Sorry, Just—" Brian began but froze as the sound of heavy footsteps coming down what had to have been metal stairs reverberated to their ears. \*Shit. Shit. Shit!\* he thought desperately. This was going to end badly. If they didn’t get out of here, he knew it would be over.

When Justin had started to say that he could not handle going through any more torment, Brian believed him. The blonde had been so far gone last time that this time bringing him back would be like pulling teeth from a rose. It would be impossible.

Justin shuddered against Brian at the sound of the footsteps. He shook his head harshly, long blonde hair whipping against his lover’s ears. "No, no, no," Justin whispered, his body gone rigidly still and cold so suddenly that it was like he had been turned to a block of ice. "No, no, no," he repeated over and over, a pleading mantra of denial, "No, no, no."

"Justin, work with me here," Brian begged, unable to go anywhere without his young lover’s cooperation. "Please, baby, help me make it all right. Help me get out of here and nothing bad will happen."

"No, no, no," the blonde whimpered, trembling, his mind already beyond the reaches of Brian’s soothing voice and into the impermeable realm of shock.

"Damn it! Justin, snap out of it! I need you!" Brian hissed as the footsteps moved ominously closer. He tried to walk with Justin tied to his back but the boy instantly swayed and threatened to pull them both back to the cement floor. Brian righted himself and felt his muscles strain painfully from his abdomen down to his groin and thighs as he fought to keep Justin from falling.

An ear-shattering scream pierced the dim silence but it was not human. The heavy wail was no more than a rusted metal door scraping against the hard concrete. It was still enough to make Brian’s heart stop and to silence his terrified, traumatized lover into a stunned nothingness of being.

Brian swallowed the taste of bile that had begun to creep up his throat in sickening fear. He said the first thing that came to mind just to fill the silence, to placate the knowledge that whoever had opened the door was not advancing or threatening their prisoners.

"What do you want?" Brian asked, glad his voice was smooth and collected; unlike the rest of his body which shook as badly as Justin’s, if not more so than his lover from the effort of supporting both bound bodies.

The man — and it was definitely male, Brian decided — laughed heartily. He lingered a moment longer and left without a word, locking the thick door at his back.

"Just fucking great!" Brian groaned. He knew now exactly who held them from listening to the laughter and it was not an appealing thought. Things had just gotten a Hell of a lot worse.

\*\*

Will had not had a fun day. Not only was his little brother missing but he had had to tell his mother about it. Worse yet, he’d had to tell Cameron. And the surprising coup de grace, the most agonizing part of his day, was having to tell his father.

It was true that Craig and Justin weren’t the best of friends but the man had grown more protective since the assault of sadistic bastards came to take the boy for their own. Only the man’s distaste for Brian kept him from making complete amends with Justin.

"You’re sure Julian had nothing to do with this?" Craig asked, his back still turned from Will and the rest of the room as he watched the morning outside turn to afternoon.

"No. I can’t be sure of anything with that kid. If he truly has no part of their being missing, he is still up to -something-," Will sighed.

"So many bad apples…" Craig muttered under his breath.

\*At least the man is consistent, never skips a chance to tell me what a screw-up I am\* Will thought bitterly. \*Bastard\*

Will pretended not to hear the remark. He wasn’t in the mood to take the brunt of his father’s anger. Getting up, he said, "Well, I’m going to head out. Detective Horvath wants to know more about Julian so…"

"I told Julian where Justin was," Craig sighed almost sadly.

Will nodded, thought the man couldn’t’ see it, "I figured. He’s a manipulator. It’s…not your fault."

"You don’t believe that, do you?"

"I believe you want to see the best in your kids, for your kids. Most parents don’t see their children as criminals, as rapists and murderers, even if the evidence stares them straight in the face. If Julian told you he was a better man now, I believe that your heart wanted very much to see it to be true, even if your mind was screaming something different. You can’t help it. Even you have a character flaw. But if it makes you feel any better," Will said nastily from the open door right before slamming it, "you can blame that on your kids too, and actually have it be true."

\*

Julian sniffed his lunch, appetite not what it had been when he ordered twenty minutes ago. \*It’s a fine time to grow a conscience, Julie-boy\* he thought ruefully, pushing a finger through the bread of his sandwich to the plate underneath. \*No, feeling bad is definitely not your style.\* Julian sighed, feeling suddenly that he was not the only person in the area scrutinizing himself.

"Guess a bistro patio isn’t the best place to hide," he said without looking up.

Lindsay answered him, "I thought you had no reason to hide?"

Julian looked from the angry woman to an even more furious teenage boy. "Hi," he said to Mark, looking down at the smaller boy behind them both, the one whose name he hadn’t known at the diner.

"Where are they, asshole?" Mark spat.

"They who?" Julian snapped just as viciously.

"Come on, honey, there’s nothing we can do to him -yet- and he knows it," Lindsay told him, a hand gently on his tense shoulder not only to keep him from attacking Julian but to remind her that she couldn’t do so either.

Julian stood up. "Not that you would believe me even if I denied it until my dying day," he said, "but I’m actually in the middle of wondering why I fucked up my life like this in the first place, why I couldn’t be the good guy for once. In a life of mistrust, it’s hard to break people’s view of you through the past’s eye. If I happen upon my brother, I’ll be sure to tell him you care."

"Fresh out of Oscars, will you accept an Emmy?" Mark snarled.

"Sit on it, kid!" Julian said, taking off down the street at a brisk jog.

As if he had anywhere to go.

\*

"You know, I liked it a lot better when you were chanting, Justin. This silent thing…baby, you’re scaring me. Come on, give me a hearty ‘no, no, no’." Brian pleaded, his fingers working the knot that bound one of his wrists to Justin’s. He tried to crane his neck to see if the boy’s eyes were even open, but even if he was flexible enough, the room’s small window was losing light fast.

\*He’s still standing, he’s still breathing,\* Brian reminded himself. \*That has to be enough for now.\*

The man felt his heart leap with joy as the thick rope gave under his cramping fingers and released his right hand. Brian flexed his fingers a few times and then twisted at the hips to face his other wrist; Justin’s back, his head set hard in one position, not seeming to register any of his lover’s escape efforts.

Justin’s body began to pitch forward and Brian pulled the boy against his chest, back bowed, bringing their bound wrists across Justin’s chest to meet Brian’s free hand. This close to his lover’s heart, Brian could feel the hammering pulse just under the skin beating frantically to get out.

"Don’t you dare do this to me, Justin!" Brian said urgently, kissing the too-cold cheek. A slight taste of sweat lingered on his tongue; the taste that of many horrid nightmares Brian had soothed before. "If you have a heart attack out of stress …damn it, Justin, I will never forgive you!"

"Him," the boy whimpered, a sound so low Brian never would have heard it had his ear not been pressed so close to Justin’s lips, "Him, him, it was him?!?"

"It’s going to be okay, Justin. Do you hear me?" Brian asked sternly. He didn’t know which ’he’ Justin was referring to but he didn’t want to confirm any of the boy’s fears.

Justin began to weep quietly, a frightened child who awoke from a bad dream only to find that it wasn’t a dream at all.

Brian tried to focus on getting the second knot to give no matter how much his heart ached to comfort the pitiful cries. He tugged on the rope vehemently and it was all he could do to stop himself from crowing in triumph as the mass fell away. He brought Justin’s right wrist to his lips and kissed the raw skin.

"See," he said, "Halfway there! I need you to stand on your own now. Can you do that for me, Justin?"

The boy mumbled and rolled his face away from Brian’s.

"Justin, can you stand? Can you stand, Justin? Stand? Justin?" Brian said, each repetition more forceful than the last. "Justin, stand."

"’kay," the blonde whispered sleepily.

"Good, I’m going to let you go and—"

"No! Brian!" Justin wailed in a panic, coming out of his reverie suddenly awake and realizing that his lover would be leaving the embrace.

"I’ll be right here. I have to untie our feet so we can get out of here. Don’t you want to go home?"

"Brian?"

"I’m here."

"Don’t leave me…"

"I will be right here. We’re tied together, baby. I will not leave you," Brian promised, spacing his words evenly and clearly. He didn’t know what percent of Justin’s alertness could be contributed to a new state of shock and what was actually sinking into his lover’s rational mind.

"Okay…" Justin said warily.

"Okay," Brian agreed, letting Justin stand on his own and turning back around, bending at the waist so he could get at the ropes. \*Keep him talking,\* Brian told himself.

"Say there’s this White Party after-orgy…there are fifty hot young studs there—"

"We’re there?"

"Of course we are! Now, if twenty studs have already copped off together, fifteen are boffed out of their minds on E, and ten are undercover cops trying to ruin the party, how many studs are left on the dance floor?"

Justin looked behind him and made out the silhouette of Brian’s hair. "None," he said.

"None?" Brian asked worriedly, "Justin, there would be—"

"If they’re at an after party orgy, no one is going to be anywhere near the dance floor…the fifteen—that’s all ten troublemaking cops and the five who haven’t been fucked or drugged— will all be in our bed." Justin replied soberly.

Brian chuckled, "And where will we be?"

"Making love on the balcony…"

"Glad to have you back, baby."

Justin swallowed, "I freaked out back there…the footsteps…I couldn’t handle thinking that…I’m sorry."

"Don’t be. You’re all right now and the only thing I want you to worry about is staying that way." He stood up and wrapped his arms freely around Justin’s waist, now agile feet standing on either side of the boy’s.

"But he left? Didn’t do anything?"

"No, and I don’t know why, but it’s been at least an hour since he came in."

"Then let’s get out of here before he comes back," Justin said.

"Yeah, I had thought that would be our next course of action."

"The door’s locked?"

"Yep, I heard it."

"We’ll try it anyway," Justin said, not going an inch until he was sure Brian was moving with him. He checked the door with a sigh of defeat. "Okay, so lift me up to the window, maybe I can break it?"

"It’s too small for us to climb out."

"We might be able to see someone and yell to them…or at least find out where we are."

"Yeah," Brian said, hoisting the boy up with laced fingers under the bare feet.

"Well, hell," Justin sighed, resting his chin on the narrow sill, "I don’t see any people…"

"So where are we?"

"I’ll give you one guess…"

\*

\*Might as well get laid,\* Julian thought dismally, eyes scanning the heavy crowd on Liberty Avenue. \*I am so bored…there’s nothing to do for fun around here until Justin…no, no, I can make fun on my own. No problem!\* Julian’s mind suddenly stopped functioning, his eyes resting on a devastatingly handsome man leaning against a lamp post. With his lungs refusing to take in air, his blood rushing to the new organ in charge, Julian felt a tremor of desire grip his body and nearly knock him to his feet.

More than simply eyeing the man, Julian found himself unable to look away. He was trapped in the dark gaze meeting his own, in the hungry desire of pure animalistic lust. He had never before been held like this, enveloped so deeply that he could not find even a thought upstairs to get angry with himself for falling for a complete stranger who he had not seen or spoken to in his life.

Love had never come so easily to Julian. He forgot everything else in the world as his feet dragged him toward the man. For the first time, Julian finally shared feelings that Justin had known before, known when he and Brian first met and kept knowing as the years went by. He was in front of the man before he was even sure that he could string the words of a sentence together.

"Hi," Julian said.

"Where’s your partner in crime?" the man asked.

"My…oh," Julian frowned, "You mean Brian?"

"Ye-eesss…"

"He’s around…"

"I see. So we’re on speaking terms again? That’s interesting."

"I’m not—"

"Justin! Bria—" Michael shouted through the crowd but stopped short when he got closer to the street post. "Fucking CHRIST!"

"Oh, goodness…" Emmett gasped, followed by Ted, his mouth open wide in shock.

Julian arched an eyebrow, matching his intended trick’s confused stare. He looked at the dark man and shrugged.

"This is Brian?" Julian asked. "I thought he was missing?"

"Sullivan Kinney," the man held out his hand, "I take it you were about to tell me that you weren’t Justin, then?"

"Julian Taylor," he said and took Sullivan’s hand.

"For crying out loud!" Michael groaned. "Both of you, in the diner, now!"

"And I take orders from you now?" Sullivan asked snidely. "I don’t recall ever falling into the lowest space on the food chain, Novotny!"

Julian smiled, "I was going to say that…except not Novotny, I don’t know who the fuck he is."

"You’ll do what he says or I’ll blow you a new asshole," Will threatened, his gun pressed into Sullivan’s back.

"My, how assertive you’ve become, Will!" Julian laughed. "If your balls get any bigger we might finally be able to locate them!"

Sullivan laughed until Will shoved the gun harder, "Move!"

"Whatever you did to Justin, I’m in no hurry to get him back as a replacement," Sullivan said with a wink, leaning in to brush his lips over Julian’s ear. "Innocence gets so old sometimes…"

"Get on with it!" Will ordered as Michael held the door to the diner open for the parade.

Detective Horvath and Debbie looked up in surprise.

"Lindsay was right, he still hasn’t left town." Michael said.

"Because I’m fucking -innocent-!" Julian whined.

"So where -are- the glory boys?" Sullivan asked.

"They were hoping you would know, I’m guessing," Julian said.

"Where’d you stash Jeff Reeves?" Michael asked.

"Good cop that he is, let me go with a warning fuck…I mean, a fucking warning…" Sullivan grinned, "He never showed up, actually. I got loose from that wall after a few days and no one was around to collect me so I went to get a shower and a cheeseburger," he shrugged.

"Liar! Where did you bury him?" Will growled.

Julian felt heat rush to his cheeks and then plummet straight to his cock. He swallowed and tried to not look as affected as he was. Dangerous -and- cute? Not the worst he could do in a night.

"So your fearless leader and Angelface," Sullivan looked at Julian appraisingly, as if picking the boy from an entourage of royal concubines, "are missing and the one time that I had absolutely -nothing- to do with it, you accuse me of kidnapping them? That doesn’t exactly seem fair…"

"Tell me about it! I come home after years of being practically banished and automatically, just because my visit coincides with their disappearance, -I- get blamed for it!" Julian complained. Both men turned practiced and perfected innocent faces to their foes.

"And besides," Sullivan said, moving away from Will to stand behind Julian, draping an arm across the boy’s chest, "If either one of us had my cousin or his…brother?" he asked and the blonde nodded, "brother, obviously, why would we be here looking for some fun when we’ve got two fine victims to play with?"

"Good point," Julian smiled.

"Not good enough," Horvath said, standing up. "I’ve heard some pretty interesting stories about you two. Especially you, Kinney."

"I’m scared, really I am," Sullivan smirked.

Will rolled his eyes. This was going to take awhile.

\*

Brian eased Justin down and looked imploringly at the boy, "I don’t know; where are we, Justin?"

The blonde scoffed as if it was completely obvious, his voice a high lilt teetering on the edge of hysterics, "Dark Starr Productions. Brad’s illegal sex club."

"Should have known," Brian groaned, drawing his lover to his chest.

"Never knew this place had more than one basement, especially one with only a mattress and no torture devices or cameras."

"I guess the guided tours skipped that part."

"Yeah," Justin sighed, "Brian, do you think that we’ll…get out of this unscathed?" Justin asked softly, trying unsuccessfully to suppress a shudder.

"Is being completely naked and feeling a little vulnerable considered unscathed?"

"Sure."

"Then yes, we’ll be fine," Brian squeezed his frightened lover.

"Brian?" Justin whispered.

"Mmm?"

"I’m feeling much more than a little vulnerable."

"Yeah, me too."

Justin molded his body to Brian’s and returned the hug, hoping to convey all the safety and protection back to the man that he was feeling from the embrace. "How are we going to get out of here?"

Brian brushed his lips into the warm, feathery hair, happy that Justin’s temperature was returning to normal after the shock wore off. The fresh scent of soap and sweat flooded his senses, scenes from their earlier shower exploits suddenly rushing back to him like a hot wash of blissful steam; the way Justin’s mouth opened against the wall, breath fogging in quick gasps, the cold water, the way the boy’s body reacted to his every touch. Justin flesh had been so frozen on the outside, icy rivulets weeping greedily down his firm, flawless flanks. But inside, the blonde was so hot, so incredibly tight, the familiar closeness enveloping Brian’s engorged cock like a flesh vice…

Justin arched an eyebrow and could practically feel his lover blushing an apology for the new prodding stiffness shoving its way between them. Neither would dare pull away from the other, as if they clung to life itself by being together. The intimate embrace was a comfort all its own, something they both needed to ward away the fearful unknown, something to stay safe, but there could always be more than arms touching.

"Bri?"

"Sorry, Jus, I was—"

"I know. Fuck me."

"What?" the word was out of his mouth before the request reached his hard on, though the surprise wore off rapidly well when Justin’s request leapt from one brain to the other. There was no objection from down below.

Never was.

"I said, fuck me. Please, Brian, fuck me? I…" Justin’s hands rubbed soft circles over the man’s shoulders, as if his hands could transmit the dire need his words could not. "Before he comes back?"

Brian knew he should waver with practicality and caution for their current situation but the danger of being caught was far too arousing to bother with such trivial things as discretion.

"Please? He’s been gone a long time and…" the blonde trailed off. He didn’t want to explain that he needed the only thing that kept him sane, the things only his lover’s most intimate touch could secure. "Ple—"

Brian silence the boy with a deep kiss that was stole the very breath from his lungs. Justin moaned huskily, legs moving of their own volition toward the raised mattress as his arms locked around Brian’s neck. One tingling, energy numbed ankle caught on the foam edge and the pair were sent crashing to the clothed springs, more interested in keeping the contact than bracing for impact, and landed haphazardly as one.

Brian ran the fingers of his right hand delicately up and down Justin’s side, goose bumps prickling on the skin beneath him, a relaxed, laughing sigh erupting from his lover as a reward for the soothing caresses.

"Yes," Justin encouraged, lips a whisper of breath beneath Brian’s. He threw his head back into the mattress, spine bowed, knees locking straight as the man repeated the gentle touch over and over.

Brian licked the lush lips fleetingly, traveling down the boy’s beloved chest, stomach, leaving marks of burning wet kisses behind. Justin vaulted impossibly higher off the bed, back arched to the breaking point as his fingers clawed viciously into the thin, worn cloth. Brian’s lusty, shallow breath hovered above the golden patch of pubic hair and the boy’s turgid cock. His tongue snapped out and slid up the underside of Justin’s dick, skimming the head torturously slow.

"AH!" the blonde gasped, his worries and fears fading into a hazy gray wool of warmth.

Brian moved back to the thick base and sucked the tight skin fiercely, pulling to just this side of pain, then heading back toward the leaking slit without breaking the tormenting suction, each inch of hard flesh left tingling and sensitive in his wake. He stopped before reaching the head, taking Justin’s cock in his hand and burying his lips into the kinky hair, starting the ruthless ascent all over again from the other side until no flesh was left un-adored.

Justin plowed his fingers through Brian’s tousled hair, raking his nails, shuddering, over the man’s scalp. "Please, please, ooh my…ungh…yesssss!" he whimpered, hips using every ounce of strength and control to keep from bouncing off the bed and going through the back of Brian’s skull.

Brian increased his merciless pull over the slit, milking the boy’s cock of precum, tongue swirling in the liquid treasure as it coated his mouth and throat.

Justin gasped raggedly, writhing on the old foam. He made small, helpless sounds as his mind separated from the physical world, lulling into a state of heavenly eroticism. Numbly, Justin felt his lover’s agile hands massaging his achingly tight balls as the hot, devoted mouth greedily consumed his pearly cum.

Brian took the boy’s juices with a final kiss to the throbbing hard on, relishing in the salty bitterness that overwhelmed his taste buds. He slicked his tongue with the natural lubrication and brought his mouth down to Justin’s twitching hole.

Justin groaned, carnal and roughly feral, thrashing on the bed in a frenzy, his insides threatening to explode in a fiery agony as Brian teased the opening with his probing tongue. "Briaaaaannn!" he begged desperately.

The man ginned wickedly. He shoved Justin’s legs apart, opening the boy for further pleasured manipulations, then forced his tongue as far as it would go.

"AHHHH!" Justin wailed, limbs convulsing in violent rapture.

Brian stroked the pale skin surrounding his prize, knowing that every touch set the boy on fire and made him forget the mess they were in. He took his mouth from Justin’s body and moved up the length of his taut body, once more making their lips an electric union, his hand slipping between their slick bodies to guide his pulsing cock home. The wonderful closeness took him in, sent shooting stars of heat to the ends of his being. A languorous moan escaped his lips as he threw his head back, muscles straining to both collapse under his weight and to begin the monstrous thrusts that would lead to an unending paradise; a place he found happiness in even out of bed, as long as Justin was by his side.

"Holy Hell," Brian whispered over Justin’s lips, waiting for the blonde’s muscles to adjust to the lengthy intrusion. Fucking the boy never got old, never got boring. Was that what love meant? Having a whole new sense of life every morning, every breath, every time they touched? Didn’t matter…love…Brian had more urgent things on his mind. He was already so close and judging by the uncontrolled mewling breaking free in near-sobs from his Sunshine, Justin wasn’t far behind.

Justin hugged Brian closer with his legs as if trying to absorb him completely into his body, his pores, his bloodstream; a drug that was too delectably addicting to give up. Brian took the hint and began to thrust into the hot hole, inhumanly slow, his body trembling with the effort to control himself. Justin’s vision grew starry in the darkness, his abdomen tightening with a spectacular fire every time his lover’s rough pubic hair brushed against his painfully constricted balls. He dug his heels into Brian’s back, knowing somewhere in the hidden corners of his rational mind that the man would bruise in the morning. It wouldn’t be the first time.

Nor the last.

Brian urged himself deeper and deeper, over and over, fast and breathtakingly faster. Justin panted beneath him, moaning and thrashing from the intense sensations rolling in wild torrents from his leaking cock to tingling lips, his entire body swaying on the edge of bliss every time Brian pushed against his sensitive prostate. A feral scream built between them like a curling tidal wave and erupted from Brian’s lips, tore from Justin’s throat, exploded from their hard cocks with a blinding, brutally delicious orgasm.

"Fan…" Brian struggled for air, melting bonelessly on top of Justin, "fucking…tastic."

Justin nodded, tried to say "thanks, loverboy", but couldn’t form words. He rest his face against the crook of the man’s shoulder, caressing Brian’s sweat glazed spine until the man shivered with the afterglow, lifting his head in a barely conscious reaction. Justin smiled and found enough strength to say "sleep", his eyes losing the battle to stay open. He felt good, better. For all he knew or cared at the moment, they were in Brian’s loft, warm and comfortable.

And safe. Most importantly; safe.

But for how long?

\*

Jennifer Taylor waited until her ex-husband took a seat —as far away from everyone else as he could get without leaving the empty diner— before she chose a place next to Debbie. The fact that her family reunions would never make the Brady’s look bad, that in all actuality the Taylor’s were in the running for the next Dahmer or Manson cover story, had not been lost on her. Seeing Cameron and Will armed to the teeth, well, she knew somebody wasn’t going to make it through hurting Justin. Not this time.

"Looks like we’re all here," Cam said, shifting a shotgun on her lap, staring at Will asking silent permission to be lethal. She wouldn’t have minded putting a few persuasive holes in Sullivan Kinney to make him start talking. She added, "I say we kill one of them for incentive."

"Mom, Craig," Will said pointedly, ignoring his sister, "Justin and Brian are missing, as you already know; coincidentally, Sullivan just showed up without the police escort we set up for him right after Julian popped up out of nowhere looking to catch up with his twin. Of course, we caught him playing the part of ‘good half’ with the Liberty crew AS SOON AS Justin went missing. Suspicious? We think so."

"You’re not being fair!" Julian complained. "You don’t even know if they were taken at all! What if they decided on an impromptu vacation? Do they tell you everything? Maybe they needed a break, you said they’ve been private lately…or, what if they WERE kidnapped but not from the loft? You said the last you spoke with them, they were at home but do they stay there indefinitely? They DO leave every now and then, I’m sure. You don’t’ know Justin and Brian weren’t grabbed separately and at different times, or even the exact moment that they were gone! How can you accuse us when you have no clue if they’re even really in trouble?"

"That would have made it easy for you to do it, if you got them one at a time," Michael mused.

"Unless I did it," Sullivan grinned.

"Did you?" Julian asked with a smile.

"No," Sullivan shrugged, "Why would I take Brian? I’m only interested in one half of that duo and my cousin isn’t it." He laughed, full-throated, "And before you all think it, Julian and I only met tonight so we couldn’t have premeditated a crime of this magnitude without communication. He didn’t pretend to be Justin to drug Brian while I took Angel by force, it’s just not logical! You’re all grasping at some pretty thin straws, I can see it in your faces. And again, I ask you, if I had Justin, what would I be doing here LOOKING for hi— uh…a toy to play with?"

"And why did he start talking to me like he hadn’t seen me in awhile? If Sullivan had Justin, why didn’t he act like I had escaped?"

"If it makes a difference, Julian did ask if Sullivan was Brian, like he hadn’t seen him before, and Sullivan looked disappointed and shocked to find out he wasn’t talking to Justin…" Michael said.

"I wouldn’t say ‘disappointed’," Sulli grinned wickedly.

Julian returned the smile, "So see, we’re innocent!"

"I still don’t believe you had nothing to do with it," Will growled at Julian.

"Neither do I," Cam said.

"I do," Craig muttered suddenly.

"So do I," Jennifer nodded.

A stunned silence fell over the diner like a heavy quilt. Sullivan broke the shocked quiet quickly, "Faith in one’s children is all very well and good, folks, but it ain’t helping to find your boys. Why don’t you let me and Julian go walk around, ask our fellow street urchins for gossip?"

"Bear’s got the street. Plus, I don’t trust either of you out of my sight," Will said.

"Bear?" Sulli laughed, nearly falling over, "BEAR??? Oh, for crying out loud…I’ve calmed down, honest. If I found them, I would tell you!" He turned the patented innocent look to his skeptical audience once more, "My cruel and torturous ways have vanished. Gone to the past! You can TRUST me!" He laughed at the ridiculousness of his own words, "Oh, come on, Will, look at the last time I got my…hands on Justin. It wasn’t by force, he came willingly…over and over and…Never mind. The point is, he came voluntarily…even if it was after I paid that little bitch-boy to kiss Brian as soon as Angel walked in the door, already sensitive and mentally unstable…um, because of me…but he practically ran right into my arms!"

"You PAID that ASSHOLE!!!!" Michael shouted.

Sullivan shook his head, chuckling, "Naïve, Novotny," he winked conspiratorially at Julian and the boy smiled wide as if he understood the secret, "Listen, kids, if I took them, it would have to be by surprise, right? They would shoot me if they saw me coming! How would I have done it? Drugged them in the shower? Come ON! I’m not that vengeful!"

Julian laughed, "Yeah, so we’re innocent! I don’t even know where they live! I bet it would be a hard place to break into."

"But not impossible," Sulli added, smiling until his cheeks looked like they would split.

"Oh, right! Of course, not impossible. If one had the right tools and desire and expertise—"

"Enough," Horvath said and stood, "Kinney’s coming to the station. We’ve all been very interested in how he escaped and whether he would be returning to finish his term."

"Want to know how I escaped?" Sulli got to his feet, "I could SHOW you—"

Will and Cameron trained their guns on the Southern man.

Horvath grabbed Sulli’s collar. "The rest of you, go home. Let the police handle this."

"What about Julian!?" Will protested.

"We can’t book him on hearsay, he’s free to go,"

"Thanks!" Julian said, surprised, leaving as fast as his feet could take him.

"Don’t let the door hit ya where the Lord split ya, Sugah!" Sullivan called after the blonde as Carl cuffed him.

"Carl!" Debbie cried out, "You can’t just let him leave!"

"I’m sorry, Deb." Horvath said again, "My hands are tied. I can’t see any plausible reason to question him further."

Carl had stood by while the eldest Taylor siblings used illegal weapons for intimidation and that alone could cost him a suspension. If Will got any angrier and Julian was still in the room, Horvath wasn’t sure if he could keep the diner from becoming a murder scene. Things were quickly going to Hell. He knew this would not end well.

\*

The footsteps woke Brian as he lay in an ecstasy-induced sleep. He rose on one elbow and listened passed the thundering pulse in his ears. \*Coming closer…\* he thought dismally.

"Justin, wake up."

"Hunh?" the boy stirred.

"He’s coming," Brian got off the bed and hoisted Justin to his feet, "C’mon, get up. When he opens the door, I’ll jump him. I want you to run, get help."

"Bri—"

"No arguments. It’s the only way," Brian ordered.

"I can take Julian. Or we could bring him down together, there’s no need to split up!"

Brian swallowed hard. After Justin’s reaction to just waking up here, unknowing who was coming for them, Brian didn’t want to put the boy into a phobic relapse. But he needed a reason to run. "Baby, it’s not Julian."

"Who?" Justin whispered, voice quivering.

"You have to be careful. You being naked, all those scumbags wondering around out there…"

"Who?" Justin demanded.

Brian cleared his throat but said nothing; instead he dragged his lover to the door and pressed himself against the wall by the thick, locked handle.

"Everyone but Sullivan is dead, right? If it’s not Julian—"

"Ssh!"

Justin lowered his voice, stubborn determination outweighing fear. "Right, Brian? Marquis, Kriegg and Lito…Bradley…is it Bear? He wouldn’t! Not again…"

Brian reached behind him and cupped his hand over Justin’s mouth, "Get ready to run," he whispered. "This might be our only chance."

\*

Julian felt the cold, heavy weight in his hand, squeezing it until his knuckles went white. His mind turned in all directions, every time landing at the same train of thought: \*I am going to hit a cop with a tire iron from his own trunk. A COP. I slashed the front driver’s side tire so I could sneak up behind him and smash his skull into his brain. Am I sure I want to do this? For a man I’ve never met? I don’t know what it is about him that makes me want to risk my own ass for his and I’m still going to bust him free? Yes? Sure? Okay then.\*

He shoved his back against the side wall of the diner and listened as Horvath said his goodbyes and Sullivan shouted promises to see everyone again soon and that he’d write everyday from the inside of his minimum security resort.

"In the back, Kinney," Horvath ordered.

Julian closed his eyes, took a deep breath. A car door opened.

"Well, of course, officer! Otherwise the gear shift gets in the way of our naked and thrashing bodies!"

Julian smirked. The door closed and Horvath was left muttering to himself. \*Now or never.\*

"Son of a bitch!" Horvath yelled.

Julian slipped around the corner to see the older man crouched down assessing the damage to his tire. He saw Sulli inside the car, saw him stop his furious work on the instant lock of the backseat to stare, an odd but pleased smile on his face as he took in Julian and the tire iron. He had figured Julian would let him get hauled away, why not?

"Do it," Sullivan mouthed, nodding enthusiastically.

"Goddamn punk kids," Carl murmured distractedly.

\*Fuck it,\* Julian thought. He shoved the weapon through his back belt loops and crept stealthily toward the car, dropping down to the handle. Sullivan got the hint and went to bang on the opposite window, screaming obscenities about Carl’s lineage.

"Pipe down, Kinney!" Carl warned. He stuck two fingers into the deep gash, making sure nothing sharp remained.

"Come sit on my face!" Sullivan screamed over the small click of his door opening.

Julian grabbed the man’s arm and whispered, "Let’s go, before he gets up to change the tire!" He dragged Sullivan around the corner and took out a small lock pick kit, easily removing the handcuffs, which he stuck in his pocket.

"I think I love you," Sullivan grinned.

"Love is weakness, now come ON!"

"The Jeep’s this way." Sullivan said, pointing to his vehicle.

Julian laughed as he waited for Sulli to unlock his side, then slid into the seat. "Well that was fun!"

"Thanks," Sullivan said, starting the car.

"Don’t think I don’t want something for it,"

"Like a matching prison sentence?"

"I don’t do jail."

"Stick with me, kid, and you’ll be running from plenty of lawful people."

The blonde scoffed, "Sure, Kinney."

Sullivan arched an eyebrow, "You’re doubting me?"

"Oh, no. I just don’t think you’re any worse than I am."

"I’ve got a few years on you."

Julian looked at the driver, "A FEW?"

"Want me to drop your ass on the next corner?" Sullivan said angrily.

"Touchy, touchy!"

"Listen, Sugah, I’ve done a lot of things that would make you crawl under your bed in hiding, waiting for someone to come rescue you."

"No thanks. I’ve gone under beds before in hiding and it does usually involve waiting for someone, but they’re the ones who need rescuing when the lights go out."

Sullivan glanced at Julian, "You’re serious, aren’t you?"

"Yes,"

The Southern man laughed and shook his head, "Yeah, I think I love you."

"So, what DID happen to that cop who was supposed to bring you in?"

"Like I said, he never showed up."

"Liar,"

"Honest, kid. I was waiting up on that wall for hours, fully and totally stuck."

"Then how’d you get down?"

"I’m resourceful."

Julian slid across the seat and squeezed Sullivan’s crotch viciously. The Jeep swerved back and forth on the deserted street like the snap of a whip. "Don’t make me beg," Julian pouted, strong fingers digging into the man’s jeans, "I hate to beg, Mr. Kinney."

Sullivan grunted, cleared his throat, tried to focus on the road, "Mr. Kinney, I like that."

"HOW?!?" Julian increased his hold mercilessly, cold blue eyes drilling into Sulli’s.

"Marquis! The Marquis!" Sullivan yelped, "Jesus!"

"Oh, I’m sorry, did I hurt you?" Julian said soothingly, rubbing a hand over the man’s hard, tortured cock.

"’s okay."

"Pull over."

Sullivan obeyed.

"Tell me about Marquis," Julian coaxed, still massaging where he’d squeezed, "Tell me what you think of him."

"Little bitch, leave me—"

Julian turned ruthless in the bat of an eye, grabbing Sullivan’s hard-on. "TELL ME!!!!"

"King of Torture, manipulation! He was supposed to be killed by Bear, but he came back a few days later, sans the big guy, and cut me down. Provided I did something for him…he let me go." Sullivan said quickly, the pain simmering with a pleasure so magnificent he was glad he pulled over. His mind was as good as mush.

"What did he ask you to do?" Julian asked sweetly, soothing Sullivan’s groin intimately.

"Just leave town for awhile…"

Julian squeezed slightly, "Really?"

"Oh, God…I-I had to leave his boy, Justin, alone."

"Did you?"

"Hmm?" Sullivan mumbled, doing his best —and failing miserably— not to show how this was affecting him.

"Did you leave Justin alone?"

"Yes…"

"Why?" Julian asked, straddling the man and wrapping his arms around Sullivan’s neck, trailing his tongue over the scar under his chin where Marquis’ Heretic Fork had sunk in.

"Un …he’s a …scary son of a …"

Julian ground his turgid cock over Sullivan’s crotch, pushing himself into the man until the pain was nearly unbearable for both of them, "You’re afraid of Marquis?"

"Yes …he must’ve been the one to …take Justin …Jesus."

"You’re only afraid of Marquis because you’ve met pale comparisons up until now," Julian thrust back and forth on Sulli’s lap slowly, torturously slow. "I can show you real fear, Mr. Kinney. Do you want that?"

Sullivan threw his head back and groaned, "YES!"

"Good, so you’re telling me you have no idea who took Justin, but you think it’s Marquis. And Bear, who is supposed to be working for Will in search of Justin, is actually responsible for his kidnapping and Marquis being alive?"

"Yeah…" Sulli whimpered, bucking his hips in energetic response to Julian’s movements.

"Such a cooperative slave,"

"Sla—!"

Julian covered Sulli’s protest with an intensely abrasive kiss; gnashing teeth and shoving tongues warring for dominance. He broke away and stared at the man’s lust-glazed eyes.

"You’re very good for information," Julian said sensually, running his hands down Sulli’s silk shirt, up the soft fabric again, stopping over the man’s sensitive nipples. "IF you’re telling the truth of course. You ARE telling the truth, aren’t you?" he asked, slowly swirling the silk against the man’s tingling flesh.

"FUCK YES!"

Julian pinched Sullivan’s nipples almost hard enough to make his fingers touch, "Then you won’t mind telling me where Marquis might have taken them!"

Sullivan screamed in rapture, even as Julian shoved one hand down his pants and grabbed his cock cruelly to keep him from coming. "Marquis’ loft! Or Dark Starr! FUCK! You’re brother’s company outside of town!"

"If I asked you to help me, could you? Would you do me a little favor?"

Sullivan swallowed and nodded, his legs burning with cool fire as Julian’s thumb skimmed the head of his dripping dick, circling around the slit as his other hand rubbed his sore nipple.

"I want you to check Marquis’ loft, Mr. Kinney. I want you to let me handle Dark Starr. Do you think you can do that for me?"

"Yes," Sullivan groaned, falling headfirst into a dizzying gauze of bliss.

And then all pleasure was gone, stolen from him and replaced with the harsh reality of concrete greeting his frazzled body. He shook his head and looked up at his Jeep, at Julian confiscating the driver’s seat.

"Good," the blonde said, "See that you do. You don’t mind walking, I hope."

"I—"

"That’s my boy." Julian said, putting the car in gear, "Oh, and Mr. Kinney?"

Sullivan got slowly to his feet, unsure whether to rub his aching head or balls, "Huh?"

"Keep this to yourself. Don’t. Tell. Will," he said, peeling away from the curb.

"Little gorgeous fucking bitch." Sullivan moaned, running a hand through his haphazard hair, exasperated. He didn’t know what confused him more: the fact that he was walking now, doing exactly what he was told by Justin’s evil clone, that he could have taken the brat and fucking him, easily overpowering the smaller body and the thought had never occurred to him, or that he let Julian drive away in his beloved Jeep.

"What out, Marquis. You’re about to meet your match," Sullivan said to the silent night, "And he’s right. I’m a lot more afraid of him than of you. YOU never made me fall so hopelessly…in love."

\*

Brian didn’t only shock their captor with his sudden tackle, he surprised himself, too. Weariness was no match for the adrenaline of getting Justin out of there. The men topped to the ground with a unified grunt, instantly struggling for the top of the fight. Brian was winning as he screamed, "RUN!!!"

"You will do no such thing, my boy!" the voice ordered, a chillingly solid sound of pure horror in the dark hallway.

Justin froze and bellowed a throat-scorching scream, covering his ears, the command a wash of acid in his mind. \*You can do this! You’re stronger than he is!\* Justin reminded himself, urging his legs to move.

"GO!" Brian yelled.

Marquis laughed, "He’d never get passed my bodyguard."

"Brian!" Justin sobbed, weight thrown against the wall as his legs pushed him slowly forward.

"Baby, run!" Brian growled, desperate to keep Marquis on the floor.

"Bear will get you! Chose! Who would you rather put their hands on you! Him or me—"

Brian slammed his fist into the man’s offensive mouth.

"No!" Justin cried, "Brian…" \*I can’t leave you with him. Don’t you know I can’t?!?\*

"BEAR! BEAR! Come and get your supper!" Marquis yelled. He knew exactly how to dig into the buried scars of fear, how to paralyze Justin second by second without ever laying a hand on him.

Justin’s legs curled under him and he slid to the floor.

"Justin get out of here!"

"I can taste you, my boy. Smell—"

"SHUT UP!" Brian hit the man again, his strength fleeting as the adrenaline rush gave way to the exhaustion of being held against his will, of taking care of Justin. His muscles shook with the effort of holding Marquis down. He knew he couldn’t take him much longer.

"Fuck you! Fuck you!" Justin cried, wrapping his arms around his knees. \*Get up! Get up!\* He told himself.

"Justin, if you don’t run, he will rape you and turn you into a PATHETIC SLAVE! Do you hear me!?!"

"Fucked by your Master. Loved by your Master!"

"Be his dirty WHORE!"

"NOOOO!"

"Bend to your Master, my boy! You are mine! Come get this evil man off your Master!"

"Justin. Justin. If you don’t run, he will do all that to me," Brian said softly.

Justin shook his head. He swallowed, closed his eyes, swallowed again. He got to his feet.

"RUN!" Brian screamed.

"BEAR!" Marquis echoed.

"FUCK YOU!" Justin yelled. And then he ran.

\*

Sullivan was not averse to stealing a car. He couldn’t fathom walking all the way to Marquis’ loft with a raging erection. Naturally, the Kinney charm found him a quick and willing trick to take care of that problem and he continued on to fulfill his orders. \*Favor, order…sound almost the same, don’t they?\* he thought.

Sulli walked into the room and caught his breath, cocked his head, lifted an eyebrow, and promptly turned his back to the loft and got violently sick in the hallway.

"Motherfucking nasty-ass sheeey-it!" he yelled, wiping his mouth and pulling his shirt over his lower face. Sullivan coughed, walking inside again and following the stench of death and rot that had assaulted his senses. "I was starting to wondah where you went, Reeves ol’ boy!"

The New Orleans Police Chief was sprawled in the large bathtub, naked, arms and legs hanging over the old porcelain at unnatural angles, flesh a fish-belly whitish-green, silvery bruises under his eyes and where his cheeks and stomach had sunk in, lips parted as if to take one last breath.

Sullivan threw up again.

He straightened up and fled into the kitchen. "Now who…?" his voice trailed off, eyes scanning the empty room. It had been months since he was last here. Did a body keep its smell for so long? Reeves had obviously been tortured, but when did he actually die?

"Makes sense, why he didn’t come and get me off’a that wall…torture’s a good deterrent, keeps a man’s mind off fighting crime. Marquis must have grabbed him when he got here to bring me to justice…except, how’d a skinny sadist overpower a good sized cop? Well, with a massive mountain of a man like Bear, that’s how! But I knew that…Couldn’t have used physical strength to beat Jeff, but Marquis never did need muscle to bring down a weak mind, how else could he have gotten Bear in the first place? So, what did he use against ya, Bear?" Sulli asked, bridging the gap of silence for his own sanity’s sake. "For what price did he get you to sell your soul?" Sullivan mused over the disheveled room, braving a second trip down the hallway toward the bedroom. "I guess Bear hasn’t figured out that when you play with the Devil, eventually someone ends up in Hell…I should know. Playing double agent with a psycho as your boss and you get stabbed in the throat. He’ll lose this one, stupid asshole…no matter what Marquis promised him, he’s not going to get out of this any less scarred than the rest of us. I bet if we find Bear, though, we’ll find the stars of Liberty Avenue, hmm?"

He stopped talking, frozen in the doorway of Marquis’ master bedroom, mouth agape at the second body. Self-lynched to the ceiling with a bulky chain and wide leather strap around his thick neck, Bear was much too heavy to even sway, his toes barely gracing the floorboards. His chocolate brown skin had turned ashen; cold, deep brown eyes had rolled to the whites and big hands lay limp at his sides. His cock was a raging, unanswered bulge in his pants.

Sullivan whistled through his teeth, "Of course…I could be wrong."

\*

"Fuck! Shit!" Justin cursed under his breath, lost in the dank underbelly of the snuff porn palace. He felt the wall to his left, fingers cautiously acting for his blind eyes in the blackness. With his mind racing, Justin tried to at least keep away from the thoughts heading toward Brian and what Marquis would do to him if help didn’t arrive soon. His mind had forced away the worst so he could find laughter and happiness again, even at the expense of denial. Truth was, the blonde never had been able to remember much of what that man had done to him. Only the dull fear of the unknown in fleeting nightmares and too-dark shadows remained where terror should have been. Very few cold sweats or dampened, unnamable phobias had plagued him, and until the horrors came back to attack, everyone had been perfectly fine with ignoring the beasts.

What was important now, though, wasn’t his own sanity. It was helping Brian—who protected Justin’s mind even better than denial could—preserve his. Justin knew that if he could avoid running into Bear, then he could get out of this filthy ring of Hades and find help.

A big ‘IF’ laced through his thoughts and Justin shoved the wave of uncertainty to the back of his mind. He replaced the word with anger, bitterness, wondering how Bear could betray him again, how the man could help Marquis destroy him all over again.

Justin stopped suddenly, his fingers grasping empty air. The boy stuck his foot out and found a step, another. Pressing upward, carefully climbing the stairs, relief washed over Justin. Dim light was creeping like liquid silver through the edge of a small trap door right above his head.

A faint echo called after him, a scream of pain, of defeat, begging him to hurry.

\*Brian!\* Justin put his shoulder against the door and pushed, grunting at the unexpected weight. He threw the door off, its hinges whining as the wood crashed onto the hard concrete. The pale light wasn’t enough to help him see and Justin guessed it was close to dawn; the broken windows on either side of the room he emerged into showing an emotionless gray sky.

Suddenly, Justin was dragged completely out of the hole, a strong hand clamped over his mouth to muffle his screams. He struggled but his captor matched every move with prepared agility.

"Justin! Knock it off! It’s me, it’s Julian!" his twin whispered vehemently. "I’m going to let you go, but don’t run, I’m here to help!" he said, making good on his promise and releasing his brother.

"What are you DOING here!?" Justin hissed breathily, the cold early morning striking his body with violent shivers.

"Oh, taking a stroll, what do you think? I said I’m here to help!"

"We have to get Brian, we—"

"Let’s get you out, first," Julian stood, helping Justin to his feet.

"Bear—"

"Shh, I haven’t seen him. Don’t worry, we’re leaving this place."

"But—"

"Shh!" Julian led Justin out to the Jeep, pulling when his brother hesitated at the sight of Sullivan’s car. "I borrowed it, he’s not here."

Justin sighed wearily, "You have a phone?"

Julian nodded, "I’ll call, you sit." He helped his brother into the front seat and draped his jacket over his naked lap. "Here, drink," he said, giving Justin a half full water bottle. "Sorry, it’s all I have left."

Justin licked his dry lips. He hadn’t had time to realize how dehydrated he was. "Thank you, Julian," he took a long draught, another, barely pausing to breath until it was empty. "I was wrong…about you."

Julian smiled, "Hey, what are brothers for?"

"Hmm? Recently…brothers aren’t worth much…" Justin blinked thickly, a foreign aftertaste corroding over his tongue.

"Sleepy?"

"Jul—?"

"Hush, I don’t blame you. You’ve been through a lot, Jus. You can go to sleep. You will be well watched over."

"But I…" Justin lolled his head back and forth sloppily, a tear slipping down his cheek as his limbs fell prey to the drug Julian had mixed into the water.

Julian took the bottle and launched it across the deserted landscape. He leaned over Justin and said nastily, "Besides, it’s a long drive to New Orleans, my oh-so perfect brother. You’ll do good to take a nap."

\*

Brian screamed in frustration as Marquis got the better of him, slamming him onto the ground face first and taking hold of his wrists, wrenching his arms cruelly behind his back.

"You will learn the meaning of obedience, my dark soul," Marquis purred in his ear as he straddled his victim.

"I’ll bury you!" Brian swore.

Marquis licked a line behind Brian’s ear, "The only digging you will do is with your tongue in my ass."

Brian shuddered. He hoped Justin had gotten out, had to believe that Bear hadn’t stood in his way. He cried out as Marquis pushed his hands between his shoulder blades, bending upwards at the elbow. "Son of a—"

"You will call me Master,"

"Not in a million years!"

Marquis laughed, sinister in the rising morning. He pressed himself the length of Brian’s body, growing erection like steel against his ass. "You are weak in body. I shall enjoy breaking your mind."

Julian stepped into the room, naked as the day he was born. He knelt down beside Marquis, behind Brian’s line of sight, a cruel grin lighting his face as he rest his head upon the Southern man’s arm.

"Ah, there’s my boy. My good boy, come back to me, so soon. I knew you could not stay away," Marquis murmured lovingly to Julian, allowing Brian to turn his head toward the new arrival.

"Justin, no!" Brian gasped.

"Justin, who am I? Answer," Marquis said, smiling despite himself at the boy’s ingenious plan to break the illustrious Brian Kinney. He couldn’t have done better himself and had to admire the blonde’s cunning. Brian was the man who ruined Marquis’ notoriety, had made him a laughing stock of the shadows. He was the ultimate prize, the case no one could crack.

But Marquis and Julian could do it together. They would bend him until he snapped, making him think that his beloved Justin had turned against him, had chosen his true Master.

"You are Master," Julian replied in a lost and feeble, childlike voice.

"No! Justin, get out of here!"

"Justin, my boy, who is this man?"

Julian looked at Brian as if he had never seen him before, "Evil. He will try to take me away from my Master!"

Brian closed his eyes, hot tears staining the dirt that clung there. \*Oh, god…\*

"And what do we do with evil men? Answer."

Julian held up the pair of handcuffs he had taken off Sulli. "We punish them, Master."

"Yes, my boy, we do." Marquis bound Brian’s wrists. "We punish them severely."

\*

Sullivan called Liberty Diner from a payphone outside of Marquis’ house of death. He knew the group would still be there, despite Horvath’s orders. Considering the man had lost his prisoner, well…he might still be there, too.

"Liberty Diner, open until—"

"Hiya, Ms. Novotny, is my cousin’s lover’s brother there?"

"Guess who?" she said, not bothering to disguise her disdain.

"Kinney, nice work." Will said instantly on the phone.

"I had help," Sullivan shrugged as if the blonde could see it, "but listen, I didn’t call to talk about that. Just wanted to let you know, I visited Marquis’ old haunt and found a few dead bodies. Jeff Reeves, he’s been gone for awhile."

"And I’m supposed to believe you weren’t the last face he saw?"

"He’s not that lucky," Sullivan scoffed.

"You said ‘a few’?"

"Yeee-up."

"Mind sharing?" Will asked, swallowing the knot forming in his throat. Would Sullivan Kinney be cruel enough to taunt him if the other bodies were Justin and Brian?

"Maybe. Answer me this: when was the last time you talked to Bear?"

"Yesterday,"

"Hope you said goodbye…"

"What’d you do!"

"Not me! Looks like he hung himself!"

"I don’t fucking believe—"

"Who cares what you believe, I’m stating fact! I thought you should know that he’s here, and that he won’t be finding Justin anytime soon unless the kid’s already waiting in the afterlife. My own personal opinion is that this huge right hand man you’ve allowed back into your lives had something very nefarious to do with Angel’s disappearance."

"Damn it…"

"Look, we’ve had our fights, and it’s all pretty justifiable, the you hate me and vice versa dance. But this time I’ll swear on anything you’ve got that I have no idea what’s going on. Brian left me tied up on the wall and I waited for three fucking days. Reeves never came, but Marquis did. He cut me down and made me leave town. If you listen to anything I say tonight, know that Bear is dead and Marquis is NOT."

"Why didn’t you say that before?! Why did you make a fuss out of me trusting Bear when you KNEW he had let Marquis live!!!"

"NO!" Mark cried out in the background.

"I didn’t think you would want to know. Hope springs eternal and all that happy horseshit. Would you still be looking for two alive human beings if you knew Marquis had them all this time?"

Will’s voice was less than a whisper, "Justin was still alive after two weeks with him…a few days—"

"Yeah, and Marquis liked him then. Now he has a grudge. Marquis is one sick son of a bitch. I wouldn’t wish him on anybody, sugah, not even my cousin. Sure, I brought him into Angel’s life, but…shit, that was before I saw him in action!"

"You mean, felt him in action! You got beaten, hurt, your pride destroyed, and it stopped being fun! Hurting other people isn’t fun when it bites you back! You weren’t in control, you were stuck! That’s the only way you could ever understand the consequences of what you’ve done!"

Sullivan huffed, "Just thought you would like to know about Bear, whether you believe it was suicide or murder, though maybe the fact that he died with a gigantic hard-on is a clue that he didn’t die alone. Big man like that would have needed someone to tighten the strap up in the rafters so he wouldn’t break the ceiling…someone with experience who he trusted enough to listen to…or felt sorry enough for hurting that he would do anything…someone to tie him up there and make sure he couldn’t get down again…" \*A certain blonde someone who is on his way to Dark Starr as we speak…what ARE you up to, Julian dear?\* Sulli thought to himself.

"Is there anything else we don’t know that you want to tell us, Kinney?" Will said angrily.

"Yeah, did you know you’re an asshole? That’s a clue you’ve seemed to miss! Have a great day, Taylor," he said, and hung up the phone. Sullivan had places to go.

Or rather, just one place.

He had a feeling it was time to go back to New Orleans.

Death in Diamonds

Justin was dimly aware that he had to pee. The sensation was almost overwhelming, a sharp pain in his gut like the morning after a long night of heavy drinking at Babylon. His head certainly felt like he'd had too much alcohol! He shifted his leaden legs, the weight refusing to let him walk to the bathroom. Moaning, the blonde vainly tried to remember how much and what kind of drink he'd consumed so he could vow to never do it again.

"Brian?" Justin said hoarsely, mouth dry as if he'd switched to a diet of cotton and sand.

"He had a bit more to drink than you did, my boy. I don't doubt he'll sleep for most of our trip."

Justin's mind fought for sobriety. \*Sitting up, not in bed…\* he thought worriedly, panic setting in as consciousness pulled memories of faces to match the voice to his left. \*Not at home, not safe. Wind in hair, driving fast? Brian? Bathroom…drink, thirsty. Danger! Man; not safe, not home. Pain! Who-Marquis!\*

"Guddamnit…" Justin murmured, eyelids fluttering open. He rolled his head against the back of the seat to stare at the driver, "How…?"

Julian piped up from the backseat, "I drugged you, stupid!"

"Gotta…" Justin mumbled, one urgency taking precedent over all else, "gotta pee!"

"Aw, poor baby! Hold it. Your beloved got a double dose of Cataleptic, I don't hear him bitching!"

Marquis eyed the boy in his rearview mirror, "Quiet, my dark one. You know nothing of the after effects of my concoctions. I believe doctors should feel the bite of a scalpel before performing surgery, likewise, it's required for therapists to attend sessions of psychoanalysis before picking the minds of other troubled souls. You, too, Julian Taylor, should know the paralysis of what you sent down Justin's throat before truly mastering the art of villainous intent."

"Is that a threat?"

"An observation, dark one, simply a thought on your very young career in sadism." Marquis said, pulling over on the side of the highway. He unlocked the seatbelt from Justin's chest. Calmly, moving in the manner of a man with a well practiced routine, he got out of the red Jeep and opened his captive's door. "You know not what you ask of your victims until their fear is your own."

Julian rolled his eyes, "I've been torturing people since I learned to walk, I know what I'm doing. You seem to be the confused novice, giving him what he needs! Let him wet himself, the shame will help bend him to your will!"

Marquis visibly bristled but continued to wrap his arm around Justin's waist, the boy whimpering in helpless disgust as he was lifted from the car. Marquis turned dark, flaming eyes to Julian, "You have perhaps forgotten, my beautiful companion, that when you were learning to walk, I was in my twenties. I knew how to condemn a man to forever kneel at my feet with a smile reserved for Gods on his face when you were wearing in your first shoes. There are many kinds of shame and I have perfected every form, but allowing Justin to wallow in his own filth is not what I practice. He will be mine and he will be proud to be so. A good Master makes their followers need and desire punishment when they do wrong, not fear it. Escape is never planned when one is happy with their imprisonment and no Master who has learn this will ever be murdered in his bed."

"Wanna bet?" Julian murmured nastily. "Take him already, I want to start having some fun! And don't get lost in the big, bad woods, old man."

"I can handle my boys, child, even better than my men and much better than you realize. Do not cross me or question my abilities ever again. A reputation is earned for a reason and just because you do not believe what I am capable of does not mean I have not done it. That was your only warning, it will do you well to heed it." Marquis snarled.

Julian scowled and went back to nuzzling under Brian's arm, running his fingers intimately over the unconscious man's chest, "Tell me what to do and I'll tell you where to go," he said. "Just hurry the fuck up."

\*

Will and Cameron stood with their shoulders together, a wordless bond between them as they stared at the soft earth. Will threw down his shovel and watched it land on the new mound of dirt covering his former best friend.

"I almost feel like I should say a few words for him …" Will sighed softly.

"You just said twelve words for him, that's more than he deserved," Cameron said bitterly. "Now let's get out of here and start tracking our brother.

"He was a good friend, Cam!" Will shouted, torn between caring for and despising the big man. "Justin forgave him, why can't we?"

"Because we're not that nice."

"What about the cop?" Will asked, burying the argument in his heart. "Should we bury him, too?"

"No, we shouldn't have even wasted our time with Bear, the big lump. I say we should have called Horvath and let him deal with the both of them."

"He didn't deserve to be photographed and put into an unsolved murder file, hanging from the ceiling like that…Justin wouldn't have let that happen."

Cameron rolled her eyes at the weaker specimen of the opposite gender now kneeling over Bear's grave. "Justin isn't here, Will. And even if he was, you think he would want his ex-protector to stay in an unmarked hole? It's Bear's fault that Marquis is still alive in the first place, either way he spends his eternity, I'm not about to feel sorry for him."

Will nodded silently and got up, brushing dirt off his hands. \*I'll come back, Bear. Me and Justin, we'll come back and mark where we put you. Maybe I'll work on forgiving you, too.\* he thought.

"Now, do we really believe Julian killed him?" Will asked, walking to Cameron's car. He had wanted to wait until night to bury Bear but she insisted it was now or never. Funny, she knew more perfect, out of the way spots to hide bodies than anyone Will knew, alive or dead.

"Wait, where did that come from?"

"Just something Kinney said on the phone, that Bear didn't die alone: 'Big man like that would have needed someone to tighten the strap up in the rafters so he wouldn't break the ceiling…someone with experience who he trusted enough to listen to…or felt sorry enough for hurting that he would do anything …someone to tie him up there and make sure he couldn't get down again …'. What if Julian tricked Bear into thinking he was Justin, said he wanted to have a little fun, got him up there and teased him, made him hard. What if Julian killed Bear? He couldn't have handled a physical fight with him, but if Bear was incapacitated, stuck up there …Sullivan was hinting at that, I know he was!"

"Sounds like something our Julian could do if he wanted to. But why would he even need Bear out of the picture?"

"Maybe Julian and Marquis are working together. Maybe Bear was an opposing force to their plans for Justin and Brian and had to be taken out."

"Maybe he wanted a piece of the action and the other boys didn't want to share." Cameron sneered.

"Either way, someone had to kill Jeff Reeves before he got to Sullivan on the wall. From what Kinney said, it wasn't him …I believe that. If Bear did it, why would he have gone back to the loft where the body was rotting?"

Cameron chewed her bottom lip, "Why do I get the feeling Julian was in town long before we knew about it?"

"Well, the cop was tortured from what I saw, though I couldn't determine what actually killed him. If Bear didn't have anything to do with Reeves' death or kidnapping …They could have brought Reeves in, already dead, after they strangled Bear. I mean, what if Bear let Marquis go for whatever reason but then distanced himself from the whole thing? Until Justin was taken, Bear could have been underground."

Cameron looked back at the grave and snickered, "Underground, I bet."

Will got in the car, halfway, his knees on the ground. Hotwiring cars was one thing he had learned to do early on, but he had the keys to this car. What he needed was waiting behind the radio. "I don't like all these 'what if' scenarios."

"It's all we've got." Cameron handed her brother a screwdriver to pry off the radio faceplate -from where, Will didn't want to know, but Cam always had tools at the ready.

"Unless Sullivan Kinney has more than he told us."

"Yeah, but where do we start looking for him? We don't even remotely know where our own brother is…" Cameron got in the car and banged her head softly on the headrest. She reached into her pocket and handed Will a small transmitter chip.

"Well, if we were a murdering psycho-"

"We ARE," Cam said.

"Right…well, if we were Southern murdering psychos, where would we hide?" Will installed the chip, hoping he had done it right. There was only one way to find out and that time would not be for some hours to come. If the radio signal worked, any conversation inside the car would be broadcast to the mirror chip inside their emergency follower's car. Both chips were activated by remote control, both already online, even before Will set it up in its hidden location. Backup was hard to come by these days. Trusted people kept dying. Their entire conversation had been recorded from the inside of Cameron's pocket. Their backup had heard everything.

And good thing, too. He was already on the road.

"We wouldn't hide," Cameron looked at her brother, "We would get our fool pride back from he who took it! We'd want to get back everything Marquis took from us, including Justin and Brian."

"And how would we do that?"

"We'd find out where our enemy was going …"

"Unh-" Will stopped her, "No. He'd have a secret weapon, first. A bargaining chip that means nothing to Sullivan but something to appease Marquis in the place of Justin and Brian, something that would enable Sulli an even trade,"

"What could Sullivan possibly use to get Brian and Justin back? It would have to be something special, something able to still hurt them both even from afar to make Marquis even consider-" Cam pondered, but the thought was no sooner out of her mouth than they both knew the answer.

\*

Mark stirred in his bed violently, nightmares plaguing his mind before the quiet house downstairs even had time to realize he had cried himself to sleep. Brian and Justin, his father and best friend, were gone, nothing but bloodied remains in flashes behind his eyelids, flesh in tortured ribbons, screams unending.

The curtains fluttered in a cold breeze, window open to the cold morning. Mark shivered but did not wake, even as Sullivan Kinney crawled into his room. The man watched Mark sleep. The kid hated him, no doubt about it, but he needed Mark for his plan to work. Sulli had a heavy feeling in his gut that in the end, only Mark's endangered safety would be able to bring Justin and Brian back from the edge.

"Okay, sugah," Sullivan whispered, "let's do this without screaming." He crept to the bed and cupped a hand quickly over Mark's mouth.

The teenager came suddenly awake, struggling even before his brain registered what was happening.

"Shh! I'm going to Naw'lins to get the boys back, I know where they are. You can come if you don't give me any trouble!"

Mark stopped fighting, staring plaintively up at Sullivan until the man let him go. "Why?" he asked, rubbing where the man's fingers had dug into his cheek.

"Because I think they might need to see their kid's face to break free of Marquis' hold."

"You don't want to help dad …" Mark said, sitting up and drawing his knees to his chest.

"Call me a sucker for a pretty face, but I'm not going for Brian."

"Justin won't ever be with you again."

"Hell, I ain't goin' for Justin, either, kid!" Sullivan stood straight and paced the room, "I'm going for a piece of that dark little vixen, Julian. He owes me a screw. I figure, he and Marquis are two tops vying for dominance over a very succulent treasure. Only the more stubborn of them will win when they stop being useful to each other. Until then, Marquis needs Julian to help control Brian, the man who took Justin from his grasp before. Marquis needs Brian to break so Justin won't resist, won't have a reason to disobey him ever again. You follow me?" Sullivan asked and Mark nodded, "Julian likely needs Marquis for the means and methods of torture, plus a secure roof under which to play his black heart's deepest desires. He needs the most feared tyrant of sadism to build a name for himself in their field of expertise."

"And you want to get to Julian before he stops being useful to Marquis or before Julian surpasses Marquis and will never submit to your dominance?"

"Smart fuckin' kid … I get Julian, you get your dad and Angel back, and we can all have a little revenge on Marquis if we play our cards right. What say you, Mark? Partners, for now?" He asked, holding out his hand.

Mark got out of bed and shook Sullivan's hand, "Fine. But I'll tear off your arms if you lay a hand on Justin or my dad, I swear."

"Understood." Sulli nodded. "Now let's get the fuck outta here before someone decides to come and check on Brian's prodigal son. Oh, and grab a jacket," he said, straddling the window pane on his way out, "Hell's cold this time of year."

\*

"All better, my boy? Answer."

Justin closed his eyes and swallowed thickly, giving the barest of nods. \*If he wants conversation he's going to have to rip out my throat and shout through it himself,\* he thought defiantly. His body may have been numb and too heavy to control, but his mind was strong, active. Justin took a deep breath and held it, accepting that Marquis was in charge by default. That didn't mean he had to like it or that he was not simply biding his time until the drug ran its course through his system and he could run like the blazes out of there.

"Now say 'thank you'," Marquis chided, running his thumb over Justin's open zipper, stroking the jagged teeth as comfortably as one would a cherished pet. "Say 'thank you, Master' or I will not be so generous with your relief next time."

\*Just stay alive so you can kill him,\* Justin told himself, \*Appease him, keep him happy …let him think he has me under control and then he won't expect when I get away …\*

"Thank you," Justin ground out through gritted teeth, though the 'thank' sounded more like 'fuck' in his own mind. Being indignant and mutinous in his thoughts kept Justin more alert, fought the fear trembling just below the surface.

"I can accept that you have been forsaken from my watch for far, far too long, my boy, and it is not your fault that the manners I so graciously gave you were stolen away by others too brutal to ever understand the subtlety of owning obstinate youths," Marquis purred, hot breath against Justin's ear. He suddenly yanked a handful of Justin's hair back, exposing his neck. "But do not dare believe I will continue to allow such rebellion without punishment now that I have you back! The next time you speak it will be with permission and you will call me 'Master'!"

\*Be prepared for a very quiet day then.\* Justin scowled, letting his furious eyes do all the talking.

"Ah, such ugliness in such a pretty face. This will not do." Marquis released Justin's hair and the hold he had, keeping the boy upright. He watched with a sinister gleam in his eyes as Justin's disobedient glare turned to panic while his legs crumpled beneath him and sent him into a heap on the leafy floor.

\*Don't show him weakness,\* Justin chided himself, \*Don't panic, it won't help now.\* Justin tried his damnedest to focus on the very difficult task of not using up the little energy he had to test the obvious paralysis of his limbs.

Marquis lowered himself to a crouch, face inches from Justin's. Marquis cupped Justin's chin, turning his face so their eyes met.

"I did not appreciate that glare, my boy."

"It was good for me," Justin snarled, glad that his voice was as steady as his mind. The blonde, frustrated and feeling much braver now that Marquis was no longer in charge of holding him upright, spit in the man's face.

Marquis circled his fingers in the saliva on his cheek and Justin instantly knew it was a bad idea. "I hope …" he breathed deeply, his voice wavering in the way that gave Justin a horribly sinking feeling that Marquis was barely controlling his rage. "I …hope …that was good for you, too, child, because this," he held up his slick fingers in the mottled sunlight, "this …is about to be good for me."

Marquis tore the blonde's pants down his pale hips and around his ankles with his other hand and used the denim to lift Justin's feet, resting the boy's legs up over his neck. He stared down at Justin's exposed hole hungrily, rubbing his bristly, unshaven face over one of Justin's bare legs.

"No!" Justin cried out.

Marquis threw his head back and laughed, deep and gloating. "Oh, you have so much to relearn! What a shame we will have to start," he added to Justin's spit by devouring his own fingers and then shoved the wet digits into the unprepared opening, "all over again!!!"

Justin yelped, feeling a trembling terror prickling his hands like jabs of hot needles. He was afraid, god yes, but his mind refused to feel the fear. It wasn't only his life in danger this time, it was Brian, back in the car, unconscious. \*Just escape! Whatever Marquis does, never give up. Brian needs you!\* he told himself sternly, chocking back the lump of unshed tears building in his throat. He did NOT want to cry, couldn't bear to give this monster the satisfaction of his tears.

The sudden flash of constricting blue washed over his face in a distant memory. Something had stolen his air, made him so afraid he would die, the world was muted, all he could hear was death pulsing in his ears …and then a cut was made over his mouth. Latex, a mask of some sort …

Justin found himself gasping for air as if the mask were truly over his face again, as if Marquis were slowly strangling him with that wretched blue plastic.

"Now," Marquis said, slowly removing his fingers and pushing them back in even slower, reveling in the pained and white-hot panic on Justin's face. His voice was enough to bring Justin back to the present, confusion obvious. "Where should we start this lesson, hmm?"

Justin whimpered, closing his eyes. He could smell the latex as it filled over his nose, could feel the painful, cold pinch of some metal instrument being shoved into his mouth to keep his jaw open …

Marquis leaned over Justin and lifted the boy's shirt, twisting it up over his head and leaving it twisted under his neck and around his shoulders. He pinched one of Justin's nipples hard, hissing gleefully as Justin bit his bottom lip to keep from crying out.

"Say 'Master'," Marquis goaded, taking far too much pleasure in being able to look down on the helpless boy. He knew that the drug would soon leave Justin's system but he planned to have the blond well under his control by then. No one ever strayed far from Marquis once he had a hold as secure as the one he had had on Justin before.

Justin's cheeks burned with the effort it took to tell himself that nothing was covering his face. Yet. He tried desperately just to breathe, to get through this, to be strong. For Brian. He shook his head, thrashing back and forth until all he could hear was the crinkle of dried pine needles beneath his soft hair and the harsh gulps of air he was ingesting. He couldn't hear Marquis' taunts, couldn't hear the orders he was being given. His body was beginning to go numb, tingly, like his nerves were waking up from a very deep sleep. He could feel Marquis' ministrations on his body clearer now, the pain a bit more accentuated.

"Brian," Justin whispered in a haze. The dappled sunlight above him was swirling at great speeds, blurring beneath a cottony gauze. He was hyperventilating, fighting the Marquis in his past, fighting the man above him now.

Marquis bit his bottom lip so hard he tasted blood. Brian Kinney was not suppose to come into this equation at all. Brian Kinney was not allowed in Justin's mind! He yanked his fingers out of the boy's throbbing hole indignantly. More severe tactics were in order.

Marquis grabbed Justin's jaw, wrenching it painfully until Justin's wild blue eyes -now the color of deep blue midnight with oxygen depletion- met his own black ones. With his other hand, Marquis grappled in the mess of sharp, dried pine needles until he found what he was looking for.

"Pay attention, my boy," Marquis purred sinisterly, holding up his first of many tools of intimidation. He liked to think of himself as innovative, a true Master of the art. Now more than ever. Stuck out here, without the comforts of home -iron shackles and leather whips, sensory depleting masks and swings that spread anything to anywhere- Marquis was a leader in excellence. If only in his own twisted mind.

Justin stared up at him, he had no choice. He didn't seem to have made the connection between actually paying attention to Marquis and seeing what he was supposed to be paying attention to, held in the man's hand. His torturer smirked, a cruel play of his lips, like a cobra watching a wounded mouse struggling to get to safety. But Justin had fooled Marquis. He knew what the man was clutching. But he didn't show his fear of it, even when he figured out exactly what Marquis was going to do with it.

Marquis, deciding that patience was not a virtue at the present time, brought the object in front of Justin's face. He smirked again until Justin thought his thin face would crack. "Do you know what this is?" Marquis asked, rather stupidly, Justin thought.

Of course he knew what it was. It was something to make him run like blazes, if only his legs would obey, wrapped around Marquis' neck. It was pain. Humiliation. Anguish.

More commonly, it was a choice between two evils.

Marquis scraped the pinecone against Justin's cheek, rough enough to leave a bright pink mark in his wake. He stared down at Justin, eyes suddenly so much colder, bottomless pits of hatred. "I asked you a question, boy. Answer!"

"Pinecone," Justin grumbled, glaring at Marquis. "It's a goddamn pinecone you son of a -"

Marquis pressed the cone against Justin's temple until he winced, leaning in close enough for spittle to spatter the boy's face, "One word answers will be quite enough!"

"Fuck you is two words, is that okay?" Justin snarled mutinously.

Marquis seemed at a battle of wills, his eyes waging war between strangling the insolent boy where he lay or regaining the control he had worked so hard to build. Fire burned red in his cheeks, his lips pressed into a white line of rage. Justin stared audaciously up at the man, waiting for the final fight or flight. His toes were answering his brain's urgent distress call to move, his feet tingling and coming around soon afterward.

The man took a deep breath through his nose, closing his eyes, a low chuckle rumbling from deep in his throat. "You will soon learn that such things will never leave your sweet lips unpunished, my boy." He took another deep, steadying breath, getting control of the shakiness fury weaved into his tone.

Justin's lips trembled with anger. He said nothing.

"Now, my boy, a choice. You believe that you are stronger than your Master, yes? Answer."

Justin raised an impudent eyebrow and again, said nothing. A choice. Between Marquis fucking him or Marquis using the pinecone to …Justin swallowed thickly in a suddenly parched throat. If he chose Marquis, the pain would be less, of course, but the humiliation …that was likely the key emotion that Marquis was counting on. If he couldn't scare Justin into obeying him, he would get him to do so with small prods, with making Justin believe that he wanted to be hurt. Making Justin think that to be hurt was life.

Again. This had happened before. Justin was sorry for something he shouldn't have been sorry for, Justin paying penance for wrongs so simple as breathing out of turn, Justin being hurt and made to believe it was love. Marquis made him think that he was no better than whatever the man deemed him worthy of.

And now that Justin was aware of the game, now that he had a mind to fight it, he had absolutely no choice whatsoever in the choice Marquis was presenting him with.

"I said, do you believe you are stronger than me, boy? Answer or I will use this in places not mentioned in the nature guide!" he yelled, brandishing the pinecone again in front of Justin's face.

"Yes! I know I am stronger than you!" Justin shouted right back.

Marquis nodded serenely as if that was the answer he had been waiting for. He brought the pinecone down, down, scratching the length of Justin's torso, a foul sneer of supremacy on his face. Justin gasped with fear despite his brave front as Marquis circled his limp cock with the abrasive new weapon of choice. A ripple of terror thrilled through Justin's gut. Surely the man wouldn't …he wouldn't actually …!

"You are so strong you would rather this, instead of your Master, hmm?" Marquis cooed, dropping his hand still further until the pinecone was resting above Justin's center. He gently pushed against the skin, watching the boy's reaction all the while.

Justin clenched his jaw, biting his bottom lip, glaring up at Marquis.

"Do you want your Master to fuck you, my boy? Answer."

Justin growled low in his throat, the sound turning into a roar of fury as it left his mouth. In a sudden burst of pride, of freedom that was not yet his, Justin decided he would rather bleed to death out here than verbally assent to Marquis raping him.

"Do you want your Master to shove this inside of you, my boy? Answer." Marquis said patronizingly, a teacher scolding a misbehaving child. He pushed again, watching gleefully as tears of rage began building in Justin's eyes, shining overly bright in the sun. Eventually, any man faced with extreme torture or minimal torture would choose the latter. Self-preservation was a bitch but it was one of Marquis' greatest assets. Justin wasn't such a fool to keep up the stubborn act. Soon, he would break and Marquis would be there to reshape the pieces into his obedient slave.

"If you do not answer me immediately," Marquis chided, the tension of Justin's earlier insolence beginning to quiver his voice once more, "I will chose for you. What do you think I will chose, hmm? For such a naughty boy like you?"

Justin screamed again, angry at Marquis but angrier at himself, the tears he had fought to hide since awaking what seemed like eons ago, but had only been a half hour at most, spilling down his cheeks.

"Fuck you! Fuck you! GoddamnyoutoHell!" Justin bellowed, sobbing, still angrier the more emotion that escaped him.

"Answer me, Justin," Marquis said so coolly, so calmly, that it infuriated Justin even more.

"Fuck …" Justin choked back another hiccupping sob, feeling the pinecone against him like some great fist, something he was forced to beg for …was it really not so long ago? Sweating under a mask, feeling his balls bruised by vindictive pinches, his legs quaking with the assault …oh, the pain …and he had asked for it.

He had to ask for it now.

"Fuck …me …" Justin whispered, voice so low, so livid, he was surprised the forest didn't catch fire around him just from the heat of fury his tone held.

"No."

Justin sobered instantly, staring wide-eyed at the man whose voice had been frostier than Justin had heard come from anything living; purely glacial, sending chills down Justin's spine. Never had the boy imagined that Marquis would refuse his request, that he really was going to push that THING into him, fuck him with something so harsh.

"N-no?" Justin had to ask, hating himself for it.

Marquis smiled devilishly. "No. That is not how you answer me."

A wave of relief, as preposterous as feeling relieved when he was lying there in the pine needles bare assed with a pine cone pressed painfully against his opening was, washed over Justin. \*Oh,\* he thought, \*silly me, I didn't ask correctly. Asshole! Fucking asshole!\*

"Say, 'Master, I wish for you to fuck me. I wish for you to take me and give me what I deserve. I wish for you to make me better of all the injustices and wrongs the world outside your care has taught me.' Say it, my boy."

Justin gaped at him. The words 'no' and 'way' came to mind. As did the words, so common in Justin's vocabulary these days, 'fuck' and 'you'. But he didn't say them. Now, the sane part of his mind told him, was not the time to be obstinate.

But damned if he would call that fucking pig 'Master'.

"I wish for you to fuck me," Justin ground out, \*and take that fucking pinecone away from my ass!\* "I wish for you to …line?"

Marquis ground his teeth together. "I wish for you to take me and give me what I deserve. I wish for you to make me better of all the injustices and wrongs the world outside your care has taught me."

"How long have you been practicing this!" Justin demanded.

Marquis twisted the pinecone against Justin, never looking away from the boy's face, even as the first trickle of blood seeped into the earth.

Justin whimpered and it was a broken sound, as broken as he could make it. He said slowly, breathing through the pain, "I wish for you to take me and give me what I deserve, and for you to make me better of …"

Marquis pushed harder, seeming now to not care whether or not he entered Justin first or after the pinecone.

Justin hissed in a breath and said the rest in one word, "alltheinjusticesandwrongstheworld outsideyourcarehastaughtme! God!" He yanked his face away from Marquis' grip and pressed his cheek into the dirt and pine needles, feeling the sharp pokes on his face as clearly as the dull ache of his ass.

He felt that if he could get free of Marquis, he would be able to run now. How far, and to where, however, were questions he couldn't yet answer. Justin wasn't quite sure where the car was, or how close they were to where it was parked. Surely Brian was awake by now!?

Marquis threw the pinecone aside, proud of his victory and wearing that pride all over his smug face. He took a small red plastic packet out of his pocket and for one marvelous second, Justin thought that it was a condom, that Marquis was actually going to use protection. But no, the boy saw as Marquis tore open the pack, it wasn't a condom. It was unmarked lubricant in a clear bag. The stuff was a violent red, the wrapper was not. He was sure it would feel like fire against the newest cuts of his ass.

"I made this myself. It is something my boys back home find highly sensual. It will awaken every last nerve you have wherever I put it, make you unable to keep from screaming my name. Not nearly as fatal or inebriating as the Cataleptic, but I do find my boys prefer to use this than …nothing at all. Do you want me to use this, my boy? Answer."

"Do you have anything else? KY maybe?" Justin asked snottily. He had, unfortunately, picked up Brian's fierce tongue in the years they had been together. Being afraid and hurt used to make him quiet and timid, now, Justin wanted to lash out. With Brian away, someone had to fill in the gaps. He felt reassured that Marquis hadn't punished him for not calling him 'Master'. Confidence wasn't easy to come by beneath this awful tormentor, but when it did, Justin clung to it like a lifeline.

Marquis shook his head sadly, "So much to learn. So, so much. And you will not be so easily taught this time, I fear. You have let the words of evil men cloud your judgment of the right way."

" 'Cloud my judgment'? Do you realize you sound like every religious bigot out there toda -Aaargh!" Justin finished in a throat-scorching scream. Marquis had applied his latest invention to Justin's opening without a word of warning, and the man had not been lying about its effects. Justin felt every nerve boiling with an insatiable desire to be touched, pushed, felt. His nerves weren't just awake with it, they were like addicts waiting for the next fix of flesh.

"Mmm, you like that my boy? Answer."

"Aargh! God! Ungh…take it off!" Justin squirmed as if a thousand hands were hovering over him, just a breath away from touching his flesh, always so close to touching him but so very far away. His body was back to being able to move but it was in no way out of his own volition.

"I'm so very sorry, my boy. So very sorry indeed. It cannot be taken off, nor can it be remedied by laying perfectly still. Is it …unbearable? Answer."

"Yes!"

"Insatiable? Answer."

"Yes! Argh! Ungh! Argh, please!"

"Do you want me to fix it, my boy? Answer."

"YES!" Justin begged, writhing on the forest floor and not having a mind to be ashamed of himself. He tried to touch himself, to satiate the wonderful aching, but Marquis didn't have to do anything more than swat his hands away to make the boy continue to squirm, hands grabbing fistfuls of pine needles in his urgency to touch, to be touched, to feel everything all at once and to make it go away, yet, to make it last forever, too. It was almost like the Cataleptic, that much was true, but instead of being deadly, it only made Justin wish he were dead to end the torturous pleasure.

"Do you really want me to fix this? Answer." Marquis said, sliding the moist packet opening over Justin's lips, eliciting a feral scream from the boy as his mouth joined in the fight for attention.

"Please! Please!" Justin screamed, hips jutting up toward the man who had so short a time ago, been the most repulsive man on earth. Brian was not in his mind, nor was Julian, or his friends and family back home. Marquis wasn't even truly there as anything more than a body, than a vessel to make his mind forget it all.

Marquis leaned over Justin, lips brushing ever so feather-light over Justin's fiery mouth. When he spoke, each word was only agonizing breaths teasing the inflamed nerves. Justin arched his back toward Marquis with a frustrated growl, but the man kept from touching his prize.

"Justin, my boy. Look at me. Focus on me, now." Marquis said softly, an edge of his former rage returning.

Justin, not thinking about disobeying, followed his orders, looking up pleadingly at Marquis.

"Justin, my boy, if you really wanted this to stop …" he smiled wickedly, suddenly getting to his feet with a surprising agility. "If you really wanted this to stop …" he said again, smiling still more evilly, "then you would have called me 'Master'."

Justin groaned, turning himself over so his bare ass was facing the sky. Marquis hoisted him up before he had time to work out the maneuver of fucking the ground in his desperation.

"Now, now, maybe we will learn from this little experience like no other lesson has taught us, hmm? Perhaps you will feel this need for your Master's touch and find that you cannot have it when you have been so very wayward. When you beg for me to fuck you later, you will truly want it, yes? Answer."

"Yes …" Justin whimpered as Marquis pulled up his pants, the barest of touches of his jeans against his skin was like agony all over again, the fire spreading up through his belly, down his thighs, up his cock, making him impossibly hard against the zipper.

"Yes what?" Marquis asked as he forced Justin back through the trees, cursing his own need to punish the boy before meeting the needs of his own stiff dick.

Justin stumbled but Marquis caught him by the arm with a vice like grip.

"Yes what, my boy? Answer."

Justin felt a sneer of his own work itself onto his face. He felt like the need to feel was overwhelming but there was something entirely stronger battling with Marquis' mix. Justin's own stubborn will to fight. His own refusal to call the man by any title he did not deserve. "Yes …" he said, "you fucking bastard."

\*

Will and Cameron had arrived seconds late. Sullivan passed the Taylor siblings in the car he had stolen earlier, with Mark seated beside him, without getting even a second glance from either blonde. Mark watched them fade into the distance, hurrying up to the front door of Lindsay and Melanie's home, but as Sullivan turned the corner, Mark had already looked away.

Will was about to knock on the door when Cameron shoved her way inside. The lock, if it had been locked, wouldn't have dared defy her.

"Where's Mark?" she demanded urgently.

"Upstairs," Lindsay said, immediately on her feet. "Wha-"

But Cameron and Will had already raced up the stairs before Lindsay could finish her question. She followed them, Melanie on her heels.

"What's going on?" Lindsay demanded as Cam burst into Mark's -thoroughly empty -room.

"Fuck!" Will yelled. "We're too damn late!"

Lindsay gasped, her hand flying to her mouth, "Where-?"

"Sullivan bloody Kinney," Cameron cursed under her breath. "He's going to trade Mark for Brian and Justin,"

"Or maybe just Justin," Will added, "We haven't gotten that far yet."

"I'll call the police," Melanie said quickly, but Will just as quickly shot her down.

"No, don't. There's absolutely nothing they can do. They've never been able to hold Marquis, let alone track him."

"But we figure where Marquis is going, Sullivan is going. They've been away from home for far too long," Cameron sighed, kicking the wall in frustration. Truth was, she and Will had taken Mark in as family. Anyone Justin cared for that much had to be their own kin, blood or not. Mark missing, Justin and Brian missing, all under the control of the worst of men, it was enough to make her want to shoot someone.

She had a few someone's in mind.

"I'll call everyone," Melanie nodded, giving a fleeting glance at Cam and Will before rushing off to the phone.

"We're coming, too," Lindsay said, her tone leaving no room for argument.

But neither Will nor Cameron had even thought of raising a protest. They were glad that they had people to back them up. In the end, when things came crashing down, it might be best if the three kidnap victims were near family.

It would save Will and Cameron from having to break the bad news to anyone not present at the time of their deaths.

\*

Marquis dragged Justin back to the car and was immediately affronted with questions of the blonde's state of dire distress. Julian seemed to think that he was entitled to know everything Marquis did to Justin, yet on his own, he had been all too busy with Brian to even notice his brother's absence.

"What did you give him?" Julian demanded, eyeing his brother as if the ailing twin were some strange creature in a freak show. But he wasn't asking out of concern for Justin. He wanted some to try on Brian when the brunette regained consciousness. Julian had been playfully pulling the hair that lead down to Brian's pants from his belly button, seeing how much of the slight pain he could inflict before Brian made some kind of reaction, though he never did wake up.

"It's my special recipe," Marquis said with the air of a parent about to lose his patience with a tantrum-throwing infant, "And no, dark one, you cannot have any."

Julian's eyes flared with rage. He dug his fingernails into Brian's chest, pursing his lips. Marquis only smiled more at Julian's reaction, making the younger man bit his tongue until he tasted blood.

Marquis took Justin to the back of the Jeep and opened a small black bag he had brought from the Dark Starr studios. He pushed Justin over the car, the boy moaning in frustration. Marquis grabbed Justin's hands as he tried desperately to touch himself, to stop the agony. Justin screamed at his captor wordlessly, sounding more and more like an animal as the blood rushed to lower parts of his anatomy.

"Now, now, my boy, that is not a sound one makes to show his obedience. Wordless grunts are for the bedroom, not for the public eye."

"Raaaargh!" Justin howled, desperation giving him the strength to pull away from Marquis.

"Hey! Don't let him get away!" Julian shouted, turning around in his seat as Justin's knees dropped his weight and sprawled him on the loose gravel, a sadistic smile on his face showing that he didn't so much care if Justin got away so long as he got hurt doing it.

Marquis pulled a roll of duct tape from the bag as coolly and calmly as one taking a glass of wine to their favorite armchair for a night of good reading. He tore a long strip and tossed the rest back into his bag, kneeling down and straddling Justin while the boy writhed on the road, face down. The gravel scratching his face didn't seem to bother Justin so much as not being able to figure out how to move his hands to his aching cock.

"No!" Justin screamed fruitlessly as Marquis took hold of his hands and yanked them behind his back, wrapping them securely in silver tape.

Marquis scowled once his job was done, snaking an arm around Justin's nose and mouth, cutting off his air all the while sending pleasure coursing through the boy's body by touching the sensitive lips. He leaned close behind Justin and whispered in his ear.

"You want Hell, boy, continue disobeying me and I will take you down to meet the Devil."

Justin arched beneath him, trying to pull away, trying to push himself harder against the ground, against Marquis' warm flesh.

"And when you meet the Devil, my boy, you will see that He answers only to Me." Marquis released Justin and an uncontrolled sob lurched out of the boy at the loss of contact. He was dimly aware of Marquis slipping an arm around him and pulling him up, walking him forcefully around the Jeep and throwing him into the seat. Marquis buckled his catch into the seat, smiling sadistically as two thick tears rolled down Justin's flushed cheeks.

Marquis got into the car and started back on their route, glancing back at Julian as the blonde cleared his throat.

"You won't be able to make a fool of me forever," Julian muttered indignantly under his breath, once again stroking his fingers up and down the line of hair from Brian's belly button down.

"I have no desire to make a fool of you, dark one. You are doing so well on your own." Marquis said, bright as day, never knowing the storm that was building in the young man right behind him.

Julian ignored Marquis' comment but it took all the control he had to do so. He studied Justin for a moment as his brother writhed in the front seat, tracing the back of his hand over Brian's jaw, his cheek, a flaming, endless darkness welling in his blue eyes. His gaze then bore into the back of Marquis' head for a moment before he switched focus to Brian. Julian brought back his fist and slammed it into Brian's stomach in a sudden burst of feral outrage.

"Wake up!" he screamed.

Justin arched off the seat, turning his head to Julian and Brian but not quite able to control his mouth to protest the treatment. His eyes rolled in their sockets and he bit his lip, hard, trying to alleviate the unquenchable sensation.

"You did not get much attention at home, did you?" Marquis chided Julian, keeping his eyes on the road. It was going to be a very long trip to New Orleans if Julian decided that outbursts of physical violence were going to be acceptable.

"Shut the fuck up! You have your prize, I have mine, to do with what I want! He is mine and he won't wake up!" Julian slapped Brian across the face, "I'm going to fucking kill him if I want to and just you try to stop me!" Julian's screams were loud enough to peel paint off the walls, but just as suddenly, he quieted to an almost eerie serenity. He smiled sweetly at Marquis in the rearview mirror and the look, the silence, was much more disconcerting than the yelling. It was enough to send shivers down Marquis' spine, even after all he had seen and done.

For the first time, Marquis had a thrill of terror in his stomach that he had no idea the force he had joined hands with. And that sooner than he was prepared for, he was going to find out just what Julian Taylor could do.

Part II

"So, what did Julian do to piss you off so much?" Mark asked candidly, flipping through the glove box that belonged to neither he nor Sullivan. Long rides didn't sit well with Mark. It made him think of the first time he had been taken to New Orleans when he was much younger, though for no better circumstances. It always seemed to boil down to going to see Marquis.

"He stole my Jeep." Sullivan answered simply, not looking over at the boy. It was hard enough driving and concentrating on what he was going to do to Julian without having to play twenty questions with his cousin's son.

Mark huffed. "Yeah, right." Under the maps, the pair of sunglasses, was something Mark decided not to tell Sulli about, and quickly shut the compartment before the man looked over.

Sullivan's dark eyes studied Mark. "I have clocked more warrants and APB's in that Jeep than you could ever manage your entire juvenile delinquent life, so don't get me started on murdering a thief for sentimental value."

"That has nothing to do with Justin or dad …or me, for that matter. If you just wanted to get Julian and your Jeep back, you wouldn't need me to get them back. What's the real reason? And don't give me any shit about sentimental value over a dumb car, either, I can see through you like a greasy napkin."

Sullivan gave Mark a disgusted look. "You're smarter than your dad."

"And you aren't, so? Tell me, already, if I have to sit in silence for one more minute I'm going to die of boredom!"

"As opposed to dying by my hand if you don't shut the fuck up and sit still?!"

Mark smirked, turning in his seat to look at Sullivan, "Listen, Sugah," he said in his best southern voice, "No need to get your panties in a twist. All's I want's a little conversation."

"You're not conversing on the right topics, kid." Sullivan grumbled.

"Okay, then, how about telling me why you and dad hate each other so much?"

"I'm better looking and he can't get over it."

"Fuck that!" Mark sighed. "Come ON!"

"Because when he got your mother pregnant I tried to convince her to have an abortion."

Mark groaned, "You don't even know who my mother is!"

"Shut up anyway," Sullivan snarled. Mark grinned. He had no intention of shutting up.

\*

"I've tried their cell phones, damnit, what good is checking again going to do? Their phones are probably back in Pittsburgh somewhere, laying on the floor forgotten." Will said angrily to Michael in the back seat.

"Just checking …" Michael said softly, clicking his phone shut.

Will sighed deeply, "Sorry. Didn't mean to snap at you. It's just …enough, ya know? Fucking enough, all this shit that has happened to them. I thought it was over."

"So did they. We all did. For awhile there, it was." Michael said.

"Never should have let our guard down," Cameron muttered from beside Will, staring fixedly out her window but not seeming to take in any of the scenery.

"How were you to know what was going to happen?" Lindsay told Cam sternly, running her hands through Melanie's hair, both also in the back seat. "After we sent Mark up to bed, we didn't go and check on him. It's as much our fault as it is yours, for not seeing him as a bargaining chip, and not seeing that Brian and Justin were taken again."

"It isn't your career choice to watch people, though, is it? You haven't trained most of your damn life to kill the bad guys, to keep the ones you love safe. You aren't made for that life. We are." Cameron answered just as harshly. "Will and I kill for a living. We also made a pact that no more harm would come to our family on our watch."

"We also made that pact," Melanie said. "Just because Justin isn't blood, doesn't mean he isn't family. And Mark, too."

"And Brian," Lindsay added.

"The important thing isn't who's at fault, it's getting them back," Michael said.

"And getting even," Will agreed. "Once and for all."

\*

By the time the second moon had risen since acquiring his boy, Marquis was sound in his decision. Justin was asleep next to him, albeit restlessly, his tongue still unconsciously lashing out to touch his lips every now and then. The gel would wear off soon and he wanted Julian and Brian out of the picture when that happened.

Marquis pulled into the parking lot of a truck stop and pulled the hand brake, turning in his seat to face Julian. "It is time we part ways, dark one. Your Brian will awake shortly and notice that you are not Justin simply because you are still conscious. Take him and -"

"I fucking know what to do, Marquis! Have fun with Justin. I'll meet you at the Tormented Gardens." Julian said, sliding Brian out of the Jeep after him. He let Brian crumple to the pavement and leaned over the door, dangerously close to Marquis.

"You are sure you do not need me to show you how to dominate?" Marquis taunted, a forced smile curling his lips.

Julian took a deep breath and offered a forced smile in return. His hands shot out and grabbed the back of Marquis' head, pulling him into a bruising kiss. Marquis tried to pull away but Julian held fast, one hand snaked tightly into the man's hair and the other landing as soft as butterflies over Marquis' clothes. Looking for something specific.

The gel Marquis had used on Justin.

Julian found several packets of what he was searching for and tucked them into his back pocket without Marquis noticing -the man was too busy trying to get away. Julian let him go, his smile widening triumphantly. He stood away from Marquis, in case the man wanted to retaliate with his fists, and said, "When you see how I control Brian, you will know I don't need your help. And you will be begging for tips."

Marquis laughed mirthlessly, hardly waiting for Julian's feet to hit the pavement as he put the Jeep in reverse and floored it back onto the highway. He glared into the rearview mirror at the slowly fading silhouette of Julian Taylor with his middle finger raised high into the air.

\*

Julian leaned Brian's limp form over the hood of a primer smeared pickup truck, ignoring the nasty looks given to him by two burly men lounging on motorcycles. The boy, innocent in face with the devil inside, walked to the nearest payphone and dropped a quarter in, dialing his brother's cell phone number.

"Yello?" Will answered, shouldering the phone as he drove.

"Will?! Will, it's Justin!"

Will swerved, the attention of his passengers avidly on him. "Where are you?"

"I …I don't know! I'm scared!" Julian whimpered convincingly, voice wavering with the verge of tears. "H-help me!"

"Justin, listen to me okay? We're on our way. Are you going to New Orleans?"

"Y-yes. To Tormented Gardens. In Sulli's Jeep."

"What? You're in Kinney's Jeep?"

"Yes."

"Then what is HE driving?" Will muttered under his breath.

"Huh?"

Will cleared his throat, not sure if he wanted to tell Justin that Mark was missing. He chose not to. "Are you driving now? Where's Marquis?"

"I'm in the trunk, there's a black bag and it had a phone in it. Please, Will."

"Julian is with you?"

"N-no. I don't think he had anything to do with this, it's Marquis. He …killed Bear. He told me." Julian whispered, then caught his breath, "Oh…oh, God, we stopped! He's coming Will! Please, Will! Will, helllllllllpppp-" Julian wailed, cutting himself off by covering his own mouth and then slamming the phone down. He sobered instantly, shooting a crazed grin over to the two bikers (who quickly went inside, wanting nothing to do with whatever Julian was playing at).

Brian kept his eyes closed, his body rather numb. He had been awake for the last ten minutes but the orders from his brain to his hands to strangle his captor were lost in translation. Julian -he was very sure this was not, in fact, anyone BUT Julian because he had not only lied to Will about their location, but had said Marquis was alone in the kidnapping - seemed to disappear from the scene, leaving Brian prone on the truck.

He had gone inside for a drink.

Brian groaned, slowly opening one eye to take in his surroundings. It was a seedy place, but nothing compared to Dark Starr Productions. Though, Brian thought, he would rather be back at that hell hole with Justin tied to his back than here, alone. He tried his damnedest to push thoughts of Marquis having Justin, of what the man was even now doing to the boy. Brian lifted a finger with great difficulty, only a damn finger, and was too worn out to do much more than close his eyes again before Julian returned at a panicked run, unceremoniously dragged Brian into the truck cab, climbed in after him, and shot sparks of gravel on his way out onto the highway.

\*

Will shook his head, glancing at the caller ID on the bright blue light of his cell phone. It wasn't a cellular call that Justin had made, it was from a payphone. There was a number, but all the name revealed was 'pay phone'. He cursed, more confused than ever, and threw his phone to Cameron. "See if you can get an operator to cross reference that number, Cam. Get an address. No doubt both of the natives we're chasing know all the short cuts down south. Justin called from a payphone, let's find out why he decided to bring a payphone into the trunk with him, eh?"

Cameron frowned at her brother, dialing an operator with her own phone and glancing at the number in question. "It wasn't Justin, then."

"I figured as much, really. When he talked, he only referred to himself. He said 'help me' instead of 'us'. Wouldn't Justin have mentioned it if he were without Brian?"

"He would want to talk to Brian if they hadn't been taken together, if he didn't know exactly where Brian was." Cameron confirmed. "Yes," she said to the operator, "Can you reference a number for me? I need the address, please. Thanks, yes, I'll hold."

Will continued, "And Justin wouldn't have shown Marquis he was talking on the phone. He would have dropped it but not hung up, to let us hear what went on in case there was some clue or background noise to where they were."

"Julian." Cameron said the name like it was a curse. The operator came back on, Cam gave the number, and closed her eyes in concentration as she waited for the address.

"The question is," Will went on whether his sister was listening or not, "why would Julian call us pretending to be Justin, saying Marquis was the sole kidnapper, and that he, Julian, had nothing to do with it?"

"Maybe because he and Marquis aren't together?" Melanie chanced.

"Yeah, but …"

"No, I mean, they ARE together in this, but for one reason or another, they split up. It's possible Julian has both Brian and Justin and want us to follow Marquis? Or he doesn't want to implicate himself in the crime. Like he already knows we are on the wrong trail…"

Will nodded slowly, letting Melanie's words sink in. He didn't have time to answer before Cameron was thanking the operator profusely and hanging up, a name and address scrawled on her hand.

"El Diablo Variedad." She said triumphantly. "We're a half hour away. Hit the next off ramp."

\*

"I'm getting a beer," Sullivan announced suddenly, veering off the road and into the lot of a deserted truck stop.

"Fine," Mark said, unbuckling his seat belt as their own stolen car clicked it's engine idly, cooling off, "Then I'll drive. I'll come back and pick you up later."

"Ha ha. Ha ha ha fucking ha." Sullivan said sarcastically. "Not a chance."

"I have a permit!"

"And I have a gun." Sulli said, brandishing the weapon under his shirt for proof.

Mark didn't retaliate with his own gun, sitting quietly waiting for him in the glove box. Instead, he feigned shock and sat still while Sulli jingled the keys in his face and disappeared inside. The teenager got out of the car and walked casually to the payphone, past a drunk man sprawled on the hood of an old Chevy truck, and dialed Melanie's cell phone collect.

"Hello?" her voice came instantly, as if she was expecting the call.

"This is a collect phone call from -" Came a preprogrammed voice, then, "Mel?"

"Mark!"

"Hiya! I'm kind of out past my curfew and -"

"Mark, honey, where are you?"

"Um … I came of my own free will. Sullivan -"

"-has taken you as a bargaining chip with Marquis!" Melanie cut him off. "Mark, tell us where you are."

"I'm at a truck stop, the …" Mark glanced up at the hissing neon green sign, "El Diablo Variedad. That's Spanish, right? Devil's something …"

"WHAT?!?" she screamed, looking at Will, "He's at the Variedad. Mark, we're almost there. Where is Sullivan?"

"Inside having a beer." Mark rolled his eyes. He had already figured out Sulli's plot to use him to get Marquis to hand over what he wanted, though while his mothers thought it was Justin, Mark was pretty sure that in this, Sulli had not lied. He wanted Julian.

Speaking of Julian …

Mark pressed his face behind the payphone box, watching with shock as the identical twin of his best friend scurried out from the bar and grab the drunken man off the hood of the -

It was Brian!

Mark dropped the phone, running as fast as his legs would carry him toward the truck. Sullivan came raging out of the doorway and the impact sent both of them to the ground as a shower of gravel shards rained down on them.

"Bastard!" Sullivan shouted, throwing a half-full bottle of Guinness Stout after the speeding truck.

"What are you waiting for?!? Get in the car!" Mark shouted, already on his feet and hopping into the car. Sullivan followed suit, gunning the engine and taking off after Julian.

He had seen the blonde for only a split second, the bright impish blue eyes startled to see Sulli sitting not three stools away. Julian took off at the speed of light, pausing only to shove not one, but two burly bikers into Sullivan's path.

"Hurry! You're going to lose them! He has dad!" Mark screamed, on the edge of his seat.

"Shut up, kid! Damnit! And buckle up! If you go through the windshield -"

"You won't be able to trade me for Julian when we find Marquis," Mark finished, smirking at Sullivan's shocked expression. "Yeah, I know. Don't worry, I won't hold it against you. It's pretty obvious Julian isn't working for Marquis, isn't it?"

Back at the bar, two curious men came out of their regular haunt, shrugging off spilled beers and obvious confusion. One of them went back inside to tell a friend that he was no longer the proud owner of a primer coated Chevrolet and the other walked to the dangling payphone as if approaching a dangerous animal. He picked it up and held it to his ear, wincing at the screeching female voice on the other end, and promptly hung it up.

Part III

Justin's eyes fluttered open. The wind was blowing in his face, smelling clean, fresh. Like plenty of trees were flying by as they drove. Drove? Driving… they were on the road. He remembered feeling like his body was not his own, like he was riding the knife edge between pleasure and pain and slowly falling off the deep end of the latter. The fresh air was making him feel better now, but he kept his eyes closed, waiting for some clue to what was happening and where he was.

And who he was with.

For the last, he didn't have to wait long. Marquis' voice came through the darkness, like bruising black sin if cruelty and sadism could have a color. He was not speaking to Justin, no, but to someone else not inside the car. And what he was saying made Justin's mind reel with the horrific memories of what was once the state of his tortured mind.

Bruising strength. Shame. Submission. Pain. Justin fought to keep his memories from tearing out of his throat in the form of a scream. His one advantage, the only thing keeping Marquis' attention focused on the phone call and not on him, was feigned unconsciousness.

"Non, mon ami, it is YOU who does not understand. The cargo I carry here will appease even the darkest of men. His flesh is ripe and sweeter than you have ever paid for. No, no, he will not cause a problem. When I deliver him, nothing will remain of the boy. Nothing," Marquis said with a grim finality, darting his dark eyes to the unconscious form of his victim.

Justin could feel Marquis' eyes roaming over his body and suppressed a shiver. His hands clutched into fists and it was then that he remembered he was bound. Justin desperately wanted to see where Brian was, why Brian was not making a fuss about their situation, but he would no sooner open his eyes than tell Marquis he loved him.

"No," Marquis continued to the person on the other end, his voice clipped and curt as if he was not happy with whoever he was talking to. "Non, I assure you, you will be quite satisfied with this one."

Justin swallowed thickly. Marquis, the most horrible man he had ever been forsaken to meet, was working for someone else? Marquis answered to somebody?! Who could possibly be more frightening than Marquis?

Besides Julian, of course.

"No!" Marquis shouted and Justin flinched away, swallowing a gasp. "I will not be demeaned like that! You listen to me and listen well, my friend: Justin Taylor beat me once but it will not happen again. I have something that will assure my success." He paused and Justin waited, digging his fingernails into the palms of his hands. "I have Brian Kinney. Yes, in the safest place possible. In the hands of who he believes is his beloved."

Justin squeezed his eyes closed so tightly he saw stars. Brian was gone. He had sensed it, felt the loss like some palpable missing piece to this nightmare. Brian was not with him, he was with Julian thinking it was Justin. Justin was alone.

"Now you've caught on," Marquis said acidly. "You just keep pumping money into the Tormented Gardens and I'll keep you stocked with toys." A pause, then, "Yes, Master, when he cries you will know what true heaven feels like." Another pause, this one lengthier and forcing a seething, angry breath from Marquis. But no reply. Marquis was so angry, Justin knew he would be gripping the phone and steering wheel with a white knuckled strength.

Justin tested his bindings and found them far more secure than he would have liked. But Marquis was distracted by the telephone call, distracted from Justin's actions by the man who was yelling so loudly that Justin could hear it from the passenger side of the Jeep. During the diatribe, Justin shifted in his seat. He didn't open his eyes, knew that if Marquis saw him he would know soon enough. Justin refused to see if Marquis had his black eyes on the road, instead forcing himself to twist in his seat until his tightly tied hands gripped the most deliciously wonderful thing this side of Brian Kinney's cock. The door handle.

There was only so much Justin could do to prepare himself for what could very possibly get him killed, either on impact with the speeding highway or by Marquis if Justin did survive hitting the pavement but did not run fast enough.

If only there were a car following, someone to witness his escape…

No time for trivialities now. Justin clutched the handle like a lifeline and yanked it towards him, shoving himself backward and into the oblivion of the road.

\*

Julian drove until he was certain he would either flip the battered old truck or get picked up on a police radar scanner. Glancing in his rearview mirror, Julian could not see Sullivan Kinney following him but that meant shit in the book of thieves. If Julian knew anything, he knew that a high speed chase between men like he and Sullivan at night excluded headlights. It was a careless pursuit between maniacs of a different species of person, a brand of man that existed recklessly and thrived in the dead of night.

Well two could play at that game.

Julian switched off the dashboard lights, bathing himself in the nocturnal blanket that matched his mind. If Sullivan wanted to catch him, the bastard was going to have to work for it.

\*

Mark reached up and clutched the handle above the door instinctively. He had never gone this fast, not even in a car he was driving. "Still after your Jeep?"

"What?" Sulli grumbled sharply.

"Your Jeep. The one with sentimental value that you're chasing Julian for?"

"What about it, kid?"

"Julian was not driving the Jeep. He left in a beat up pickup truck. If the only reason you're chasing him -"

Sulli cut him off, "Do you see any other leads? Do you fuckin' see where he abandoned my Jeep?"

"No, but -"

"But shit," Sulli snapped, glaring at Mark in the pitch darkness of their own stolen vehicle. "There's no other way to find things out than from the source, however split it fucking is. So sit back and relax and enjoy your first high speed chase."

"How do you know it's my first?" Mark demanded.

"Because you're grabbing the 'oh, shit' handle like it's the last thing you'll ever do," Sulli grinned, turning back to watch the road. He knew Julian was up there. The little bastard was too much of a tease to pull over to the side of the road and wait for his predators to pass by. Julian would be booking it, of that, Sullivan had no doubt.

Mark scowled but stayed silent. Julian might have been Sulli's best bet at finding the Jeep but Mark was still unconvinced the Southern man wanted the Jeep more than he wanted Julian. Mark used the darkness to his advantage and slipped his fingers to the glove compartment, opening it with the agile ease that under normal circumstances would have gotten him admiration from Sullivan. If Mark was not going for the gun hidden there, he knew Sulli would have been proud that Mark took more after him than after Brian. As it was, Mark now held the gun like a cold weight of assurance in his lap. There was nowhere else to put it and keep it from sliding around during the wild drive, giving it's secret away. He closed the compartment and hoped more than he had ever hoped for anything in his life, that the gun was loaded. He would defend himself if he had to, when Sullivan turned on him.

Or when he saw those pitiless black orbs in Marquis' sinister face.

Whichever came first.

\*

Brian woke in stages. First came the feeling that he could move not just one but all of his fingers. For some reason Brian could not remember, there had been an exhaustion he had never felt in lifting just one finger. That was then …whenever then was. Next came the thought that he had fallen asleep again sometime between dusk and the full dark that it was now. Though he could not recall exactly when he had fallen asleep the first time to make this little nap fall into the 'again' category, Brian knew he had been awake before.

The best question was: how much had he had to drink and who slipped him the acid laced with turpentine?

No, no, better question than that: where was he and who was he with?

Where was he …in deep shit, that's where. But on the map …? Brian struggled to remember and got flashes of mental flotsam floating around his mind. Slamming down on something hard, metal, a truck …that was when he found moving his finger required some down time. A bar, wasn't it? Some bar? Gravel on the ground, crunching … Brian tried to dig deeper into his mind than that. He knew that beyond the jumbled mess of his mind was an answer. He needed to find out where his trouble started to understand where it had taken him.

And Justin.

Brian cracked one eye open and peered into the darkness of the cab surrounding him. He looked in the direction of the driver, where he knew the driver had to be -because Brian sure as shit hoped he was not driving, there had to be another person there somewhere- but saw nothing besides shadows hiding in shadows.

Brian felt safe to assume that if he could move his fingers, he could move everything above the waist. He was fairly certain that everything below that was for shit right about now. For a wild moment, Brian considered using his newfound agility to grab the steering wheel, roll them off the road -Brian checked to make sure his seatbelt was secure- and put a stop to his confusion. He would swear on all his dead relatives, and some of them living, that he could pull it off. But then, all of his relatives besides Mark were bitches and bastards and swearing on them would do Brian no good …

Brian gave the order to shake his head, to try and clear the spider webs out of his consciousness, but got only a slight nod in reply. So much for having the above the waist part down.

He closed his eye and opened both of them this time, squinting at the person he could not yet determine was friend or foe. Depending on how long he had been asleep and how long it would take his friends and family to track them, Brian could be with either one.

Just as Brian had become slowly aware of all ten fingers moving, Brian found himself with a malicious headache that had taken residence behind his eyes. It felt like someone had hit him with a freight train, backed up, and hit him again. Closing his eyes, as keeping them open only made the headache go from malicious to lethal, Brian decided he needed to concentrate on escape.

His mind refused to think of escape, no matter how hard he tried. The single thought that Brian could focus on was Friend or Foe?

Though, if he could focus on one train of thought besides that for a few sarcasm-free moments, Brian could have answered his own question. The darkness, not even dashboard lights, and the considerable lack of conversation or even general questions to Brian's welfare, well, the answer was right there for him to see.

Enemy.

Which one? There had a stockpile of them over the last few years: Marquis, Sullivan, Julian, not to mention Kriegg and Lito … Bradley Taylor was on the list and -

Dark Starr Productions. The seamy flesh trade underbelly past-owned by the current meat slush/former Brad Taylor enterprise was where this mess had started. Drugged, Brian had been drugged. That explained most of his unusual lethargy but it did not explain who had him now.

Marquis, Sullivan, Julian.

Marquis. Julian.

Marquis. Justin.

Julian.

That little fuck!

Brian struggled to figure out the rest of his plight, now that he had a who and a basis of where. His mind could still not grasp all the wispy dreamlike shadows that would make the puzzle complete. He could not hold onto his brilliant findings about Julian, could not make the thoughts real in his mind, solid. Couldn't, until he heard his captor speak.

Julian was solid, alright. And something had made him angrier than Hades.

"Julian T here, I'd like to speak with Teyo. No, I will not call him boss. I will most certainly NOT call him Master! Listen to me you stupid ignorant fuck of a lapdog secretary bitch! I will not make an appointment to place a goddamn phone call! If you like your legs to stay a-fucking-ttached to your obese vulture body, you will put me on a direct line straight through to Teyo Goddamn Dillinger!"

Brian shuddered and was glad that one of the Amazing Psycho's super powers did not include night vision. Julian's words were spoken with laughter, as if nothing he had just said was meant as a threat or insult. But Brian knew better than to believe Julian's laughter was anything but ominous. Julian was laughing over thoughts of doing every single thing to Teyo Goddamn Dillenger's secretary that he said he would. Julian's laughter was over how good a stupid ignorant fuck of a lapdog secretary bitch would look on a giant spit roasting over a fire.

Julian was talking again, but this time his laughter had ebbed to a voice so sinister it would have made the Devil himself sit back and applaud.

"That's better you dumbfuck. Put me through and stop apologizing before I rethink what state of life I want to bury your sorry ass in. Alive or dead? Put me through and I'll make sure you're dead before I nail the coffin lid shut. That's right, yes." A pause, Julian was waiting for something. "What did you call me?" he prompted impatiently, after the pause went on for too long where Teyo Goddamn Dillinger's secretary was stammering for the correct words. "Yes, that's right. I AM your Master. Everyone is your superior but what am I?" A short pause in which Brian could hear Julian smiling. "That's right. Now go get Dillinger and you had better fucking run on those short little pegs your god graced you with. Don't make me wait much longer. I am not a patient man."

Brian thought of correcting Julian, saying that he was a monster but most definitely not a man. His brain jumped into action and stopped the words before they could make it snidely from Brian's lips. It would not be smart to antagonize the antagonist at this point in time.

"Dillinger? About damn time! Do you know what I've had to go through to get you Kinney? A fucking mess, that's what! Who do you have working for you down there, simpletons? Does that stupid fuck on the phone understand who I am? Does he realize -No, I will fucking not calm down, Teyo! I have been driving for what seems like forever on this backroads country stretch of nothing, carrying the package you requested in perfect working condition. I have a fucking native to YOUR land somewhere on my ass chasing after fuck knows what. I split up with your cronie, Marquis but at this rate of service he'll beat me to you. Do you want that? Hmm? Do you want Marquis and my brother to get to you before I arrive with Kinney? Before I have time to train him? That's right, Dillinger. That's fucking right. No, you don't. If Justin arrives before I do, your entire show will be ruined. All those spectators will have nothing to see. Paying fucking spectators, Teyo! Remember those? When Tormented Gardens had funding and plenty of ass to go around? Hmm? I don't. You know why I don't? Why I have to hear stories told of the greater times? Because you've let Marquis run the business into the ground! You are lucky to have me on your side, Teyo. I will bring the Gardens back into what they were in the glory days before I was born. You know I can and you know I will. All you have to do is keep putting on the charade that you still have control of it all and let me do all the work. Can you do that? Can you fucking do a simple goddamn thing like act the part you've been playing for years? Well then fire that dumb fuck secretary you had pick up MY call and get someone who knows who I fucking am!" Julian finished with a shriek that could shatter glass and threw the telephone hard in Brian's direction.

Brian swallowed a scream of his own.

The good thing was ...he could feel his legs now.

\*

Julian gave another piercing scream and it was all Brian could do to not bring his hands up to cover his ears. Brian's body recoiled slightly and he winced as his headache threatened to split his skull open like an over-ripe papaya.

Brian realized he was hungry. Not just slightly. Brian was famished as if the last time he had eaten had been in his childhood, and it had been a sparse meal. His mind suggested shutting itself off again, that the exhaustion he had felt before was looming just over the horizon if he wanted to take advantage of it, but Brian wanted to stay awake. Needed. Had to. Wherever Julian was taking him -Marquis, he knew that bastard's direction, but Julian had mentioned 'training' Brian before going down south. Fat fucking chance- would suit Brian better if he knew the entrance when he got there.

Brian decided to stay awake. Right after ... a little nap.

\*

Sullivan pulled the car like a stealth predator behind Julian's old Chevy. Two car lengths. One. Julian stayed on course, steady speed, giving no indication he knew Sullivan had caught up.

"You aren't going to ram them, are you?" Mark asked in a bare whisper. "You don't know if dad has a seatbelt on."

"They can't hear you, why are you whispering?" Sulli whispered back.

"Why are you?" Mark countered.

"Shut up," Sullivan said sharply, loudly. "I know who's getting the gifts of Brian and

Angel when they hit Naw'lins."

"What do you mean? I thought -"

"That Marquis was the man in charge? Sorry, kid, there's always someone higher up. Always someone scarier."

"I-is that how you know where they're being taken? Because you work for the bigger guy?"

Sullivan snapped his head around to look at Mark. "If you were any smarter, Mark, I would have to wonder who your real folks were. Where the fuck did you come up with that inference?"

"You said you knew who they were being taken to and that he's scary. I assumed, is all."

"Anyone who's anyone in Naw'lins works for Teyo Dillinger, even Marquis."

"Teyo Dillinger. I've never heard of him."

"You will. By the end of this, you will."

"If he's so scary, why do you work for him? You're an independent soul, or at least you pretend to be, why work for a man who scares you?"

"The nightmare of working for him and the nightmare of NOT have a very clear line between them. Smart people choose one side, dead people choose the other."

"I think it's stupid to be afraid of one man." Mark said firmly, "And I'm not afraid of him."

"Hopefully you'll never have to meet him. If you did, you would rethink your confidence."

"You aren't going to trade me to him?" Mark asked truthfully.

Sullivan shuddered so hard Mark could almost hear it. "Hopefully \*I'll\* never have to meet him."

"You've never even MET him and you're afraid?"

"Nobody's met or even seen Dillinger. I would not like to know anyone who had met him, let alone seen him, because that person would have to be the Devil himself.

Nobody. Not his workers, not his victims. The man lives in darkness. He works in darkness. He has cut intricate works of art into people's flesh with a paring knife in total, complete darkness. While they were still alive."

"Mmm, powerful and talented. Sounds like a catch to me."

"You can joke now, Mark ... he makes appointments through the phone and his voice ...his voice is like the monster under the bed when you were little. You know it's there and you know it's evil but you don't know when it will come out to get you. When you bring him what he asks you to bring, you sit in the darkness. It's a nice room, from what you can sense of it. Like a lobby in a hotel. There are chairs his assistant has you sit on and they're nice. Innocent little chairs. You tell yourself before you go in that you'll count the steps from the door to the chair, from the chair to the outer door of his room, but when you enter the darkness you forget what you were going to do. You forget how to count steps to escape. It's like ...being in a hole. Like being in solitary confinement, only, you know if you were stupid enough you could walk around. And there are other people there, other clients or errand boys or ...whatever they are, there, sitting quiet next to you. On either side of you. But no one ever talks. When he calls for you, an assistant comes and gets you. You speak to him politely, like you speak in a prayer for your life. You deliver what he asks and you leave, hoping he won't call you back and glad to be leaving at all. Then the assistant leads you outdoors and it's so bright it brings tears to your eyes and -why the fuck am I telling you this?!" Sullivan shouted, snapping out of his quiet reverie.

"Because you wanted to prove how scary this guy is?"

"Shut up. Just shut the hell up. You don't know shit, Mark. This man is unstoppable. The police raid his building on a regular basis but all they ever find are chairs. Those empty, innocent chairs after hours of hallways set in a black maze. Dillinger, his workers, his victims, and his clients, vanish."

"So he has sensors outside his door and too many corridors to keep straight to give him time to leave. It's simple, Sullivan. He's smart, that's all."

Sulli shook his head. "I'd like to prove you wrong, kid, but I'm not that cruel."

\*

Will leaned back against the driver's side of the car, hands clenched into fists at his sides. He wanted to close his eyes but knew the images his weary imagination would throw in front of him if that happened. Cameron, using her tall, leggy blonde abilities instead of her professional killer abilities, was inside the El Diablo Variedad talking to the bikers, truckers, and general deviants. They would not give Will much information, or Michael for that matter, if the latter could actually be trusted to go inside and come out in one piece. But Cameron in her tight jeans and tighter camouflage shirt -and gun not bothered to be hidden at the small of her back and strapped around one thigh ... the knife sheaths on her wrists fully stocked- would be outside again once the information ran dry.

Until then, all the rest of her entourage got to wait.

Will jumped, glad no one he knew was watching him closely, when his cell phone rang. Will plugged his ear and answered, "Taylor."

"I'm on them."

"You're sure?"

"Red Jeep, two passengers. One blond, short, unconscious, the other tall, dark, and insane. Yeah, Taylor, I'm sure."

"Keep following them. We're at the El Diablo Variedad, your kind of place, do you know it?"

"I do."

"How far off from us is your position?" Will asked.

"Too far. Keep on the trail you're going."

Will took a deep breath, held it, trying to steady his voice. "I'm ...I'm trusting you. Get Justin if you can. Bring him home safe."

"I owe you my life. I owe Justin more."

Will would have said more if the other end of the line hadn't clicked off. Shaking his head, Will looked at Melanie and said, "Stay here, I'll be right back."

"Who was that on the phone?"

"Backup," Will said the simple word with so much emotion laced into it, he nearly choked. "He's found Justin and Marquis, made a positive ID on them and the Jeep. Julian, Brian, Sullivan, Sand Mark weren't there."

Michael panicked, clearly not liking the fact that Brian was split apart from Justin. His best friend just did not pull the Brian Kinney miracles without Justin by his side anymore. "But ...how does your backup know it wasn't Julian in the Jeep?"

Will bit his lip. He hadn't thought of that. "He said the blonde was unconscious."

"Asleep?"

"Possib -no, unconscious. We talked to Julian earlier, remember? He was posing as Justin. If Marquis has Justin ...they must have split either right before they got here or when they got here." Will shook his head again, "I'll be right back, stay here."

Cam came out of the truck stop with it's convenient bar before Will could go inside. "We've got the make of a primer colored Chevrolet, stolen by the Devil with an angel's face with an unconscious man. Chased after by a man with a Southern accent and a teenage boy. Heading, gee, never could have guessed it, still toward Louisiana."

"Backup has a bead on Marquis and Justin," Will said, then in a voice sounding much more like he was trying to convince himself than Cameron, said, "He can handle himself."

"It isn't himself I'm worried about him handling, William," Cameron spat dangerously.

"Let's go, who or whatever you're about to fight over isn't doing us any good," Lindsay reminded them, looking the most out of place in their surroundings.

"Right," Will nodded. He squared his jaw and looked at Cameron. "Let's go."

Part IV

Justin braced himself. He knew he was falling. The feeling of drifting through the abyss of night toward rushing highway seemed almost as clear to him as the fact that time had slowed and the impact was going to break both of his arms, legs, and likely something even more important like his skull.

And even more clear, speeding into focus even in the impossible darkness, was the sight of Marquis. Noticing the escape.

Marquis latched one fist into Justin's crotch and the effects of the toxin all over Justin's skin came back full force at the violent touch. For what seemed like an eternity, Marquis held Justin there, dangling halfway in the Jeep and the other half precariously over the ever nearer road. Marquis seemed to swerve only slightly while holding onto Justin at such an angle and Justin was viciously reminded that Marquis was stronger than he looked.

Stronger than he looked like Hades was cooler than it looked. An unfeasibility nevertheless true to those who got too used to being around it.

Justin gave a wild scream he could not believe came from his throat, his bound hands trapped beneath him, legs trying desperately to find a purchase to help take the pressure off Marquis' grip. The scream that erupted next from Justin had nothing to do with terror and everything to do with the concoction Marquis had set to work devouring Justin's nerve endings.

Marquis squeezed Justin's hard cock, the sound of his disobedient boy screaming an unwanted orgasm like music to his ears. It did not matter that Justin did not cum of his own volition, that had ceased to matter when the boy left his service. The drug was doing it's job and Marquis was a very happy man.

"Road splatter. So much highway garbage. Is that what you would rather become than join with me again?" Marquis asked acidly, eyes on the road while his hand kept a firmer than ever hold on Justin's crotch. "All that beauty gone to pot? If it weren't for your mind, you would be a very happy boy."

Justin disagreed. He might have been a very dead boy but he would still be HIM. Justin would have escaped, even if it was short lived. He would have been free! Justin's foot hooked underneath the dashboard, the other swinging wildly up and under Marquis' arm, dislodging his grip with the surprise agility. Again, Justin tried to tip himself onto the road but Marquis recovered too quickly, cold fingers latching around the ankle that had kicked Justin free.

Marquis yanked Justin, hard enough to pull the joint out of socket had he only a better angle. It was still enough to hurt and Justin cried out. Marquis pulled Justin toward him, relinquishing his hold on the ankle when he could find a better place back at Justin's groin.

"NO!" Marquis screamed heatedly.

"Let me GO!" Justin screamed right back, struggling to get his bound wrists out from under his body, wriggling to free himself from the ties while the desperation to let Marquis touch him to soothe the tingling on his skin fought to win over everything else. Justin managed to slip his hands free and moved them out from beneath him but he could not ignore the sensations of the drug.

Marquis swerved again and Justin heard his door click shut over his head. It wasn't locked but Justin would have to get to the handle again to use it as an escape route. Marquis' anger thrummed through his hand into Justin's cock like a live wire. "I will NOT be made a fool of this way in front of the Grand Marquis!"

Justin kicked at Marquis again but the same angle that kept his hip from dislocating also kept him from getting a decent strength behind it. "Grand Marquis?!" he spat with all the strength his kick lacked, "Isn't that some kind of a car?"

Marquis lurched at Justin, releasing his groin but finding the delicate tissue of his throat instead. Pulling Justin violently to a sitting position, Marquis tightened his grip until he knew Justin was seeing stars. "Disrespect will not be tolerated."

Justin squeezed his next words out around Marquis' hold, "No -" he choked, "Really! Mercury made -a car called -"

Marquis saw a world as red as the blood he tasted in his mouth. He was losing a control Teyo Dillinger was having a hard enough time believing he had ever held. All because of Justin Taylor and Brian Kinney. It would be so easy to pull the car over and teach Justin who owned him …damage the goods, just slightly, before Dillinger got them …

It would be almost as easy as finishing what his hand so eagerly wanted to complete. Asphyxiation. Death. It would be so simple and then, then …Justin would never disobey him again.

Marquis quite liked the sound of that idea. Justin, subservient. Justin, unable to argue. Not wanting anything because he no longer lived …the corpse would still be quite a tight fuck. Tighter, perhaps, than he was now. Marquis entertained the idea of an eternally beautiful Justin, frozen in the terror that Marquis bestowed on him. Literally frozen. Forever, preserved for Marquis, whenever he wanted. No arguments, no whining, no will of his own.

Marquis did this to him. Marquis had won.

Justin's hands were clawing frantically at Marquis' wrist, reaching to his face, the small rasping noises turning to squeaking turned to nothing and the hands stopped their assault. Stopped. So simple. The weight that was Justin's body left his control and leaned more onto the hand that was stealing his life. Marquis held the power again, so easily. So quickly.

"He is Teyo Dillinger. He is the Grand Marquis. You should not have insulted him" Marquis whispered crazily, more to himself now than to the unconscious boy laying across his lap. "He was my mentor once, when I was just a boy. I will show him your beauty and that I have not disappointed him. No, no, hush now, your Master will make sure you are treated nicely by my Master. See, he likes them as cold as he does hot. He will like you, yes …"

Suddenly, headlights flooded the Jeep's interior. Marquis' hands instinctively went up to cover his face, leaving both Justin and the steering wheel abandoned of their severe choke hold. Like a flash of lightning, a striking snake, the Jeep was knocked violently off the road. Marquis' head hit the steering column with such a force the crash itself did not make such a grotesque sound. Justin was thrown from Marquis' lap, crumpling bonelessly onto the floorboards. He was not tense, not braced for the impact, instead going with the force of the blow and managing to keep his inflictions from Marquis as the worst of his injuries.

The man who hit them got out of his car. He did not run to the accident, did not call an ambulance. The scene seemed to move around him, past him, as if he commanded the universe with his presence and everything hurried to go by. Walking to the Jeep, watching its wheels continue to spin and grind the wreckage into the tree it had been forced into, the follower pulled Marquis out of the driver's side door. Marquis went lifelessly to the highway, looking like every bit of black blood in his veins was now trying to escape through his skull.

He was not dead, nor did Will order it so. Marquis was to be left alive if at all possible, and brought back for …questioning. Will was the boss, Marquis stayed alive. First priority, though, was making sure Justin was alive. If Justin died on his watch, there was no way Will would stop hunting him.

Reaching into the Jeep, he immediately checked Justin's pulse. Weak, thready, but there. His breathing, however, was nowhere near as excited. There was no way CPR of any kind could commence inside the Jeep. Justin had to be moved. As gently as possible, Will's hired help lifted Justin out of the red tomb that used to be Sullivan Kinney's Jeep and laid him down on the highway.

As if sensing he was out of danger, Justin's lips quivered and a quiet breath sneaked through, filling his lungs. A violent cough followed, his lungs rejecting the air as if it was a foreign substance, already forgotten as being life-giving. Justin sucked in air, then, great mouthfuls of it as if he could never get enough. His eyes did not open, nor did he try to get up. Justin tried to roll onto his side and found two strong hands holding him on his back. The hands were searching all over his body in gentle yet firm pressing touches, searching for something. Justin could not remember what the hands would be searching for but he did know one thing.

It was a blessed thing.

The hands were too big to be Marquis'.

"Bruh …" Justin tried to call out for Brian, though the person searching him was not Brian, either.

"Shh." Came the hasty reply. Searching, searching, all over him.

Justin wanted to fight the touches, wanted only to roll over onto his side but this man would not let him, would not stop prodding him. It did not hurt. Quite the opposite. It felt too good. Only Brian could make him feel this good, only Brian had permission to touch him like this …

The drug. Right! Justin remembered. That was why he felt so good while a stranger pushed little dents into his body. Justin tried to open his eyes but was unsure if he had succeeded. Everything was still so dark. Somewhere in the corner of his right eye, there was light. Bright light. Justin glanced over in that direction and winced. Very bright light after so much darkness.

"Are you nauseous?" the man asked.

"No," Justin answered without thinking whether that was a lie or not. He wrapped his mind around the question and found it was truth. "No," he repeated his findings. Was that his voice? That raspy ugly sound came from him?

"Does anything hurt?"

"Throat." That was the easy one. "Hands."

"I can help your hands," the voice said kindly, finally letting Justin roll onto his side while examining the indentions from the tape that had bound his wrists. He massaged the reddened fingers until Justin could wiggle them. "Better?"

Justin moved his fingers and got pinpricks of pleasure-pain in response. But it was movement. "Not yet," he choked out, coughed, and tried again, "Not yet."

The strong hands that had been prodding him now scooped him up off the hard ground, holding him like he weighed nothing. Justin found himself nuzzled against the man's chest, let his mind fall into the security of the vibrant heartbeat there no matter who his savior was. It was a reprieve, at least.

"I don't want you to sleep," the man said.

Justin thought tiredly, \*that's too bad, isn't it?\*

"I'm going to put you down, now." Justin started to make a noise of protest but the man said, "Just for a moment."

Justin felt himself being set into a seat that was undoubtedly more comfortable than the ones in Sulli's Jeep. An indeterminable amount of time past between his being set down and the seat next to him dipping under his savior's weight. Justin wanted badly to sleep, just for a moment, but he had too many questions.

"Where's Brian?"

What sounded like a breath of laughter came from the man. "That's where we're going next, I promise."

Justin nodded wearily. He had forgotten what his other questions were. The important one had been answered.

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"I'm hungry," Mark said, more to fill the anxious silence than to request a meal. "And I have to pee."

Sullivan grunted in a noncommittal way that made Mark think of Brian deep in concentration. The older man had not heard a word Mark had said, not through the blanket of focus he had wrapped around himself. They were driving too fast for Sulli to pay much attention to anything else.

"So this Dillinger guy is pretty scary, huh? Nightmare stuff? I'd like to meet him. I really would. My New Years resolution is to only be afraid of things I can see. Not stories or figments. The world is scary enough as it is, don't you think? I mean, why be afraid of something I've never experienced or someone that someone else thinks is terrifying? Your definition of scary and mine could be totally different. You, for instance, seem to be scared of things like commitment and daily showers. Me, I'm no more scared of smelling like soap than I am of a meadow of wildflowers. What frightens me are the truly sacrilegious evils like my math teacher, Mrs. Larcen, and the Teletubbies. Or that Burger King commercial where the king is just standing there when the man pulls his blinds open … Shudder City! You aren't scared of Marquis, I don't think? I know what he can do, what he …has done. I KNOW he's scary. I -"

"Need to shut the fuck up. We'll stop for food once we have Julian. If you really have to pee that bad, go out the window. Teyo Dillinger is one of those sacrilegious evils you were talking about, almost as scary as that Burger King commercial but not as scary as those Quizno's subs singing rats. I agree, the world is scary enough without figments of imaginary terror. BUT, kid, you haven't' seen nearly as much of the world as I have. You've seen a fucking lot but nothing like what I've seen. So when I say someone is scary enough to make every other horror I've ever witnessed look like an all expense paid vacation paradise in comparison, I have to believe my conviction about that person. You know why Marquis doesn't scare me, sugah? Because I've seen what Dillinger can do. I haven't seen him do it but I've seen what's left of his victims. That is more than enough. Some things are everyone's definition of scary and Teyo Goddamn Dillinger is one of those universal terrors. And for the record, you're not smellin' like a fresh Georgia peach, either."

Mark turned to stare out the window instead of gaping at Sulli. The man had sure LOOKED oblivious to everything but the road. "D'ya think we're any closer?" Mark asked. "I mean, to catching them?"

Sullivan sighed and it almost sounded remorseful. "The closer we get to Dillinger, the closer we are to Julian and Brian."

Mark leaned his head back on the headrest. "You don't' think dad will make it through this one, do you?"

"I'm not worried about your dad, I told ya. I'm …" Sullivan seemed to be fighting a war within himself when he said, "I'm shit scared of going back there for myself."

"What, to New Orleans?"

Sullivan bit his lip, hard enough to draw blood. "Yes," he said, using the pain to steady his voice. "To Naw'lins. I …left some bad blood back in the Bayou that I'm none too happy goin' back to."

"Worse than the Jeff Reeves thing?"

Sullivan gave a short, mirthless laugh. "Yeah."

"Are you telling me you pissed off …Dillinger?" Mark guessed smartly.

"Not so much pissed off as," Sullivan heaved a great sigh, "got a price put on my head."

"Remind me why I'm going into Hell with an escapee?" Mark said snidely. "An escapee who's going back voluntarily! What the fuck did you do to -"

"If I tell you what I did to go to the top of the Grand Marquis' hit list you can't ask me one more question for the duration of this trip."

"Grand Marquis? Isn't that a car?"

"That comment will get you killed by one of his loyalists," Sullivan said seriously. "They go nuts, like Pavlov's dogs if you get that reference …those trained to be …mini Marquis, lesser Marquis, go absolutely bonkers if you say anything bad about their leader."

"What if I don't believe your excuse? Do I have to keep my promise?"

"Yes. And tough if you don't believe me. You want to know, you'll swear to shut the fuck up on the heads of your dad and Justin."

"I fucking swear, alright?" Mark said grudgingly.

"Yeah, you do."

"Just tell me already!"

"I wouldn't hand Angel to him."

"What!"

"No questions!"

"That was an exclamation of indignant outrage. It was NOT a question. THIS is a statement: You kept Justin from Marquis at risk to yourself."

"Fuckin' little Goddamn fucker," Sullivan growled. "Years and years ago, Angel's big brother Bradley showed the wrong family photo to the wrong people."

"Justin was really young when Brad left. Any picture would have been -"

"Three, four, maybe younger, I couldn't tell. Yeah. Dillinger knows what he likes immediately and he chose Justin as his own right then. Only problem was, no one knew who Brad really was. He didn't use his real name until he started to make it big with Dark Starr Productions and even then, his family ties were severed. So Justin was out of range. Years pass. Dillinger hires a lowlife by the name of Kriegg to research Brad. He finds Will instead, but it's a notch closer. Using Will, Kriegg communicated Justin's whereabouts. Kriegg died, Justin was gone again. Brad died, Justin was gone again. Then, Marquis gets a hold of Justin. Only, Marquis didn't hand Justin over. He took Angel for himself. Dillinger demanded Marquis return Justin but before that could happen, my gallant cousin rushes to the rescue. Justin, gone again. Now, Dillinger wants to make Brian pay for all the lost time, since Brad, Kriegg, and all the others he sent after Justin are beyond punishment."

"And Marquis is redeeming himself now by bringing Justin."

"Right in one." Sullivan nodded.

"But you said that YOU wouldn't deliver Justin to Dillinger."

Sulli sighed as if he had hoped Mark had forgotten the root of this discussion. "Word got out that I not only had an easy, constant, and current access to Justin but to Brian, too. For years. And I …knew Justin was marked from that young age. I used to be one of Dillinger's biggest producers, bringing him …well I'm not proud of it but it kept MY ass off his menu. And by menu, I do mean eating as well as all the other things he can dream up."

"He EATS people!"

"Only when he's hungry," Sullivan answered soberly. He continued hastily, as if wishing to get as far away from that subject as possible, even if it meant forsaking the privacy of his past. "So he found out my involvement with Justin. A couple of months ago, he tells me he knows. I get this phone call …not on my cell, either. On a payphone I was walking by. Dillinger …the man can make day turn into night with one word. He had quite a few words for me. Even though it was broad daylight, which isn't his scene, it was like he was right there, talking to me. Watching me. But he wouldn't be out during the day …he just …knew where I was. He demanded Justin and Brian, said I would be in deep shit trouble when I made the delivery. So …I hung up on him."

Mark laughed. "You've got quite a pair on you!"

"He basically told me I was dead. Dead with Dillinger means tortured until your body shuts down and dies just to escape. Skinning people alive, layer by layer. He's taken the technique down to an art. I've heard he has a special …basting sauce. Salt, lemon juice, Tabasco …he brushes the stuff on every newly peeled layer of skin. What could I have done besides hang up on him? Plead for my life? Not a fuckin' chance. He couldn't kill me twice so no matter what I did between the time I was put up for death and the time we met for that death, it didn't matter. I'll still end up just as dead no matter how angry he is with me. Might as well enjoy my time left defying the impossible to defy …"

"You didn't deliver dad and Justin to him though, even if it redeemed you a little bit."

Sullivan rolled his eyes. Question or statement, he was still answering the little bastard. "I told ya! I ain't that cruel as to wish Dillinger on anyone."

"There's one thing I don't understand. If Julian works for him and what Dillinger wants is Justin -"

Sullivan smirked. "The difference between J and J Taylor is quite substantial, if you haven't noticed. It's like a small tealight candle flame compared to a fire that devastates a National Forest. I bet the family photo Dillinger saw of Justin and then to see Julian …it was all he needed to see to know which twin was malleable and which would ruin everything it touched."

"If Dillinger is afraid of Julian -"

"Whoa, stop that thought right there, princess. Dillinger is not afraid of Julian. It's more along the lines of …well, the fire analogy again. Could you keep the fire from burning you better if you touched it or didn't play with it at all in the first place? Understand?"

"Yeah. The Grand Marquis is afraid of touching Julian!"

"NO! There's a fine line between fear and awe. Say you see a wolf in the woods. It's the dead of night, all there is around you are trees and moonlight. No civilization for miles. You're lost. You've been lost for days. You are just as hungry as the wolf but all you can do is stare at it. And it stares back at you. You know it's dangerous but you have to admire it's beauty. It could eat you. It would eat you if you gave it just a little chance because it's untamed, wild. But you still watch it, wondering how something so beautiful can be so dangerous. Julian is the wolf. Beautiful and lethal, mesmerizing but untamable. Dillinger can't touch him, he knows the wolf will eat him alive."

"Sounds like fear to me, Sullivan. Awe, sure, but fear too. Julian has a pretty face but he's just as human as the rest of us. He's got a psychotic mind, that's a given. He's a sociopath, no arguments there. But so is Dillinger if all you've told me is true."

Sulli shook his head. "You're not getting' it. Teyo Dillinger is physically, mentally, and emotionally unable to feel fear. Fear cannot get scared like Death cannot die. Dillinger watches Julian. He might even like him as much as the man can like another person who isn't screaming. But Dillinger will never lust after Julian. He'll never touch Julian. He can't. Teyo Dillinger admires Julian too much to harm him…it's like Dillinger is the only person who wants JUSTIN because he can't do all those things he wants to do with JULIAN."

"If he could feel fear, he would be afraid of Julian."

"I don't know."

"Julian fears him. You said everyone does."

"Yeah, I think Julian's scared shitless. But he's not dumb. I think Julian knows that Dillinger won't touch him but it isn't infinite. Whatever power that keeps Dillinger from Julian could snap. Insanity is unpredictable like that. As it stands, Julian would be stupid not to have a backup, some wall of extra protection between them. Just in case."

"A backup like having dad?"

"No. And that was a question."

"Fuck off."

"Statement, better. Damn kid."

"So?"

"So, he'd need something Dillinger couldn't control. Teyo Dillinger needs to control everything in his world. If he can't., he loses power and he can't lose power. It's like lifeblood to him."

"Like Julian. He can't control Julian so he keeps him close instead…"

"Right. So he's powerless there and it's killing him. But what else that's so out of his control range? I have no idea."

Mark ran a hand through his hair. "Maybe …Sullivan, maybe it's not a 'what'. Maybe it's a 'who'!"

Sullivan scoffed. "And who else can't he control?"

Mark looked at Sullivan. "Who else but who hung up on him?"

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Will couldn't believe his luck. Never since Justin disappeared did he expect to have won even an inch of ground for their side. Let alone one half of the entire battle. A grin spread across his face as he hung up his cellular phone. He couldn't stop the grin from stretching toward his ears until it covered an almost frighteningly huge amount on his face.

"Well?" Cameron asked him, peering quizzically at her brother. She was unsure if the smile meant their backup was successful or if Will had just gone crazy with loss and was going to take them all off the deep end with him.

Michael scooted forward from the backseat, took one look at Will's face, and sat back. He turned wide eyes to Mel and Lindsay and clasped his hands tightly around the seatbelt across his chest. Michael was fairly sure Will had lost his mind. Whatever had caused it, that grin couldn't be good, could it?

"William!" Cameron tried again, swatting the smile off her brother's face by means of a slap to the back of his head. "Developments?"

"Safe. As sound as he can be at the moment. Justin's with our follower." Will reported dutifully, the smile still trying to return, quirking the ends of his mouth.

"Justin's okay?" Lindsay exclaimed with relief. "They're heading back to Pittsburgh?"

"No," Will said.

"NO?" Cameron spat. "What do you mean, 'no'?!"

"I mean no as in they aren't going back to the Pitts," Will clarified unnecessarily. "We'll …never get Brian back without Justin, whether it be mentally or physically."

"GodfuckingdamnyouWillhe'sourbrother!" Cameron ground out furiously as one word.

"Yeah, and one without the other is incomplete. Taking Justin back to safe ground when Brian isn't with him will just make our baby brother run off to find him on his own. Justin is safe with -"

"Right. Safe. He's fucking safe. You're letting your precious follower take Justin into the fray to get Brian back when you're not even sure Brian is going to be salvageable by the time any of us get there! You're planning on keeping Justin safe by throwing him to the sharks to let him try to find Kinney, why? Because you think he's in any condition to run off on his own?" Cameron shouted, banging her fist against her window so hard it spider webbed under the pressure.

"If Brian dies, do you really think that there will be enough of Justin to protect from himself or anyone else?" Will asked pointedly. "If Brian's gone, do you think our little brother will still be the same person you've grown to accept into your little family? Huh? Fucking answer me, Cameron, because I really fucking want to know!"

Cameron's nostrils flared in anger but she said nothing, her lips pressed into a tight white line.

"Justin is Brian's only hope and you know it. We need him with us not only as a distraction but as a key into Dillinger's -"

"WAIT! Wait one goddamn second! You're not telling me …no, no, no, fucking surely you're NOT … you're not suggesting…that we use Justin as BAIT?"

"You're acting like we can't protect him!" Will yelled indignantly.

Cam smashed her window with her fist and said in a scream that could boil water, "What the fuck are you ON?!?"

"Cam's right!" Melanie broke into the argument. "What good has your protection done for Justin so far?"

"Don't start with that shit! At least Justin didn't get kidnapped from right under our own ROOF!" Will shouted, wishing instantly that he could take the comment back but knowing he couldn't. The car was filled with a disturbingly eerie quiet that made Will shift uncomfortably in his seat. Even Cameron was staring at him, her face clearly accusing him of going too far. "I'm sorry. That was said in the heat of the moment. I know Mark's disappearance isn't your fault. I didn't mean that."

Lindsay swallowed hard enough to make a sound. She said reasonably, trying not to sound too harsh despite her anger at Will's comment. "We aren't the ones setting Justin up for trouble, Will. Whatever your reasons or plans, you have to understand how feasible it is that Justin, lucky enough to get through everything else that's happened, might not have any lives left."

Will nodded but didn't say anything. He didn't have to. Everyone in the car knew that Lindsay was absolutely right.

\*

"Is that them?" Mark asked animatedly, sitting as far forward in his seat as the belt would allow. "I thought I saw -"

"Yes, that's them," Sulli said. "Sit back and hold on, I'm going to ram them."

"You're going to WHAT?!"

"Either you sit back or you go through the windshield, it make no nevermind to me!"

"Your grammar is as bad as your driv - God!" Mark yelled, hands flying out to the dashboard as Sullivan hit the gas and thrust their car into Julian's. Sulli put it in reverse and sped backwards, accomplishing an amazingly straight line with absolutely no light to guide him.

Julian gripped the steering wheel, turning the car into the fishtail spin Sullivan had forced them into. "Just like foreplay, eh, baby? You make to take me from behind, tell me how badly you want to hammer me nice and proper, send my world spinning and we -" he turned the wheel until they were straight, heading toward Sullivan " -end up-" he put on speed "-face to face!" Julian flipped his high beams on and laughed crazily as Sullivan swerved in an attempt to get away from the blinding light.

Brian watched in horror, seeing Mark in the brightness that made everything else look black. He could no longer pretend to be in a drugged sleep, could not let Julian slam into Mark while preserving his own safety. Brian grabbed the wheel and jerked it to the left, onto the median strip, over the empty next lane of traffic, and into a ravine with a crash so harsh it shattered the back window. Brian was breathing heavily, glad everything seemed to be working now. Unbuckling his seatbelt, Brian reached over Julian, who was either too stunned to move in the pitch darkness or knocked unconscious, and took the keys out of the ignition.

To get out, Brian had to hook his leg onto the windshield and pull himself up and over it. He climbed onto the hood and used it as a bridge to get back onto solid ground.

"Dad!" Mark yelled, sprinting across the highway like a residential street and wrapping his arms around Brian's middle.

Sullivan sauntered after Mark, looking idly either way as if daring traffic to mow him down. "Well, well, well, saved your ass again, cousin."

"The fuck you did!" Brian countered angrily, holding Mark tighter as Sullivan got within arm's reach. "From what I recall of the sudden turn of events here, it was ME who forced Julian away from slamming you into the tree line!"

Sullivan shrugged noncommittally. He walked away, not to be bothered with his cousin anymore, and stood over the ravine. To say he expected to see Julian was a given. But to see Julian seconds before he felt the gun pressed into the most treasured part of his anatomy was most definitely NOT what he would call a good end to the night.

"Um, not to alarm ya'll or anything'," Sullivan called over his shoulder, accent thickened in his voice as Julian pressed the gun harder against him. "But I do believe we're not yet the winners'a this little game the dark angel here's playin."

Brian looked over at Sullivan, his back silhouetted against the high beams, and to the mass of shadow that was Julian kneeled down in front of him. "Actually, Sullivan, it looks like you're the one he's not through playing with." Brian covertly handed Mark the keys he had taken from Julian and pushed him away, whispering, "Go get in the car and lock all the doors."

"Sulli has the keys to it, though!" Mark whispered back.

"Go, just go. Hotwire it and get out of here if you have to."

"I'm not -"

"You damn well are leaving me here, Mark, if Julian gets close to you and I can't get there in time, go."

Mark huffed but did as he was told. Brian didn't know why he stayed when Mark very well could have started the other vehicle and gotten them both the hell out of the fire. He still had no idea where Justin was but any place away from Julian and Sullivan was a good place to start. The thought that he felt sorry for his cousin, trapped by the proverbial short hairs by Julian, did not even cross Brian's mind.

Still, Brian walked over to where Sulli stood. "Troubles, cousin?"

Julian growled, "Both of you get in the ravine."

"And do what, sugah? Make you the meat in a Kinney sandwich?"

Julian dug the gun into Sulli's groin, effectively shutting him up. "You, Brian, turn off the headlights."

"I don't think so, I don't much like you in the dark," Brian said. "But feel free to punish Sullivan for my impudence."

Julian knew he could not switch his gun away from Sullivan, not even for a moment to quiet Brian. Sullivan was too quick to not keep under a constant guard. But Julian had other defenses besides his gun. Several would be useful toward bowing Brian to his beck and call. One step at a time. "You don't know where Justin is. You need me. If you ever want to find him again, you will do exactly as I say."

"I know where Justin is goin'," Sulli said airily. "I know exactly. Brian, don't do one thing Julian tells you to do, I swear you'll be happier for it."

Julian swore softly under his breath. One ploy down, but he was not out of the game. "Alright, Brian. We can do this the -"

"Hard way or the easy way. Yeah, cliché badguys R us stuff. Why don't I save us both some time and boring monologues by choosing the hard way and let's get this show on the road, hmm?"

Julian smirked, his face cast into ghastly shadow by the headlights underneath him. "I was hoping you would say that," he said. Julian reached his free hand into his pocket and opened the red bag of nerve-enflaming drug he had stolen from Marquis. Brian saw Julian move and propelled himself backward, not knowing what Julian had and not wanting to find out. Sullivan was not fast enough and Julian palmed the packet of violently red gel in his hand, pulling the Southern man's belt down, yanking him onto the hood. He pressed the gun against Sullivan's temple and shoved his hand down Sulli's pants, squeezing the man's noticeably hard cock with enough force to break the protective packet. Julian felt the warmth of the topical drug coat his hand and knew the instant Sullivan felt it, too.

An unintelligible sound came screaming up Sulli's throat like the sound of a wild animal breaking free. He bucked against Julian's hand while at the same time, his arms tried to push Julian away, his hands attempting to simultaneously jerk himself to completion and rip the lower half of his body off. Sullivan gritted his teeth against the unbearable knife edge between pleasure and pain, wishing beyond anything else that he could find enough of a stable thought to tell him which one he was supposed to be experiencing.

Brian had hit the pavement running. Hearing Sullivan's scream eerily reminiscent of something he himself had experienced in a dream, Brian was no longer even secretly sympathetic to Sullivan's trouble. Except Sullivan said he knew where Justin was being taken.

Brian stopped so fast he left skid marks. "Damnit!" he hissed. Brian turned resolutely around and walked back to his suffering cousin and the cause of that suffering. Brian slid down the side of the ravine and tucked himself into the driver's side window, switching off the bright headlights. "Alright, Julian. Leave him alone." Brian said reluctantly, having to pull each word out of his throat. Remorse for Sullivan's pain? Yeah, and he would sooner kiss Marquis.

Julian grinned wickedly. He did not take his hand away from Sullivan's writhing form. "Go into the bed of the trunk and find something to tie him up with. If you don't find anything there, look in the car he stole."

Brian gritted his teeth. "And what assurance will you give me for Justin's safety if I do what you ask?"

"You either do it or I'll shoot you and your brat kid." Julian threatened. "Justin will die, you will die, Mark will die, and for good measure, I'll go and kill the rest of your friends. I'll rape them to death. All of them."

Brian rolled his eyes. "Evil gets old, do you realize that? This whole darker than dark is just a tad annoying after the first few minutes."

"Go on, Kinney. You haven't experienced anything yet." Julian said dangerously.

Brian looked briefly in the truck bed and found nothing, even if he had been properly searching. "Nothing here." Brian said with a wave, walking back up the embankment and onto the highway. Brian saw headlights speeding toward him seconds before the car raced by, so close it clipped the button on his jeans. "ASSHOLE!" Brian shouted after it, continuing toward the car albeit more cautiously.

"Dad …" Mark said nervously.

"Is there anything I can hit Julian with? Tire iron, anything?"

Mark shifted uncomfortably. He reached into the back of his jeans and handed Brian the gun he had found hidden in the glove compartment.

"Where the hell did you get this?" Brian demanded.

"Glove compartment. It's not mine!" Mark said defensively. "I thought I might have to defend myself. I guess -DAD! Look out!"

Julian whipped the butt of his gun against the back of Brian's skull, knocking him unconscious instantly. He had the gun pointed at Mark with lightning speed. "Get in the back, little bit, or I'll shoot your father and use you for bait instead."

Mark hesitated, looking toward the place he had last seen Sulli. Julian pistol whipped Mark for the indecisiveness.

"I said GET!" Julian cried, enraged. Mark hopped over the seat, wishing that Julian had come seconds earlier. Before he had handed the gun to Brian. "You didn't listen, Mark. I said get in the back," Julian said with deadly calm. "The very back."

"I'm not getting in the trunk!"

"Oh yes, you are." Julian said. He shot into the pavement beside Brian's head to emphasize his point.

Mark got out of the backseat, taking in shallow, frightened gulps of air. He had only one chance to retrieve the gun and he had to do it right. Mark stumbled, sprawling himself over Brian's crumpled form. Mark's fingers curled around the gun -

And Julian crunched his hand with one pompous foot. "Ah ah ah, not such a good idea," Julian chided. He kicked Mark in the face, his heel connecting solidly with the teenager's jaw. Mark saw a brilliant display of stars before his vision, and everything else, decided to surrender to darkness.

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Michael turned in his seat, searching out the darkness passing them quickly by. "Did you hear something?" he asked, squinting once more out the rear window before righting himself.

"Relax, Michael, there's absolutely nothing out here," Will promised.

"But I thought -"

"It's the situation that's creeping you out," Cameron told him, a bit firmer in tone than Will. "The dark of night, your best friends missing … sit back, we'll be in Louisiana soon."

Michael nodded. The Taylor family assassins were right. It was only his imagination that had Brian screaming 'asshole!' at them. It was the night. The situation. Michael turned around in his seat again. "Can we go back?"

Will groaned. "What?"

"Just …the past mile or so? I really think I heard something." Michael continued. "What'll it cost us at the speed you're going? Two minutes?"

"Two minutes could make the difference between fifteen minutes without oxygen and thirteen. Two minutes between salvageable and brain dead. If that's what you -"

"Will, turn the goddamn car around before I take the keys!" Cameron spat. "It will shut him up and if it doesn't shut you up then I will."

Making a face that one could only assume was supposed to be a representation of his sister, Will made a violently sharp U-turn and went back the way they had come. "Feel free to tell me what to do, where to go, when to stop and how to wipe my own ass, Novotny," Will grumbled.

"I just thought … There!" Michael pointed to the half-hidden nose of a primer coated Chevy truck.

"And? It's a human wasteland out here! There's bound to be abandoned trucks, not to mention someone here and there deciding to go drinking, driving, and deceasing. It's an old truck, looks like it's -oh, don't get out of the car! Michael!" Will shouted after him. "Damnit, Cam, I am NOT going after him."

"It's still hot!" Michael shouted back at them. Lindsay and Melanie got out of the car and ran to Michael.

"And if it's a bystander I suppose they're going to want us to help them," Will murmured gloomily.

Cameron frowned at him. "What is your problem? Besides the obvious."

"Am I the one breaking windows with her fist?" Will stated sharply. "Cam, what I said before about Justin not surviving this without Brian? I wasn't speaking lies. Through everything that Justin has been through, he's been through it with Brian. He didn't die when he should have and I firmly believe it's because of Brian. Now, we entertain Novotny's flights of fancy and what if we're that much later to the scene where Brian is counting on us to be there?"

"I'm hearing what ifs, could be's, and should haves. You're speculating in your peculiarly pragmatic way of thinking. But what about your backup? Hmm? Isn't he already a half hour ahead of us on the road? You trust him with Justin, why not Brian?"

"It's not that I don't trust him and you know it!" Will snapped and added closer to the radio, "And even if he wasn't patched into our conversation, with or without confirmation calls on the cell, I would still trust him. I …"

"Want to personally make sure that the light we've been so valiantly trying to keep burning in Justin's eyes doesn't go away?" Cameron guessed.

"It's not just that, either," Will admitted, deflated. "It's this whole damn mess. I … it's partially my fault that Justin is even in trouble."

Cameron stared at her brother. "What are you talking about?"

"When I was away from the family, working with Kriegg … there's this guy named Teyo Dillinger and -"

"Will, Cameron, hurry!" Lindsay called excitedly. "Mark's been here!"

Cam gave one fleeting 'we'll discuss this later' look and got out of the car, trotting over to where the others stood. Will, taking a deep, steadying breath, followed.

"How do you know?" Cam asked.

"I bought him this for his birthday. He could never get home by curfew and the 'I don't have a watch' excuse had gotten real old, real quick." Lindsay held up a Timex watch, it's quartz face cracked. The band was not broken. Mark, or someone else, had taken the watch off and left it in the middle of the highway.

"So, it's a fairly common watch. Are you sure it's -"

"I had it engraved," Lindsay told Will haughtily, flipping it over so Will could read it in the headlights.

"To Mark, always forward but never on time. Curfew is at nine." Will read. "Jeez, nine?"

Lindsay glared at Will sharply.

"Sorry …sorry. Okay, so …" Will looked around the once again deserted road. "Where are they now if they were here just minutes ago? This is a straight stretch of highway."

"Well you missed this the first time," Michael muttered under his breath. "Who's to say they didn't go right past us?"

Will growled. "Then get in the damn car!"

"Will!" Cam cried out from the other side of the road. "Gun!" She picked the weapon up by the trigger bar and examined it closer in the headlights left by their car. "Safety's on," she expelled the clip, "Full mag. No one shot this baby. At least, not recently."

"Why leave a fully capable weapon?" Will wondered out loud, crouched low to the ground to examine the tire treads off to the side of the highway, the broken headlight glass shards twenty feet away. He stood up, squinted across the highway at the headlights of the ruined primer Chevy, and spoke as if he could see the entire scene played before him. "Car rammed the Chevy, fishtailed it. Chevy turns around, skid marks on the pavement show the driver intended to return the favor. Chevy does a 180, flips into the ravine. Car stops here, twenty feet from the initial blow. The owner of the gun gets out, drops it here … why, I don't know."

"Could he have had it in his lap? Sullivan not wanting Mark to get it, keeping it near his crotch knowing the kid would never go for it there?" Cam theorized.

"This is Mark," Lindsay said. "If he saw that gun, if he wanted to escape, come hell or high water, he would get it."

"Let's say for assumption's sake, Mark didn't see the gun." Will said.

"I lose my cigarettes, wallet, lots of shit by forgetting it's there and getting out of the car. Just don't have time to put things in their proper place when one is on the move after a bad guy or running from one…" Cam said with a half smile. "So Sullivan drops the gun, or sets it down?"

"We're missing four people," Will said. "Four people who started out in two vehicles. One is here. Those four people left in one car. Whoever was driving did not know that gun was there."

"Unless …" Melanie said. "They knew the gun was there but didn't want to have more than one weapon in the car."

"Two guns is too many uncontrollable ways for someone with the upper hand to lose their victory …" Will agreed, nodding. "The one who walked out of here, who then drove the other three, was of his own volition to do so."

"So …" Michael sighed. "We know that neither Brian, Mark, or Sullivan have the upper hand."

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"Brian?" Justin whimpered, hearing the sound of his voice and hating it. Flashes of pain clawed their way through his consciousness in a vain attempt to patch his memories of the last twenty-four hours together.

"Easy, easy, you're safe now." A rich, rumbling bass voice soothed from somewhere far away, somewhere on Justin's left.

Justin took a deep breathe, held it, winced at the rasping pain holding air in his throat caused. Brian's voice, though as delicious and sinful as dark chocolate, was nowhere near as deep as the one which spoke comforts that Justin could not sanely believe. Not just yet. That voice, that … voice …

Belonged to a dead man.

"Dead," Justin whispered, voice strong with conviction where it lacked sound. "Buried," he said, no louder.

"To keep you safe, yeah, I was dead."

"W-was?" Justin asked, sounding as confused as he felt. "Safe?"

"It was your brother's idea. He can explain it to you. If it were up to me, I'd sooner be walking into Teyo Dillinger's lair alone, voluntarily, than bring you anywhere near the man. But seeing as nothing is up to me anymore … seeing as your brother is the only man besides yourself who deserves my life debt, who can give me orders I would follow … I'm not of much choice to do anything but. Including die."

"But …" Justin swallowed, felt something cold being pressed into his hand and jumped.

"Bottled water."

Justin grimaced. Hadn't bottled water from a thought-trusted source been the conduit to he and Brian being IN this mess? Justin thought, fuck it. He was too tired, throat too raw, to care whether this drink was drugged. With slightly numb fingers, Justin peeled the safety seal from the lid, popped the squirt top, and drank.

"Better?"

"Yes," Justin rasped, cleared his throat, tried again. Much better. "Yes." The cold of the water helped to gather Justin's senses back where they were supposed to be, slipping pieces and parts that had been scattered back into place. He opened his eyes, peered at the driver. At his savior. His indentured servant? "I don't understand. What are YOU doing HERE? You … I …" Justin sank back in his seat.

"You were saying 'but' I believe?"

"Yeah …" Justin shifted uncomfortably, finding a position that did not irritate any bumps, bruises, or violations his body had suffered. "Um … to keep me safe, you had to die. You DID die. Didn't you?"

Bear chuckled low in his throat. "That I did, blue eyes, that I did. And that clever brother of yours is the one who killed me."

"That's what he said. He said he killed you …I just expected him to do a more …thorough job of it."

"Will told you he killed me?"

"Will?! No, Julian!"

"Julian only took the credit for my death. He is an opportunist. Will was the one who set me up, who wanted me to disappear. The only way I could do that was to go underground, and not in the burial sense of the word. I asked him for … a favor. For friendship's sake. I wanted to get out, get away. He said he would grant me that wish. But he needed my help. Will pulled me out of retirement and set me on a course that Marquis might have taken while Will followed a second trail. I … I'm only doing what he told me to do. By killing me … Will saved my life."

Justin closed his eyes, realized how dry and tired they were, opened them. "And what did he tell you to do?"

"Something only you could undo," Bear said uneasily. The anxious, almost frightened timber of his voice was not lost on Justin. Bear was hoping, praying, that Justin would undo his orders.

"Which is?" Justin pressed.

"To take you to Teyo Dillinger. Marquis' Master," Bear added hastily, before Justin could ask. Here, too, Justin could tell the big man did not want to elaborate on who Dillinger was. Like a group of slumber party kids going into a dark bathroom and saying 'Bloody Mary' but never making it the final time lest she show up, it was as if Bear were almost too afraid to speak of the man. Afraid Dillinger would appear in the back seat ready to slash their necks.

Or worse.

"You want me to order you to go home? You would listen to me, have to listen to me, if I said to get me the hell out of here?"

"Yes," Bear said, again in that pleading voice so unreal coming from that rolling bass.

"Brian's being taken to him? To Dillinger?" Justin asked, saw Bear flinch at the name and had to fight to not say it a few more times just to see what the man would do.

"Yes," Bear said, this time resignedly. He knew what answer his answer would produce.

"And you have to do anything I tell you? Your life debt depends on it?"

"Yes," this time, sighed.

"Then Bear, I order you to speed the hell up."

Bear sighed and did as he was told. "Does this mean you forgive me?" he asked, almost to himself as if unsure he wanted to know the answer.

Justin said resolutely, and a little sadly, "I'll tell you when we get there."

Part V

Brian knew before he opened his eyes that he was fucked, again. And again, it was not the pleasurable, romantic candlelit shower session his weary mind so desperately wanted to be having. The drug Julian had put into his system earlier in their excursion had completely worn off now. It was the slight concussion that made him feel sluggish this time.

At least he knew where he was. And who he was with. Sullivan was making quite the fuss in the backseat by the time Brian's eyes fluttered open and Julian was shouting taunts at him from the driver's seat. By deduction and just a little hope, Brian prayed Mark was in the trunk and not left on the side of the road somewhere.

But then, was being picked up by some strange, homicidal trucker a little better or a little worse than being Julian Taylor's potential plaything?

"I sweyah!" Sullivan pleaded, the Southern accent in his voice making the words nearly unintelligible. Last Brian remembered, Julian had reached inside of Sullivan's jeans and done something Brian wanted very little detail about. "You baystahd! Fuck mei! Untai mei! Little sheee-ittt! Ungh, Gawd, you fuck!"

Brian closed his eyes again, running with the theme of covert listening he'd grown accustomed to. With Julian's attention on Sulli, Brian was free to figure out his next move. He knew he could not risk jumping out of the car since Mark was still a prisoner. Brian's hands were tied behind his back, his ankles bound and drawn back, a link of rope connecting his hands and feet just enough to make sure he could no more run than crawl away. Until he figured out a plan, the drama unfolding between a desperately horny Sullivan and a rigidly sadistic Julian made for fine dinner entertainment.

"And why should I fuck you, hmm? Do you think that having me slink down your body and impale myself on your dick would make you feel better, Kinney?" Julian asked in a lilting, childlike voice that sent chills down Brian's spine. It did little more for Sullivan than make him whimper for more. "Do you know what I did to you, Sulli? Do you want to know how I destroyed you? How I brought you to ruin? Teyo Dillinger wants you, Kinney. You've upset him. I could care less for the sacrifice he insists you make. Do you want to know why?"

Brian rolled his eyes. If Justin asked so many questions without intending to answer, Brian never would have fallen in love with the kid.

Julian went on as if his words were as innocent as talking about the weather, "I can tell you that anything you believe will make you better is for naught, Sulli. The person who fucks you will not be your bottom and your throbbing cock will continue to ache even if you get to come. The glorious little gel I've sent into your system will only make things worse for you the more action you get. In a way, you should thank me. I've saved you more torment and suffering by denying you the pleasure you seek. The pleasure that will, ultimately, destroy you. What I've given you will be the soon to be LATE Marquis' last concoction. I don't know what he calls it, if it even has a name. But since he'll be dead soon, it will forever be known as my creation. I will call it … Vortex. I have a supply of my own now, as well as some of his Cataleptic in wait where we're going. Just wait until you see where you will meet your end, Sullivan. Sad to say, I can't stick around to watch your dying scream … In trade for you, I've decided Dillinger will owe me something I already have. See how generous I am? He gets you and all his dues rest in your cousin. I get Brian, Dillinger gets you and my dumb brothers. It's all for the best, really. I couldn't stand another minute without being an only child."

Brian squeezed his hands into tight fists. Julian had said 'brothers', hadn't he? Plural? Just how deep did the Taylor family fall into the seedy crevice of the flesh trade? Only child … that discounted Brad, since he was no longer a member of the Taylor family on account of his untimely and most deserved death. Will and Justin were the only brothers Julian had. He had said nothing about Cameron one way or another from what Brian could recall, so either Julian did not count Cam as his sister or was too naïve to see her as a threat.

So … Julian wanted to be an only child. Too bad because Brian would have loved to see him year after year at the Taylor family Christmas parties. Bull fucking shit. Why couldn't Julian just have disowned his family like any normal dysfunctional person?

"Pleeayse! You baystahd!" Sullivan continued to bellow in his own particular rhythm of suffering.

Brian twisted his wrists in the confines of his binds, found them irrefutably tight, and decided he would have to have someone else cut them. Problem, considering Sullivan was paralyzed with need, Mark was nowhere to be seen, and Julian with anything sharp coming toward Brian was a horror in itself.

He just hoped his lover was faring better with Marquis.

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Mark knew what blood tasted like but this much of it in his mouth nearly made him physically ill. Julian had kicked him in the face, tied him up, and thrown him in the trunk. He was weaponless and from the sounds of it, currently on his way to Teyo Dillinger or whoever Julian answered to these days. Mark found himself wishing for Sullivan's angry banter or even Lindsay and Melanie's protective and annoying rules.

To just be safe in bed, to forget any of this had happened.

What was it about serious injuries that made any and everyone no matter how old wish for their mothers?

Mark shifted until his weight was more on his side than on his hands. He kicked his feet to either side of him, grateful they hadn't been tied like his wrists. The trunk was roomy, plenty of space to hide more than just one scrawny teenage boy. Mark rolled back onto his stomach and brought his knees beneath him, raising up until his back hit the top of the trunk. It was quite a bit more room than he needed to escape but Mark was not complaining. Lowering himself onto his back, Mark tucked his legs to his chest, brought his arms under his legs, and around to the front with only a minimal amount of complaint from his shoulders. The skill to get bound hands to the front of a body was one of the more important lessons Mark had ever learned in his youth sitting in the back of a squad car on the way back to his stepfather's vengeance.

But this time he was not in a police cruiser and the terror his stepfather had put him through was nothing compared to what he was heading into if Sulli had told the least bit of truth about Teyo Dillinger. This time, Mark was not going to be a victim. He had been welcomed into a warm and sane family and there was no way in hell he was going to let anything spoil it.

Mark fished around the trunk for something to cut his ropes but found nothing save the jack with Julian's head's name on it. He would have to make do with his hands bound but in front of him.

Inside the car, Mark could hear Sullivan whining and Julian shouting back. They made such a lovely couple. Mark could already see the wedding photos. He rolled his eyes at that and tried to ignore the argument. And his throbbing head. Knowing that the lock to the trunk would likely be the hardest way to go about escaping despite it being the most obvious, Mark instead went to the next best thing.

Diversion.

Again on his back, Mark kicked the ceiling of the trunk as hard as he could then began kicking the bottom of his impromptu prison with the same vigor, only rhythmically instead of one single hit. When in doubt, create a flat tire. Julian would have to stop the car and even if he didn't see a flat, he would have to open the trunk to find out just what the hell Mark was doing.

And then, he would get an up close and personal introduction to the tire jack. And not to change the flat.

Part VI

Justin had never thought he would be safe again. For a time there, he had thought Marquis would finish him off in the Jeep. That madness in the man's black coal eyes had been beyond anything Justin had ever seen on a living human being. He had distant memories of being strangled, as if it had happened to someone else, and then he had woken up in safety.

While safety with Bear had once been a given, a proven fact, it had stopped being such until now. Justin would never voluntarily be alone with the big man again but given a choice between the driver and the man bound in the back of the Jeep, Justin would have chosen Bear hands down. It was like a decision between a long, full life and a long, slow death boiling in acid.

Justin craned his neck to see into the backseat, watching Marquis laying completely still across the seat bound so heavily in duct tape he looked like a worm almost completely sown into its cocoon. Only Marquis' eyes could move but those wild orbs were making up for the rest of his body. That shivering, incomprehensible madness was still there, unfocused and psychotic, but something else was there as well. Something human language had no word for; a feeling of such utter terror it was indescribable. Marquis, bless his black little shriveled heart, was terrified.

"Do we have to keep him alive?" Justin asked into the silence of the car.

"Give the order and he won't be. Think about it before you do, though, blue eyes. Condemning a man to death is a helluva lot different than hating him and wishing him dead. I would hold his face against the radiator if you wanted me to, rip his arms off, break every bone in his body, but I can't undo it once it's done. On your orders, somebody would be dead. A person, despite how akin to the monsters he is, is still a person. Murder is still murder."

Justin looked at Marquis, at the man who would have murdered him, and knew that no matter how badly Justin wished the sadist's death, HE could not be the one who ordered it. "No," Justin sighed. "But if he has some horrible, incurable disease, I couldn't wish it on a better candidate."

Bear made a sound that could have been a chuckle, but Justin wasn't sure. He said, "I'm glad you don't want me to kill him."

"Why?" Justin asked suspiciously.

"Because Will wants to be the one to kill him."

"Oh." Justin sighed, shifted in his seat, and watched the highway stretch straight ahead. "Bear?"

"Yeah?"

"Tell me about the Grand Marquis."

Bear shuddered so hard Justin felt it across the front seat. But he obeyed. "You've met the Devil in Julian. Teyo Dillinger, the Grand Marquis, is who the Devil answers to, who the Devil is afraid of."

"I'm not afraid of Julian," Justin said soberly. "So I can't be afraid of his boss."

"What ARE you afraid of?" Bear asked honestly. From a very early age, Justin had been the most resilient, strongest person he had ever met. The kid kept getting up after any and every trauma, including the utmost betrayal of a cherished protector, and Bear had begun to wonder if Justin had anything in his life which would keep him down permanently. He hoped not, but Justin had an answer for him.

"Never seeing Brian again," Justin said automatically. Somehow, Bear had known this was Justin Taylor's Kryptonite. The one thing which would be debilitating beyond all repair.

"No need to fear that, it won't happen," Bear said, trying and failing to sound confident.

"He might already be dead," Justin answered quietly, morosely. He knew what his brother was capable of, the fucking psycho. "Or worse."

"Or he could be safe and sound, waiting with Will to meet us. You don't know, Justin." Bear said, "Neither of us know how close Will and Cam are to finding them. Right now, all they've found is a car and Mark's watch."

"What?! What the hell is Mark's watch doing all the way out - No! Oh, don't tell me he's not at home, safe in bed!"

Bear winced. Oops. It was a good thing Will and Cam could not hear the radio transmission from Bear's side as he could theirs. Justin had obviously been unaware of the recent turn of events. "Justin, Sullivan and Mark decided to follow Julian and Brian."

"What? Wait … Sullivan and Mark? What does Sullivan have to do with Mark? I … hold on, start from the beginning."

"Will made me look dead, Sullivan found me, Julian took credit for it -"

"Skip ahead. Sullivan and Mark."

"Sullivan took Mark from the Peterson-Marcus house, they apparently got right up close and personal with your brother and Brian at a bar called El Diablo Veriedad. When next Will, Cam, Michael, Lindsay, and Melanie found evidence of any of them, it was one abandoned car, Mark's watch left on purpose as a trail, and all indicative of Julian being in charge of Mark, Brian, and Sullivan. That's as much as they know, as much as any of us know."

"Well, that's just the best fucking news I've heard all night," Justin grumbled. "And how do you know all of these little play by plays?"

Bear reached up to his left ear and removed a small earbud headphone, handing it over to Justin. "One way radio communication plugged into Cameron's car stereo. They staged my burial as if there was an audience. For all we knew, there was. Dillinger has many eyes and ears and he wanted a piece of me alive for …taking a piece of what was essentially his." Bear quickly went on before Justin asked what Bear had taken that had belonged to Dillinger. Justin would not be happy to know a man he had never met had claimed ownership of him. "To make sure he knew I was dead, to make sure that if Will ever needed an unexpected hand against the Grand Marquis, they had to stage the funeral. They used the radio so I could hear while I was on the road, searching for you. But the radio was also for anyone tapping into their conversation for Dillinger, assuring that I was really dead."

Justin put the headphone into his ear and listened to his brother and sister arguing about which road to take: the off ramp or stay on the main highway. Will, who seemed to be driving, made the final decision. No one spoke for a moment, then Michael said 'I don't think this will end badly. I just … I have a feeling that everything is going to be alright.' Four voices told him, in varying shades of harshness, to be quiet. Removing the earpiece, Justin handed it back to Bear. "Do you know where you're going?"

"To the Savage Gardens, where Julian will likely head in a few days," Bear said uneasily, though this time his discomfort was not in facing Dillinger. It was in admitting that Brian was to be left to Julian's devices, likely for a week or more, until the blond came to the rendezvous.

"You mean to tell me that we're not going to find Brian until it's too late. You tell me that Brian will be alright and now you seem to think an hour, a day, a week, with Julian will be good for his health? Pull the fuck over, Bear."

"Jus -"

"NOW!" Justin bellowed so loud fire tore up his already injured throat.

Bear pulled over and Justin got out of the car, went to the backdoor, and pulled Marquis onto the pavement. Tearing the piece of duct tape that covered Marquis' mouth so hard it took flecks of skin and blood with it, Justin grabbed the stringy, bloody black hair and leaned in close to the wild face.

"You're going to tell me where Julian is, Marquis, or I swear to whatever otherworldly deity you wish that I will personally deliver you, just like this, to Teyo Dillinger," Justin snarled. His words seemed to send a thrill of awareness to Marquis and the black eyes focused on Justin's face. "You heard me, you fucking sonovabitch. Tell me or I will make Julian seem like a timid sheep to the slaughter. You have no idea what I can do if pushed, and believe me, you have pushed hard enough to deserve it."

"You'll never …" Marquis rasped, "get away from the Grand Marquis once you're there, stupid boy."

Justin sneered and it was ugly. His eyes went so cold nothing alive could have ever resided there. His face took on a ghastly shadow like looking into the mouth of hell itself and being unable to turn away from the horrors there; beautiful and deadly and eternal. "Justin Taylor won't, Marquis, but I can bet you anything that Julian comes and goes when he pleases."

Marquis tried to lurch away, not in escape but in fear. The boy holding him was not the sweet, corruptible Justin he had tried to covet. This … maniac was as lethal as a mortal man could be. Justin had a purpose and that purpose was Brian Kinney's safe return.

Julian would never know what hit him. Good. The little bastard. Marquis still believed, with the audacity of a madman, that he could get the upper hand sometime or another during their trip. This venture after Julian would buy him time. "Julian has found himself a little dive called Pepper's five miles out of New Orleans. If you untie me, I can drive you."

"I'm a child of the technological age, I can use a goddamn phonebook and find my own way. I don't need you, Marquis. Bear?"

"Yes?" the man said, coming out of the shadows of the night like a mobile mountain, something that had not been there moments ago but could have been there since the beginning of time.

"I want you to render Marquis unconscious, gag him again, and throw him in the trunk. If you can do this without killing him, Will would be much obliged but don't go out of your way to assure it," Justin said nastily. "And hurry. Brian doesn't have a few days."

\*\*

Julian heard the explosion of noise and cursed. Sullivan was still bellowing pleas and curses, unwittingly aiding in Mark's ruse. Pulling the car over, Julian yanked the keys out of the ignition and got out.

Brian squirmed in his seat but was unable to do much in the way of using Mark's distraction as anything positive. He glared back at Sulli who glared back, threw his head against the seat a few times, turned himself over, and thrust repeatedly into the seat. If he was having a good time of it, he sure wasn't showing it. Whatever Julian had given Sullivan, it had not been the gesture of a decent person.

But Brian already knew that.

Julian clicked the safety off his gun, seeing that both back tires were doing just fine. Putting the keys in the trunk's lock, Julian was prepared for Mark to try to spring out at him and get a nice little hole put in his fool heart. He was not prepared for the teenager to be laying, still tied, still apparently unconscious. His fun spoiled, Julian bent down to look under the car, wondering what exactly had made the noise.

Mark decided the jack was still his weapon of choice and clocked Julian with all his strength on the back of his head. Jumping out of the car, Mark grabbed the keys and ran to the front seat.

"Dad!"

"Alright, Mark!" Brian exclaimed.

"Let me untie you and -"

"No! Get in the car, start driving, and worry about getting free once we're free, okay?" Brian said hurriedly, all to experienced in the villain getting up quickly and coming after the heroes. Mark, without argument, got into the car and started it.

Mark sped down the highway, watching as the crumpled form of Julian Taylor got smaller and smaller behind them. "I hope he gets run over," Mark hissed brutally. "And over and over."

"Can someone hand me a tissue?" Sullivan muttered from the backseat.

"Oh, ew, Sulli!" Mark whined. "Can you be any more pathetic?"

"Shut up!" Sullivan growled. "You try havin' this shit all over your cock and not needin' release!"

"No tissues, sorry, cousin," Brian said distantly. "I guess you're going to have to stew in your own juices for awhile."

"Where are we going, dad?" Mark asked. He looked at his left wrist as if to check the time and said, "Damn, I lost my watch!"

Sullivan chuckled. "I stole it."

"What? Why the fuck would you do that?" Brian demanded.

"Because our loyal followers don't know what mine looks like. I needed to leave a trail," Sulli explained simply as if he had been discussing the weather. As if his intention the entire trip had been to leave Will and the others a way to find him.

"Slick!" Mark exclaimed happily. "Great lift job!"

"Thank you, kindly."

Mark shook his head, then returned back to his question. "I mean … Marquis still has Justin, right? Where would they go?"

Brian scowled at the open highway. "Right. Any idea for sure where they'd be going, Sulli?"

"Definitely Savage Gardens," Sullivan answered gloomily, struggling to sit up and failing miserably. The gel had worn off, thankfully, but he was still bound. "Dillinger is there when he's not at his office."

"Dillinger? The guy Julian was screaming at?" Brian wondered.

"Screaming? No one screams AT Teyo Dillinger. They scream because of him, yes, at the sight of him, yes, after he's torn the flesh from their bodies, yes, but nobody screams AT him."

Brian glanced back at Sullivan. "Julian did. He swore at him, screamed at him, said he was bringing me back to him, making sure the place would get back on its feet with paying customers. Something about a performance. If what I heard over the phone is true, Dillinger is working for Julian. I don't know what he wanted with me, but Julian seemed to be the boss."

Sullivan shook his head. "I don't believe it."

"Since when did that matter?" Brian snapped. "I'm telling you what I heard. Julian is the mastermind in all of this, not Dillinger."

"It doesn't matter!" Mark wailed furiously. "None of it matters! If Justin is victim to either Dillinger or Marquis, who is working for who hardly makes one iota of difference! Sullivan, tell me where to drive, dad, shut up unless it's a topic completely unrelated to Sulli's incompetence, Julian's boss, or Marquis' anything, okay? I don't want to hear any more. You two are cousins. I'm not asking you to like each other but for now, I am asking you to get along. And if you don't, I'll leave you both on the side of the road to punch it out."

"Yes, Sir, mini-master," Sullivan said.

"I'd salute you but my hands are tied," Brian apologized. "Terribly sorry for the inconvenience."

Mark smirked. "You're forgiven. This time."

\*\*

Bear pulled into the secluded, exclusive parking lot of the club called Pepper's. On the outside the building had a new paint job and privacy-inducing shutters on the windows; a gated community with all the bells and whistles of a grand gentlemen's club. Inside, if one were so lucky - or unlucky, depending on who held the chains - to be a member, was another story entirely. Pepper's had only a small foyer with a quaint bar. A stage stood to the left for a dancer who never danced voluntarily. The police saw the stage, knew it's real purpose, and looked the other way toward a sweet chunk of change with their names on it. Decorative lights cast a rosy, healthy glow on the front room but it, too, was all for show. Behind the stage was where the real fun began.

Bear got out of the car and went around to the passenger side door, opening it for Justin. He knew why he did it but Justin gave him a look of incredulity. The big man did it nonetheless. The owners of Pepper's were watching the newcomers through an invasive security system and thinking Justin, in all his catered to glory, was Julian. Bear had not known how they would get inside Pepper's until Justin did his role reversal for Marquis. This would work to their advantage only if Julian was not already inside but it was leverage they had not previously held. Having someone the size of Bear weighting on him hand and foot gave significant pull to the stories surrounding Julian Taylor's skill.

"Master Julian," Bear said with a significant look. "If you would like to wait here while I retrieve your toy?"

"Of course," Justin said, instantly cottoning on and changing his face to mimic his brother's impudent superiority.

"Would Sir like me to call his … associates and relay our location to them?"

"Please do," Justin nodded, wanting to see Will and Cam almost as much as he wanted to see Brian. "And tell them to -" Justin's attention faltered from his act as two men to rival Bear's size came out of the front double doors of Pepper's.

Bear immediately stood in front of Justin and gave a small bow to the men. "Sirs Judge and Vince, may I introduce my Master, Julian T."

"We've met," said the man called Vince. He looked at Justin, not with scrutiny but with submission. "Master Julian."

"Master Julian," said the man called Judge, making his own little bow deeper than Bear's as if to show off who was more compliant. "Your suite is waiting as you requested."

Justin fought the urge to shudder. Julian had indeed meant to bring Brian here. Unsure whether he really wanted to see what was in the suite reserved for Brian's fate, Justin nodded. "That will do. Boy," he addressed Bear with regality as if calling him 'boy' was as natural as calling him by his name. "Get my things, call my people, and make sure anything in the trunk is properly bound."

Bear nodded subserviently, gave another bow, and went to the back of the car. He could not very well question Justin going into Pepper's alone, not and keep up their ruse of Master and Servant. Bear understood what Justin wanted him to do with Marquis by saying to make sure he was properly bound: anyone who knew Julian likely knew Marquis as well. Bear had to assure no one recognized the sadistic man.

Rearranging a face was one of Bear's specialties. Watching as Justin followed Judge and Vince into the club, Bear went about his business in disfiguring Marquis. He didn't have time to worry that Justin had gone from innocence in not wanting to order Marquis hurt or killed to the vicious darkness order for disfiguration in the span of an hour. The closer they got to finding Brian, the closer Justin got to falling into the void of no return.

\*\*

"Wait!" Sullivan said so suddenly Mark squealed on the breaks in reaction. The southern man, who had just managed to get upright enough to see the road, toppled haphazardly to the floorboards and Brian did his best not to go through the windshield, seat belted or not.

"What?" Mark howled furiously. At this rate, he was certainly going to get enough driving experience to pass his test back home.

"Pepper's!"

Brian tossed a look at Mark, who seemed equally as confused.

"Pepper's! Not Savage Gardens! I mean … shit, if someone had helped me to see I'd'a noticed. We're on the road to Pepper's, it's a … gent's club with a sick streak down the back. Julian was heading here, he must have been!"

"And? So? Therefore?" Brian replied irritably. "Why would we want to go to the place Julian intended us to go?"

"If Marquis is bringing Justin to a rendezvous point outside of Naw'lins, cousin, where would it be but five minutes out of town? Just enough time to catch their bearings, get their stories straight, and make sure their two victims can put on the show you said Julian promised Dillinger! They would need to practice whatever it is they wanted you to do and Pepper's has the perfect stage."

"Don't get ahead of yourself, Sullivan," Brian said, almost unable to contain his own excitement. "Why would Marquis and Julian split up if they were only going to bring Justin and I back together to practice their sick play?"

Sullivan snickered. "If you were a sadistic, maniacal twerp like Marquis, would you have been able to stand Julian in the background?"

"No."

"And if you were same said twerp and wanted to warp little Justin's malleable young mind, would you want the boy's lover and anchor to be around?"

"No."

"And if you were a twisted, obstinate motherfucker with a sweet ass and a smile like honeyed venom like Julian, would you want to be around Marquis while he tried to show you the old school way of torture?"

"No."

"And if you were said motherfucker, would you want Marquis to see how you brought sadism into the new millennia?"

"Alright, I get your point! Mark -"

"There's a sign for the place up ahead. Pepper's. I \*SO\* don't want to know more than I have to." Mark suppressed a shudder and turned at the sign's indication. He was glad Brian was beside him. So long as a parent said things were okay, they would be, right? Right???

Sullivan sat up again with as much vocalized frustration as he could manage, as if he was the only one bound and having trouble. This, as far as he was concerned, was the worst escape-slash-rescue-slash-kidnapping attempt he had ever participated in, and that was saying something!

Mark pulled up to the club and frowned at the gates. Someone was obviously keeping an eye out on any potential newcomers and whoever was guarding the heavy, ominous bars, was not at all interested in Mark, Brian, or Sullivan. "Well, shit," Mark sighed. "I guess we're not getting -HEY! Isn't that BEAR?!?!" he said, ending in a shriek that made Sullivan wince and think homicidal thoughts.

"Holy fucking shit!" Brian shouted.

Sullivan was laughing his ass off in the backseat, rather enjoying the constant turn of events in this escapade. "I guess the guy hanging from the rafters was some OTHER poor four ton black man with a gigantamous hardon!"

"Grow the fuck up!" Mark hissed at him and got out of the car without waiting for Brian to even try to stop him. "Hey!" Mark screamed at Bear. "HEY! MOTHER FUCKER!"

Bear's head snapped up in a near panic. He immediately recognized the boy screaming but tried his damnedest not to. If Mark identified him while Justin was inside, the youngest Taylor would be in very deep trouble.

"HEY!!!" This from Brian Kinney, tumbling out of the car and onto the pavement, hogtied.

Brian Kinney. Here. Jesus Tap-dancing Christ.

Judge and Vince came trotting out of the front doors, guns drawn. The commotion had to be stemmed immediately. Their immunity from police only existed if no one noticed anything obviously out of the norm on the premises.

"They with you?" Judge demanded of Bear, his hands bloodied with Marquis' leaking face.

"Never seen them in my life," Bear answered innocently. "Master Julian had better not hear this or he will be very angry."

Vince and Judge looked at each other in a kind of terrified way that reminded Bear just how different brothers, twins, could be no matter how alike they looked. The men pointed their rifles at Mark and Brian, oblivious to Bear drawing two guns and aiming appropriately at the backs of their fool heads. Firing simultaneously, Bear hoped to all high hell that the recently deceased Vince and Judge had been the only ones manning the outside cameras.

Mark screamed on the other side of the gate but did not jump back into the car. Brian flinched but came back with a nasty glare at Bear. Neither seemed to know what was going on and the only one having a good time at any of this was the man still laughing uproariously in the backseat.

Bear walked to the gates, putting his guns back in their hidden holsters under his massive arms, and couldn't help but smile at Brian. "I'm on your side today."

"Bull fucking -"

"Justin is inside pretending to be Julian. We were waiting for you."

Brian sobered instantly. "Let us in."

"I don't have the key. This gate stays closed unless someone opens it from the inside. You could climb it if you were untied," he said helpfully and procured a knife from his belt, handing it to Mark. "But if you're in any way injured or incapable of making a quick exit, I suggest you stay on that side and wait for me to go get Justin."

There was no way Brian was letting Bear rescue Justin, not when he could so easily harm Justin instead. "Stay right fucking there. Mark, come cut the ropes."

Mark nodded, having just finished slicing his own bindings. Crouching down over Brian, ignoring both Sullivan's laughter and the man's sudden gasp of fear, the sudden silence. After slicing Brian free and helping his father to stand, Mark finally noticed the eerie silence.

Right before the horrible, throat-scorching screams.

Justin's screams.

Part VII

Will wondered if it was possible to break the speed of sound with one's sister's car. He was sure as shit trying. After Bear's curt, quick phone call to tell him where they were and who Justin was impersonating, Will knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that things were about to go from 'oh my fucking god' bad to 'run for your lives, it's the Apocalypse' bad. Justin acting as Julian at a place renown for tastes that would pale a normal person was not a recipe for fun and games.

When Will's cell phone rang again, after he was already exceeding the highway's recommended legal speed, Will knew only one thing: Whoever was calling, it was to report something terrible.

"Taylor."

"One of the many, yes, I know."

Will dropped the phone, pulled over to the side of the road, took a deep, sobbing breath, retrieved his phone, and felt his soul slowly shriveling inside of him. "Dillinger?" he asked breathily. Will closed his eyes slowly, two fat tears leaking down his face. He turned away from the rest of the car, pressing his knuckles to his mouth as if trying to punch the emotion back down his throat.

Dillinger did not speak for what seemed like eons, then, "Welcome to Louisiana."

Will fought the urge to get horribly, violently sick into his lap. "T-thank you," he said sounding more obedient than he cared to admit.

"I think we should talk, Will Taylor."

"N-no!"

"No?" the man asked, bristling heatedly and yet somehow emanating a wave of utter cold through the phone lines. "You are not in a position to say no to me. I think we should finish what we started."

"God," Will whispered in terror, sweat breaking out over his face in a fine sheen.

"Will?" Cameron demanded, as confused as the rest of the car. "Will, you never told me who -"

"Get out of the car," Will said.

"W-"

"Godfuckingnow!" he screamed viciously.

Cameron, as obedient to anyone as a feral dog, did not move in the direction her brother wanted but she did move. Slapping Will's head with a force to do Debbie Novotny proud, Cameron stole the phone and hung it up. Will gaped at her all of a quarter of a second before bursting into unabashed tears, to which Cameron recoiled so much she finally got out of the car.

Will pounded his forehead on the steering wheel several times before Cameron was brave enough to face the tears and got back in, looking helplessly back at Lindsay, Melanie, and Michael as if they had any better clue how to deal with the unfamiliar emotion coming from Will.

"Dillinger has Justin," Will finally managed through bitter sobs.

"Will, who \*IS\* Dillinger?"

"Madman. He's a fucking psycho…he can see me! He can see! He knows, Cam!" Will cried hysterically. "He KNOWS!"

"Knows what?" Cam demanded, the only madman she could see the brother beside her. "Who is he and what does he want with Justin? And how the FUCK did he get Justin when not two minutes ago Bear told us to confirm they were doing fine and dandy, Will?!?"

"I don't know."

"Dillinger told you he has Justin?"

"No, but -"

"Dillinger told you he was at Pepper's where big Bear is supposed to be standing guard?"

"No, but -"

"Wait," Michael interrupted, "BEAR?"

Cameron ignored him, focusing instead on smacking Will upside the head again. "SNAP OUT OF IT! Will, one phone call and you go ballistic? This is not you. I wouldn't even want to know you if this was how you acted in a crisis! I have people like you put down if they don't shape up. Panic is the first thing that will critically wound a mission and get my ass slaughtered and that is not going to happen."

"But he KNOWS!"

Cam took out her gun and pressed it against Will's temple, as lethal as she was beautiful. She meant to shoot him and he knew it. "Make a choice, little brother. Make it quick. I will not have you endanger this mission because you could not handle one goddamn phone call from one goddamn man. You really think I'm such a shit backup that I'll let whoever Dillinger is hurt you? I don't care what he knows or how he knows it, I'll kill you where you sit if you are going to let him compromise you."

"Stop!" Lindsay cried out.

"Choose," Cam said lethally.

Will blinked once, twice, swallowed his panic, and pressed his lips together as if to keep it inside now that he had it back in its place. "I'm sorry. Thank you."

Cam took her weapon away and clicked the safety back on. "Justin is depending on us. If you think this guy has him and he's bad enough to do that to you, then we had better fucking hurry."

Will nodded and pulled back out onto the highway. He should have been ashamed of himself for reacting in such a way but he was too damn full of fear to feel anything else. Cameron's words should have rang true; that there was no certainty whether Dillinger had Justin or not. If only such things as logic and confidence existed in Teyo Dillinger's world.

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Justin had not been enjoying playing the part of his twin but the accouterments of such a role did have their benefits. Sealed bottles of chilled alcohol were readily presented to him, though he declined both those and the offer of food that looked too pink to be cooked. He did not dwell on what sort of meat Pepper's served. People, many big and strong looking, bowing down to him got creepier and creepier the darker the hallway got, too. All in all, this was not going to be the place he and Brian went to on their honeymoon.

There had to be a wedding for a honeymoon to exist, naturally, though in the secret confines of their bedroom, Justin had picked up a small hint that Brian was tiptoeing around that particular conversation. Marriage. After all they had been through, Brian was still wary of marriage. Lunatic. Justin supposed that was partly why he loved the man as much as he did.

Justin continued down the long, completely carpeted hallway as Judge and Vince had indicated. He ran his fingers down the length of burgundy carpet for a while before remembering that there was probably a very disgusting reason for blood red carpet to exist in a hallway. And not just to mute a person's steps or cries, either. He kept his hands to himself after that, noting the eerie way the light sconces got fewer and further between, the darkness before him like an unmoving solidity. A wall of darkness.

Shivers that had nothing to do with the muggy Louisiana temperature climbed up his spine. He did not falter stride because Julian would not falter but damned if he didn't want to turn tail and flee back to Bear. Back to the sunlight. Justin took a deep breath and realized that he was absolutely alone. Vince and Judge, submissively three steps behind him not two minutes ago, had vanished and the hallway had been too padded for Justin to notice.

Justin kept walking, the thought that this, along with several other of his more recent choices, was an incredibly bad idea. Horrible idea, actually. He should have turned around when Bear asked if he wanted to go back to Pittsburgh.

The smooth expanse of wall on either side made no indication that it would break monotony anytime soon and Justin had a strange sense of moving down into the ground. Down to Hell. The carpet seemed unstained but the darker the hallway got, the filthier it seemed. There was no way to tell how long he had been walking, though it seemed like somewhere between an eternity and halfway into his next reincarnated lifetime. When times of confusion and stress came to Justin, he usually talked to himself. Voices, even his own, were comforting. Justin didn't dare speak now, lest some hidden microphone discovered he was not who he claimed to be.

A flicker of something out of the corner of Justin's eye caused him to stop, almost uttering the yelp of fear building in his chest. Justin stopped, staring into the now complete pitch void, eyes struggling to see. He braved a hand out in either direction, fingers gladly touching the carpet now just to have an anchor to reality. There was nothing to see, nothing but the walls to feel.

But there HAD been something there. He had quite the imagination but he rarely saw things.

Justin retracted his hands and pushed his right shoulder against the right side of the wall, moving along again without breaking contact to the physical world. He did not look behind him for fear of seeing the same darkness as was in front of him.

He should have looked behind him.

Justin let the dry-brushing sound of his shoulder against the carpeted wall soothe his nerves, let it lull him as much as he could be lulled in this place. Eventually, his mind rationalized, this hall has to end. There has to be a door here, somewhere, and soon. Julian would have gotten bored with this before too much longer and these people obviously want Julian to be bored like they wanted to be upright, functioning members of society.

Almost the moment the thought entered his head, Justin's shoulder lost contact with the wall and he fell forward. Hands flying out to regain contact, Justin found that there was a corner here, a turn in the direction. It was not a door but it was something. Getting to his feet, trying hard not to let the feeling of being cut adrift affect his mind, Justin put both of his hands against either side of the wall. There was another corner where he had come from, that much he could feel. Two directions! Shit, shit, triple fucking shit! If he turned now, there was a good chance he would get lost and not be able to find his way out. If he didn't, he dreaded walking forever. Julian would have known where to go but Justin had a terrible thrill in his stomach that there was a possibility he had already missed some turn or another. While believing he had gone straight, Justin had not touched the walls the entire journey and had no certainty he had not missed some corner or another.

Damnit!

Justin refused to let panic set in. It was bad enough vertigo was even now trying to be his best friend in the darkness. He would not panic, it would do him no good.

A breath of air whispered against Justin's neck and he shrieked despite his vow of silence. Whipping around once, twice, Justin searched the void for the source. There had to be ventilation ducts, right? A hallway this long would start to smell musty after awhile if there was no circulation of air. There was always a vent or fan or something in the movies, Justin rationalized. Certainly something was here, as well. Anything besides four sides of carpet.

He wondered if this was what a lesbian felt like going diving.

Justin shook his head with a shudder. He didn't want to go there, not anywhere near there.

The first niggling of hysteria swarmed over Justin, then, when he realized what he had done. Upon feeling the air on his neck, Justin had turned around twice. He had no idea where he had been, no idea where he was, and absolutely no idea why he wasn't sitting on the floor bawling his eyes out.

Justin did not want to play Julian anymore. He didn't even care who knew it, not now.

"Welcome to Louisiana, Justin," a voice said in the darkness.

Justin was running before he noticed his legs were moving. He had left his scream somewhere back there but there would be no returning for it. Hands instinctively tracing the walls, Justin flew down what should have been a straight hallway but which was actually such a subtle curve it was unnoticeable. He didn't have time to care, just so long as he left that voice far, far away, nothing else mattered. Justin was too terrified to scream, to make a sound, to breathe. Distantly, his mind was working the baser functions of breath and pounding heartbeat but they were dull pinpoints of activity compared to the ferocity of his run.

The hallway had gone from muggy, suffocating carpet to bitterly cold cement and Justin kept running.

From cement to carpet again, still chilled like death, and Justin kept running.

From carpet to a floor so slick, so cold, Justin's feet when out from under him and he landed with a slimy splatter. Justin stopped running. He tried to get up but quickly noticed his hands and feet unable to find purchase on the slick floor. Justin SO did not want to know what had made the floor so slick but he had a sickening feeling he was soon going to add to it. The stench was metallic but not overpowering, like raw meat in the freezer section thawed just enough to have some juice on the bottom.

Blood. Not juice. Blood.

Justin ordered himself to calm down, to start over at a more logical part of his night. Obviously the frantic clawing at the floor was not ever going to be fruitful and he forced himself to sit still for just a moment. To let his breathing catch up. Justin was blind but surely, so was his phantom greeter. There had been concrete back there, Justin vaguely remembered the sharp sting of impact running up from his feet to his thighs and the slap-slap of his sneakers as he ran. There had been no sound to indicate anyone, phantom greeter or other, had followed him. So, he was in a half-inch deep layer of blood or worse. At least it wasn't his own. So the temperature had gone frosty, it sure beat the humidity outside.

There. Calmed. Relaxed. Smart hero and not dumb victim.

There. Slap-slap, slowly drifting forth. There. Panicked. Hysterical. RUN!

Justin refused his mind's cry, instead reaching all around him to find something, anything, to help propel him away from the site where the man would fall when he, too, found the blood. Justin's fingers gratefully clawed into something that was cloth but not carpet. He used the cloth to pull himself to a kneeling position, feeling something solid behind it like a hidden wall. Justin kept both fists in the cloth, ordering himself that under no circumstances would he panic like that again. He was more lost now than when he started.

Justin's hand grabbed onto something cold and smooth, using it to pull himself to his feet and -

A belt buckle? What on earth was a belt buckle doing - Legs? That cloth had been pants and the solid wall behind had been -

"Say something into the microphone, pretty. The world wants to hear your fate."

Justin let go of the man but it was no use, his hair already captured in one strong fist. He did the last thing he could; Justin screamed with every ounce of strength he had. For what little good it would do to save his soul.

Part VIII

Will pulled the car into the lane of Pepper's right behind the car Sullivan had just evacuated. Evacuated like a bat out of hell, running toward the highway with as much vigor as he had toward kidnapping, rape, and murder. Will flung open his door and caught Sullivan mid-scream, toppling the man to the ground. Getting out, frowning confusedly down at Sulli, Will put one boot on the southern man's chest to keep him from moving.

Cameron got out and ran to the gate where Brian was already halfway to the top, jumping to scale the iron without question as to why they were doing it. She caught up to Brian by sheer force of competitive spirit alone, rolling herself over the top next to her brother's lover. Both hit the ground running at the same time, Brian's sense of urgency etched in deep lines all over his face.

"What have we got?" Cam asked him, handing him her knife, which he deftly tucked into his pants at the small of his back.

Brian shook his head. He could not say 'Screams' and not hear the horrible sounds again. Nothing like that, ever, had come out of Justin's mouth and Brian was convinced that so long as he didn't admit it, he had not heard it. That scream was something made of pure, crystalline terror, a fear so absolute there was no coming back.

And it was broadcast all over the property.

"Brian!" Cam shouted, yanking him through the front doors and onward, physically yanking him out of his horrified reverie. "If you don't tell me what we're up against I'm going to shoot you and go in by myself! I don't fly blind with company who can tell me anything to light the way!"

"Justin, hurt. Sc-scr …" Brian shook his head. "Here, somewhere, I don't know …"

Cameron's keen eyes scanned the empty foyer, mildly disgusted at the rosy atmosphere. She centered her focus on the stage. Curtains surrounding anything, as a general rule, were meant to either hide something from being seen or to hide some\*one\* from being seen. Running to the stage and jumping onto it, not knowing or caring if Brian did the same, Cameron flung open the door. She could see only red carpet, a straight hallway, and lights.

She drew her gun and entered, holding it in a double-handed stance but not pointing it anywhere but up. If Justin escaped whatever torment he had fallen victim to, she did not want to shoot him. Beyond her line of vision, Cam could only just make out a dark destination, a place where the lights faded to nothing. There was an almost imperceptible curve to the hallway around where the black hole began, too slight to notice unless one were standing still.

Cam reached into a third thigh holster but instead of retrieving another gun, she got out a flashlight. "Hold this, Kinney," she ordered, "But don't turn it on until I tell you."

Brian took the light, grateful to be doing something. Anything that kept him from running toward the blackness where Justin had to be. "I hear Will coming."

"He won't come in," Cam said surely, voice tinged with something Brian placed as disappointment. Since their reunion, Will and Cameron had been a solid fighting force. For whatever reasons, Will had broken that unbeatable battalion.

"He's coming," Will said determinedly. "And he's going to shoot somebody if she ever doubts me again."

Cameron smirked but did not turn to see her brother, continuing down the hallway. Will's fear was total but he would conquer it knowing his sister had his back.

Bear brought up the rear, a rifle ready in each hand. A normal sized man would not have been able to hold the guns one handed but Bear was nowhere near a normal sized man, nor did he have a normal sized beef with the cause of Justin's screams. "I've been here before. There's a door directly left ahead, indented only minutely in the wall. Justin would not have found that room. It's security."

Cam nodded, signaled Will to come up behind her, and both made quick work of checking the surveillance room for surviv -people. No one was watching the perimeter cameras for the siblings to slaughter in the name of Justin's safety.

Onward, Cam still in the lead with Will directly behind her, Brian switched on the flashlight. Without being told to, he was proud to say. Lacking in weapons experience, Brian felt like a lackey but he would not complain so long as whoever lead him helped find Justin.

The curve in the dark, monotonous hall split into three separate corridors. Bear pointed to the far right, "This way."

Brian stopped. "No."

Cameron turned and glared at him and Brian had to fight the urge to shine the light in her eyes. He lost that war and she cursed at him.

"What do you mean 'no', Brian?" Will asked distractedly, likely wondering how to knock Brian unconscious and steal the flashlight at the same time.

"The middle. We … just follow me."

"Love is blind, Brian. There's no quirky sayings about love being the perfect compass. Bear knows the ways down here, you don't," Will said with forced compassion.

"Bear also raped Justin!" Brian retorted nastily. "Do you have another flashlight?" he asked Cam.

"No, that's the only -"

"Well then you had better fucking come with me!" Brian shouted, already running down the middle hallway. Cameron could easily match his speed and Will his strength if they had wanted to but Brian had no mind to turn back. Cam and Will would drag him back if the had to. He couldn't let them. With an impulsive vote of faith in his abilities to find Justin in any room no matter how dark, Brian threw the flashlight behind him.

Who knew that Brian Kinney, sole believer in fucking and not love, would rely only on the drawing power between his heart and the one who owned it? It sure as hell wasn't his dick leading him to Justin, that organ quite fine with staying in bed most of the time. It wasn't his brain throwing the light backward. It had to be his heart. Where Justin was concerned, his heart had yet to lead him astray.

And if anyone ever found out he had thought that, he would never live it down. So long as Justin was alive to never let him live it down, Brian could have cared less about anything else.

\*\*

Julian tried to shake his head to clear it and found two very pressing matters at the front of his consciousness. One, he was laying on a hard, flat surface that bad better not have been the road and two, his head had come off and was split in two somewhere across a vast distance. Dimly, like the first bubble to break the surface of water put on the boil, Julian remembered having the last and only members of the Kinney family under his rule and losing them. He remembered how he had lost them almost more clearly than he remembered losing his virginity or taking that first life. Mark Kinney-Peterson-Marcus-Motherfuckinglittlebastardincarnate had hit him. HIM! That brat had the audacity to try to escape!

A semi-rational part of Julian's mind reminded him that the brat had, indeed, succeeded in escape but that small portion of Julian's consciousness was very quiet and almost entirely buried by now.

Julian opened his eyes, glad to have them both still residing in the same place as he had left them and not scattered over the highway as much of his head felt. He pictured scrambled eggs with ketchup spilled on the floor, imagined his brains would look much the same way if a car came speeding up and crushed his skull at high speed… eggs over the highway, his head cracking like a ripe melon … he hated ripe melons, they didn't sting as much going down a throat raw from screaming as citrus, so his victims told him upon threat to their lives. He hated eggs, too, now he thought about it. But he did like picturing them scattered all over the road like bits of brain ….

Getting onto all fours, Julian found his feet - also still remarkably attached to his body despite the entirety of him feeling cut adrift. For a fleeting moment he thought he would wobble all the way back to the ground but he stayed standing. Wouldn't want to end up as a plate of eggs on the road.

Not that anyone was speeding either way on this road, the fuckers. He was all alone and he did NOT like being alone. Things moved around him when there was nothing to focus on. Voices spoke from beyond the grave when there were no screams to fill the void.

Maybe he liked melon after all. It didn't taste so bad if it wasn't rotten. He preferred red meat, though, so bloody it was almost still moving. And sometimes, when it still was.

No, he decided, melon was too sweet. He hated sweet things, they always turned sour the fastest.

Julian walked toward the exit for Pepper's, though it was still quite a while away. Five miles driving or ten if the road kept winding around in front of him like it was.

He was going to kill Mark. Then he was going to kill Brian, then Justin for good measure. Sullivan, too, because he could. And then he was going to have some eggs.

Julian stopped walking and listened, grinning momentarily up at the heavens as if the sound of a motorcycle was his own gift from god. Running out into the middle of the road and waving his arms wildly, Julian made sure to look as pathetic as his twin would look in this situation. The blood running down his face and head helped his cause. Even if the biker hadn't stopped for his plight, Julian would have jumped him and stolen his bike.

"Hey, kid, are you okay?" the man asked, taking off his helmet and immediately getting off his Harley.

Julian guessed he was someone who frequented El Diablo Veriedad by the looks of him but Justin couldn't be positive. He didn't care, either. "N-no," he said in his weakest voice. "A m-man kidnapped me and hit me and … oh, fuck it," Julian said, sliding a stiletto knife from a miniscule wrist sheath and poking a new ventilation hole in the man's neck. Standing over the man as he gurgled, choking to death on his own blood, Julian bent down and stuck his finger in the hole. He had no intention of plugging it up, instead, tore downward as hard as he could, exposing the raw insides of an esophagus plagued by black nicotine stains. The man should be thanking Julian; he probably would have died of a horrible disease some day.

Taking the helmet, Julian got on his new motorcycle, a nice one with blue flames that matched his eyes on a black background that matched his soul. Pepper's had better have his suite waiting.

\*\*

Lindsay held Mark close to her, sitting beside Melanie in the locked car. She had asked repeatedly if Mark was alright and the boy, though angry he had been left behind in the hunt for Justin, placated her each time. Melanie, while better at disguising her maternal concern in Yiddish yells about how stupid it was to go anywhere with Sullivan Kinney, who had fled as soon as Will let him up, had still made sure she did a sight check for injuries.

"I still don't see why we couldn't go inside," Mark complained. "\*I'm\* the one who drove us here in the first place. I'm the one who broke away from Julian!"

"Yes, you told us. We're very proud of you," Lindsay said.

"\*I\* hit him with a jack! I escaped. Do they realize what would have happened to them if I hadn't gotten us out of there?" Mark cried desperately.

"Brian knows, Mark," Lindsay said. "And he's proud of you, too."

Mark rolled his eyes. "Don't appease me, lady, I know all about those feminine wiles."

Lindsay nodded silently and held Mark tighter as if afraid he was going somewhere. Secretly, Mark liked it just where he was and had no intention of running away again, but nobody had to know that. Nobody knew Brian could fall in love until Justin came along, damned if they were going to know Mark liked to be held by the woman who had become his mother.

Melanie, sitting in the front seat while Lindsay and Mark stayed in the back, darted her eyes up the long lane leading back onto the highway. "I don't fucking believe it!" she gasped, climbing haphazardly into the backseat for a better view.

Julian, who had the helmet on his lap instead of wearing it to protect his already demented and dented head, made short work of his trip to Pepper's. Nobody in the locked car knew Julian liked to pretend the helmet had a head inside and wished he had had more time to take the biker's head to fill it, but none of that mattered. They saw him and that was enough.

"I creamed him!" Mark shouted, watching Julian let the bike fall where he stopped it.

"Something tells me he's had a few head injuries in his time," Melanie whispered, scanning the locks just in case.

Julian sidled up to the car and peered in the windows, leaving bloody forehead prints on each one. He seemed to not see Mark or his mothers, though a sly smirk had spread over one side of his mouth, deep in thought. Julian knocked on the back window, then, as sweet as poisoned honey.

"Let me in, Mark. I have to talk to you."

"No fucking way!"

Julian knocked again, harder. "Eye for an eye," he said pleasantly. "You hit me, I kill you, all's fair."

Mark looked at Melanie, at Lindsay, at Julian, and then at the ignition without a key. Since no key had not bothered Mark since he was old enough to get more than a slap on the wrist in the justice system, Mark got into the front seat and went about hotwiring an escape. Julian screaming was tolerable. Julian complacent was downright terrifying.

Good thing Julian never stayed calm for long. "Let me the fuck in!" he banged his fists with every word, not hard enough to break the window but damn near close.

"Mark!" Lindsay gasped.

"Working on it!" Mark said.

"Lindz, don't be scared," Melanie said, face clearly betraying those orders. "If he gets in, we can overpower him. Grab his arms, hold him down." \*Just like Cam would do.\* Melanie thought.

"Right. He's Justin's size. We could keep him here, make sure he didn't make trouble for everyone inside." \*Just like Cam would do.\* Lindsay thought.

"Yeah, 'cept Justin isn't a goddamn psycho!" Mark shouted from beneath the steering column.

"Mark, language," Lindsay quietly admonished without thinking about it. Her eyes and most of her attention was on Julian as the boy stalked around the car once, twice, seemingly in search of an easy way in. He would bed down, stand up, walk a few steps, and repeat the movement. Lindsay had never seen such a look of crazed neurosis on anyone before, especially not on such a familiar face, and found herself oddly captivated by Julian's movement. His eyes were glittering with some kind of emotion Lindsay would never be damned enough to understand, the smile one of innocent charm. She shivered.

The car roared to life and Mark grinned at his skill. He had fleeting images of movie villains jumping on the fleeing car, terrifying the heroes. But Mark would have preferred that to happen. He could run over Julian and claim it was accidental. Lunatic shouldn't have been playing so close to a moving vehicle. Mark tried to shift into reverse and found it stuck, the switch to first gear equally as difficult.

"He's done something to it!" Mark hissed in a frenzy.

Julian did not seem interested in jumping on top of the car. He idly walked to the hood and lifted it up while Mark and his mothers watched. They could not very well get out and run, nor could any of them get the car out of neutral. Whatever Julian had done on his merry little walk around their temporary safe haven, it had rendered them helpless. Sitting ducks. Julian made his tinkering under the hood very loud, the fact that he was likely dismantling the car permanently quite obvious. Several items flew up and over the hood, clinking onto the windshield and top of the car like the last sigh from the rope holding a guillotine blade over a condemned man. Spark plugs, fuses, a dripping hose, it was all fair game to Julian's demolition.

Finally, the hood dropped with a resounding gunshot-like bang and in Julian's hands was the car battery. His grin was lethal.

"Open the door," Julian mouthed, hefting the battery as if he made to throw it. And soon.

"Don't," Melanie said unnecessarily.

"He's going to throw it through the windshield," Lindsay whispered, also unnecessarily. There was no mistaking that was what he planned to do.

Personally, Mark was more afraid of what the battery could do when NOT used as a breaking tool. The acid Julian held in its neat square packaging promised a long, agonized death and the deep blue eyes vowed to follow through on that promise.

"He doesn't want either of you," Mark said determinedly. "If I could just -"

"Finish that sentence and you'll be grounded until you're thirty," Melanie growled.

Mark wondered if anyone in the Kinney family found turning thirty easy. Being grounded for it would most definitely suck. "I was just saying -"

"Oi, fuck-face, you stole my Jeep!" Sullivan yelled suddenly, throwing himself into Julian. Where he had gone, where he had come from, and why he had returned, no one inside the car knew but it was the distraction they needed. The distraction they would not let Mark make.

"Go, go, go!" Melanie hurried the other two as Julian and Sulli struggled for dominance on the ground.

Lindsay grabbed Mark's hand and the three rushed to the car the teenager had stolen from Julian. They had been inside Cameron's car and each desperately hoped to have more luck with this one.

It was locked.

This was going to take time.

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Justin knew this was Marquis' Master. Call it a hunch. He wanted very badly to be wrong, feeling the man's hand over his mouth and nose like the closing of a cell door. Like a suffocating blue latex mask. Justin tried to struggle, hearing nothing but the pulse in his chest and its cunning knack for speeding up just when he needed it to slow down. He could not breathe, his blackened vision already sparkling with stars of asphyxiation. The man holding him would not let him die, not yet. Justin knew this but the instinct to fight was stronger than logic.

"You will stop struggling and you will breathe," the Grand Marquis whispered, voice as cold and sharp as polished steel. Like blood in water, the voice penetrated Justin's body, swirling inside of him, filling him to the core with something too close to safety to have come from such a dangerous source.

Justin recoiled from the voice as if he had anywhere to go. He stopped struggling.

The hand moved so Justin's nose was uncovered and the room was suddenly filled with loud, gasping inhalations that smelled profusely like cinnamon, not like the blood on the floor. He wanted, needed, more air but his nose could not supply him with it. If he had been further from hysterics, this reprieve would have been enough but Justin was through being rational. He wanted Brian, he wanted to be free, and he wanted it right fucking now!

"You will walk with me and not try to escape and you will not be held," Dillinger said in that same cool, cutting voice.

Justin nodded, placated as if nothing were wrong. As if all that mattered was in Dillinger's voice and what that voice said. He would do whatever Dillinger wanted if it meant being able to move in the darkness. Never before had he been so claustrophobic as he was at that moment. Justin had a dreadful feeling that he would feel closed in if the man was stranded in the same ocean, let alone the same room. What made the Grand Marquis so frightening was not his reputation or the fact that Justin was mystically compelled to follow. It was the fact that the reputation, every last ounce of it, was true. Somehow Justin knew that anything unspeakable that could be done to a person, Dillinger had done. And he had better obey lest he have those unspeakables done to him.

Dillinger released Justin, confident the young man would not try to get away. "You know who I am," he said and it was not a question.

"The Grand Marquis," Justin answered, wisely keeping the car reference from his reply.

"You are correct. Also, I am Dillinger. And your Master."

Justin let the comment wash over him without verbal protest, though his body bristled. He looked through the darkness at the man who was Marquis' boss. He could not see any indication of night vision goggles, nor had he felt anything unusual as the back of his head was pressed against his captor's face in restraint. But Justin was positive Dillinger could see every little detail as if he was able to read the mind of his future victim.

"We shall walk now," Dillinger said, purposely brushing Justin's shoulder walking past him to lead him in the right direction.

There were so many questions Justin had but he could not find the voice to ask them. It was as if this man controlled Justin's tongue, negating any questions before they made it past his lips. He had not been given permission to speak and he could not impose. The man had let him go, after all. He had made good on his promise so long as Justin stopped struggling. Such a simple request to be released, really. Dillinger was not such a bad - \*what?!\* Justin's mind screamed - guy. Surely if those people had been good people they would not have made Dillinger punish them.

"You were impersonating Julian," Dillinger said, a few steps in front of Justin.

"Yes," he answered despite his inability to use his voice for anything HE wanted to talk about. Justin found himself needing to explain his ruse to Dillinger, compelled to cooperate. "I thought if I could convince the people here that I was Julian, when he showed up with Brian I could tell the bodyguard guys-"

"Submissives Vince and Judge. Use of proper names displays more intelligence than one realizes," Dillinger chastised.

"Sorry," Justin said. And stopped walking. "How the fuck are you doing that?!" he demanded, finally finding the ability to question returned to him. Backing up against one of the carpeted walls in a direction he hoped was the farthest from Dillinger, Justin shook his head to rid himself of the sudden flotsam floating around his mind.

"You believed you could have Subs Vince and Judge destroy Julian while you slipped away with your lover," Dillinger continued. "Arrogant and daring plan but perhaps it could have worked. You will walk with me again."

Justin shook his head again. "NO!"

"You will walk with me again or I will take your breath."

Justin wanted to scream, 'You'll try!' but could no longer use his voice. He could not move, though he desperately wanted to run.

Dillinger grabbed Justin's hair and held him in a headlock, one gloved hand again placed over the silent lips and nose. There had been that same overwhelming cinnamon scented air right before there was no air at all. Justin struggled the moment Dillinger had him, the strange paralysis broken too late.

"You could have life easy with me or ended without me, Justin. If only you would listen to what your body wants instead of what that insolent mind tries to make fact," Dillinger said in his strangely hypnotic way.

Justin realized dimly that the cinnamon smell had to be some sort of narcotic. It HAD to be. Some drug making his will a dull … bendy sort of … thing.

"You need to breathe within the next ten seconds, Justin. Show me you deserve to breathe. Nine. Eight. Stop struggling. Six. Five. You could die right now. Three. Two."

Justin stopped struggling. Dillinger released him, letting the smaller body crumple to the carpet. For a moment, all Justin could sense was that strong cinnamon and then he was up, running as fast as he could, smacking into the carpeted corners and walls like a pinball gone rogue. He knew this escape would be his last whether Dillinger caught him and killed him or caught him and sent more of that drug through his system to fully control him. This was his final chance to get away.

The wall that seemed to slam right into Justin sent the blond flying backwards. A hand wrapped around Justin's wrist before he hit the floor, pulling him forward and covering his mouth with a warm, naked hand. Dillinger had had gloves.

"Shh," Brian whispered hurriedly as he released Justin's mouth but not his wrist, propelling them both back the way he had come. Somehow, he had kept track of the path to freedom.

Justin was having a difficult time finding a lungful of air that was not tainted with cinnamon but having Brian's flesh connected with his helped to clear his head. He wanted to warn Brian that Dillinger could see them, that these tunnels led to deeper, darker things, but Justin could still not speak. If he did, he felt he would have started to scream and never stop.

Brian yanked Justin into him and pressed both of their bodies around one corner, hand once more going to cover Justin's mouth. He listened as the soft, slow breath of their shadowed pursuer went by, listened as the man turned a different corner. Listened to the silence. "Justin, are you alright?"

Justin nodded against Brian's shoulder, not trusting himself to speak without bursting into tears. He wrapped his arms around Brian's waist, reveling in the familiar scent of his lover as it replaced the cinnamon. He had to tell Brian. "Drug," Justin whispered. "Some … mind control. Drug."

"Injection?" Brian asked, unsure what he could say that would make him angrier.

"Inhaled," Justin muttered, then suddenly, "Sleepy."

"No, Justin. You can't!" Brian whispered fervently. "Listen to me. You have to stay awake because we have to get out of here. I know we've been through a lot in the past years but we're going to be just fine. If you sleep, I'll sleep, and we'll both get caught."

"Brian …."

"Justin, I've got you now. We're going to go home soon. Very soon. But only if you come with me."

"Okay," Justin sighed, wanting nothing else but to go back to riding in the Jeep with Marquis where he had at least been able to rest.

Brian nudge Justin forward, taking his hand and leading the way. Truth be told, Brian had no more information about where they were or what direction to take than Justin did but if he told his lover that, Brian feared an argument. Or a collapse, whichever Justin was closest to at the time.

Collapse.

Mind control drugs, Brian pondered. It could have been anything from un-doctored ecstasy to a mixture of any and all things to rot the system from the inside out. Brian would figure it out when they saw light again. He wished he had kept that flashlight.

He wished he had kept his armed entourage.

He wished the crimson halls didn't smell so damn much like cinnamon.

Part IX

Cameron could not have hated Brian Kinney more than she did the moment his screams filtered through the halls. The muffling effect of the carpeting made it impossible to figure out from whence it came even if they \*could\* backtrack to the split that had taken Brian in one direction and the flashlight in another. She supposed the carpet was placed how it was for that one of many reasons.

Damn that stupid motherfucker! Why did he have to go off alone? If anything happened to Brian, Justin would have a fit. Granted, he would have to be alive to have a fit, but she was getting ahead of herself.

"Which way?" Bear asked sullenly, the internal war he was fighting almost as strong as the war with Dillinger. He had raped Justin, there was no way around that and no forgiveness for it. Not from Justin and even less likely from Brian. Bear did not forgive himself, how did he expect Justin and Brian to?

"We're not splitting up," Cam swore, keeping the flashlight for herself and leading the way toward what she hoped was more than grisly remains. Brian's screams had died - faded out almost as suddenly as they had begun and she could not help feeling suffocated by what was quickly becoming a smaller and smaller corridor.

"This is the wrong way!" Will warned. "Kinney is taller than you, Cam, he would have hit his head running in the dark and if we couldn't hear his screams then, we would not have heard them just now! Bear has to crouch down, Brian did not come this way."

Cameron hated to admit it but Will was right, though she could have cared less if Bear had to crawl to follow them. Her stupid damn brother and his stupid damn backup. "Fine, turn back, we'll go left where we -"

Will held a hand up to silence her. "I've said it before and I'll say it again. Bear knows his way around these tunnels. He's been here before. Why don't we let -"

"He's not taking point!" Cam hissed venomously. Glaring at Bear she said, "Where do these tunnels lead?"

"Everything underneath Pepper's eventually leads … to Dillinger's offices." Bear admitted reluctantly, shifting on his gargantuan feet like a four year old caught lying. "These things go on for miles … Dillinger uses them to disappear in when the cops raid his place. By the time they get into his front door and through \*that\* maze, he has already evacuated himself, his people, and his … victims … into the tunnels of Pepper's."

"Jesus," Cam ground out. Will was thunderstruck and said nothing. He had known Dillinger was here by correct assumption and interpretation of the phone call but that did not mean he wanted to hear that Teyo Dillinger never had to leave the underground. The man could virtually hide here, anywhere, forever.

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Sullivan Kinney had never been a hero but he sure as hell was not a coward. When he found himself fleeing for dear life down the highway and noticed he was the only one on the escaping brigade, he gave a good, hard thought about forgetting the lot of them. Starting over. Being someone somewhere else, where nobody knew what he had done.

Not that he was ashamed of hurting others, stealing, general crimes against humanity, and the occasional driving while intoxicated. It was the running scared that would follow Sulli until the day he died. Which was coincidentally going to be extremely soon if he went back. The shame was heavy, sodden, like wet clothes during a downpour. Only one solution outside the bottom of a bottle of Beam could fix the guilt. Heading back to Pepper's to do … whatever it was he decided to do when he got there.

Help Brian? Fuck that. Help Justin, maybe. Mark, well, the kid had grown on him in ways only deviant assholes could connect with. The lesbians, forget it. Michael … where the fuck had Michael gone? Fuck that, he didn't care about Novotny the Vanished. Cam? Will? Shit on them. Bear? Sulli would sooner bottom willingly to any and all the men he had topped in his lifetime.

So why WAS he going back? Because like an idiot, he was heading right back into the fray. At top speed, as a matter of fact. There was no reason, no person he could think of at Pepper's completely worth dying for. Except, of course, the one person who could and would kill him when he returned.

No. Sulli had not just thought that. Julian Taylor, the little shit, was not the reason he was returning to the scene of what could very well be a massacre. But what, then? Who? If he discounted Brian, the lesbians, Will, Cam, Bear, and not assigned dire importance to Justin and Mark, who else could it be?

It certainly wasn't for his Jeep, beautiful as it was. What a crock of shit. Mark had seen through it where Sullivan refused to go. And still, he didn't want to admit it. The kid was sick, twisted, and an absolute maniac with a spoiled-brat temperament and a talent for torture.

And a sweet ass, a fine knowledge of sexual pleasures, a wicked smile that could make a man cream himself at thirty feet, and a physical likeness to Angelface Justin without the corrupted-by-Brian hatred for Sulli. Julian might have hated Sulli but it was for no reasons Brian could ever take credit for. In other words, Julian was the perfect specimen for spending some serious time with. On a …settling down level. If only Sullivan could convince the kid to come down off the rafters or out of the dark corner he happened to be lurking in at the time.

Julian would put up a fight, of course. Sullivan was counting on it.

By the time he had come to this conclusion, Sulli was running at full speed again. Knowing he was crazy and hoping maybe he was not wasting his time on his lunatic crush, Sullivan screamed at Julian, "Oi, fuck-face, you stole my Jeep!" and launched himself into the younger man.

Julian turned stunned eyes to the man on top of him but only for a moment while he collected his strength through the shock. Swinging both fists at Sullivan simultaneously, knowing for a fact that untrained human instinct focused on one thing at a time in a fight. Sullivan, while tough and experienced, blocked only one fist and got the second in the jaw. Julian bucked underneath him, shuddering in delight when he felt Sullivan as hard as a rock behind the zipper of his worn jeans. Sullivan had not toppled off of Julian as the blond had hoped and regained his bearings far quicker than Julian liked. Sullivan wound his fist back and hit Julian in the eye once, twice, until the younger man's neck did not snap his face back forward. Julian's hands fell from Sulli's face and Sullivan stopped hitting him.

Julian bucked suddenly and threw Sulli off of him, into the dirt. He rolled on top of Sullivan and punched the man a good three times in the mouth, feeling his own erection growing strong and hot between his legs. Sullivan twisted one fist into Julian's hair and pulled him until their faces were only inches apart, then spit blood in Julian's face.

"You're hard," Julian said huskily, hands going to either side of Sullivan's face and holding him still.

"So are you," Sulli replied, breathing heavily. "You sick fuck."

"Bastard."

"Sweet talker."

Julian leaned down and bit Sullivan's lip, not hard but hungrily, tasting the blood he had put there. "I hate you," he said and kissed where he had bitten.

"You're not top on my list, either," Sulli whispered.

"I'm not a bottom."

"Wanna fight for it, sugah? You'll lose," Sulli promised, letting go of Julian's hair only to focus on the round ass hovering over his aching cock.

"Looks like you're on the bottom now, asshole. I'll tear you apart," Julian said nastily.

"Little bitch," Sulli murmured, mouth tingling for another kiss as Julian rocked slightly on his lap.

"You thinking what I'm thinking, Kinney?" Julian asked.

"I'm thinking I'm going to rip your clothes off and see what the Devil looks like naked. Then I'm going to see what the Devil looks like with my cock shoved so deep inside him he'll finally know what Heaven is like."

Julian groaned breathily. He didn't dispute who would be on the top or bottom. In the end the one who ended up unconscious would bottom. Until then, Julian loved to imagine what Sullivan Kinney looked like in the throes of ecstasy, bloody and beaten and begging for more. And a little part of him burrowed out from beneath the soil of his darkness, buried for so long, wondering what he, himself, would look like impaled on Sulli's dick. Finally knowing what it was like to be free.

Neither man remembered they had ulterior motives on this trip as Julian leaned over for another kiss, deep and soul searching and hinting at the passion for power both shared. Somewhere on another plane of existence, Melanie, Lindsay, and Mark gave up on the car the teenager had stolen from Julian and climbed the fence to get to the one Bear had driven. Far, far away, the three got into the car, smashed the gates down at full speed ala Melanie Marcus, and drove down the road. They left Marquis where he was tied, dropped underneath the car unconscious where Bear left him to kill Vance and Judge.

Sullivan and Julian had more important things to think about, like how to get their clothes off the fastest way. Later, they could think about killing each other. Just like any other perfectly matched couple in the world.

Julian growled suddenly and broke from the kiss, slamming his fist into Sulli's nose. The grin he wore was both erotic and dangerous. In a few moments, his grin would be the only thing he wore.

Sullivan pulled Julian back to him with a ferocity that had hair coming away in his fists and a high yelp of desire coming from the blonds mouth. The sultry southern tongue invaded Julian's lips, demanding and insatiable and looking to bruise. Bleed. Scar. Julian's hands dug into Sullivan's shoulders with fingernails bared, breaking into the flesh underneath the black shirt, yanking himself closer against Sullivan's body. A husky, wanton moan escaped Sulli's throat, swallowed into the darkness of Julian's insides as he rubbed himself against his new lover's crotch. Julian pressed his erection against Sulli, feeling the eager return of pressure from the denim-clad lap. Sullivan raked his hands through the silky blond locks above him, pulling until the boy screamed into his mouth. It was time to show Julian who would top.

Sullivan clutched Julian's ass and suddenly flipped them over so Julian was laying stunned on his back. Julian attempted to get the upper hand once more but Sulli was having none of it. He slapped Julian's face and stood, grabbing Julian's ankles together and dragging him screaming over the ground into a cropping of trees lining the Pepper's property. Before Julian could get words distinguishable through his guttural bellowing protests, Sullivan had stopped and straddled him. Sulli kissed Julian before the blond could stop him, even if he had wanted to. Julian's fingers clawed beneath Sullivan's shirt, sliding over smooth, beautifully unscathed skin. He was going to scathe that flesh if it was the last thing he did!

Julian raked his nails down Sulli's back and the man arched away in a wild howl. Taking the opportunity for what it was, Julian shoved Sulli backwards and dove on top of him with a crazed, passionate scream. He could feel the blood boiling in his veins, too hot to be contained in human flesh. Julian meant to knee Sulli in the balls but the older man twisted just in time, earning a solid hit in the inner thigh. Not as painful but certainly not a ride in the park. Sullivan screamed, backhanded Julian, and used his higher body mass to push Julian back off of him. Julian grabbed a handful of dirt and threw it in Sulli's face, grabbing the knife from its wrist sheath and going after the brunette with all the hate built up over his lifetime. Sullivan knocked the knife from Julian's hands, tears and soil streaming down his flushed cheeks. He grabbed a rock and launched it at Julian but missed.

Both men went for the knife Sullivan had thrown, their hands reaching the blade at the same time. Julian's hand went around the handle first but Sullivan's grip was stronger, forcing the younger man to put the knife to his own throat.

"I win, sugah," Sulli proclaimed proudly, breathlessly, as he straddled Julian once more.

Julian tried twisting, bucking, thrusting to escape but to no avail. Sullivan only forced him to press the knife harder against his own jugular. The heat boiling in his veins was reserved now for his eyes, burning a lethal glare at Sullivan above him.

Sulli tore Julian's shirt open and ran a hand over the smooth flesh underneath. No tattoos, no scars. Sullivan desperately wanted to mar that white skin but that would wait. Right now, he wanted to bury himself inside that sweet, tight ass. "I won, princess," Sullivan said again. He brought his free hand up and caressed Julian's bloodied face, then slapped him, hard enough to make the other see stars. "Admit it and I'll go slow, baby."

Julian spit in Sullivan's face. If the older man didn't know better, he would say the new bottom was pouting.

"I'll hurt you so good, sugah," Sulli promised.

"Wait!" Julian said, color flushing his cheeks an even deeper red. "I … I've never …."

"Never ever bottomed, love?" Sullivan asked soothingly.

Julian shook his head carefully, eyes twinkling with fear and uncertainty. He swallowed thickly under the knife.

"I'll be gentle, baby," Sullivan crooned. "You stop fighting me and I'll make you feel so damn good."

Julian bit his lip, grated the torn flesh out slowly and winced. "Promise?"

"I promise."

Julian gave the barest of nods.

Sullivan smirked. "I almost believed you, bitch."

Julian screamed. "Bastard!"

Sulli laughed and pressed the knife harder against Julian's throat. He slid off the lithe body, never breaking contact with the tender flesh. "Take off your pants. I'd suggest you do it slowly or you'll get cut."

"I'll kill you!"

"Not before I fuck you. NOW!"

Julian buried a sound that was part sob, part eager groan. His hands traveled down his body, fighting not to tremble. A gasp came unbidden from his swollen lips as he touched the button of his jeans, brushed against the zipper barely containing the entirety of him. With a whimper he had no blood left in his brain to be ashamed of, Julian undid his pants and slithered out of them. Sulli grabbed Julian's hair and yanked him to a sitting position.

"Now mine. Do it! And if you hurt me in any way, shape or form with my zipper I will tear the ears off that pretty little head of yours!"

Julian, scowling, undid Sullivan's button, his fly. He could not hide the lustful breath from hastening in his chest at the sight of the beautiful cock that sprang forth from its cage. Julian did not wait for Sullivan to give him permission. If he was going to be beaten, he would not go down, so to speak, on someone else's orders. Sullivan arched despite himself, the knife all but forgotten in his and Julian's hands.

"Down around my hips," Sulli whispered. Julian let go of his cock and yanked Sullivan's jeans down further. "Now, we're going to throw this knife and then, honey, we are going to dance."

Julian nodded, eyes glittering with dark malice. The part of him that was enjoying being the victim had turned from a quiet mewling to a high, keening wail of carnal, animal excitement. He let go of the knife and Sullivan tossed it far into the brush. Julian's glare locked with Sullivan's determined hazel eyes and both men grabbed for each other's hair, skin, anything loose was game.

Sullivan held onto the first loose thing he could, one hand pressed in a vice grip around the base of Julian's cock. Julian, still with Sullivan's hair in both hands, pulled Sulli to the side so he could straddle the older man once more. Julian relinquished on handful of wavy dark hair as Sullivan rolled them over so he topped Julian. The younger man was not through yet; forcing Sulli off with the determination of a dying man. Julian landed on top of his pants, exactly where he wanted to be. With the stealth an accomplished Covert Ops officer would be proud of, Julian reached his empty hand into his pocket and felt victory there in a palm-sized packet of flaming red gel. Julian knew he would have to either open the packet with both hands behind his back, giving Sulli the advantage to top him, or be quicker than he had ever been opening it with his teeth.

Julian was not about to give Sullivan the advantage. He could distract the man just fine. With the lightning fast strike of a poisonous snake, Julian head-butted Sullivan dead center of the forehead. Sulli, reeling, let go of Julian's cock as both hands flew to his face. Julian tore open the packet and emptied it onto his hands, meaning to cover Sulli's cock with it again. The more pain he could cause Sulli as he fucked the older man, the better triumph would taste. Julian rubbed his hands together and then slathered the gel all over Sulli's cock.

Sullivan jumped back to reality at the familiar knife-edge tingling between pleasure and pain. He began to scream but knew it would not relieve the sensation. Sulli backhanded Julian, again, again, until the boy, lulled into the security of the victory not yet won, fell off of Sulli's legs. The southern man did not wait for Julian to get his bearings, getting quickly on top of the blond and using his knees to force the younger man's legs apart. He didn't care if Julian had bottomed before, or when he did, or who he did it with. The little bastard had this coming.

"You ever felt this stuff, Julian?" Sullivan asked viciously, one hand holding his bottom's wrists together and the other positioning himself at the tight hole. "It hurts like a bitch and feels so good you want to die."

"Wait!" Julian cried out as Sullivan pushed the first inch of himself past the tight ring of muscle protecting Julian from pure bliss. "Please!"

Sullivan gritted his teeth but he stopped. "What!"

"I … gawd," Julian whimpered as the gel worked its way onto his most sensitive flesh. He bucked beneath Sullivan despite himself, trying to work the hard, pulsating head further inside no matter how his mind screamed to run, to fight, to flee. "Never … really … I've … please."

"Never, truly?" Sullivan asked warily.

Julian shivered at the new sensations filling him. "No. Please? I don't …"

"Shh." Sullivan soothed, one hand on Julian's lips. The younger man had not asked him to stop or to pull out, not even to go easy. He knew Julian was being truthful this time. "I'll go slow."

Julian nodded, two fat tears running from his eyes into his hairline. There were two sides warring inside his head and both seemed to make perfect sense. He did not want to be dominated. He wanted to be dominated. He didn't want eggs anymore.

He just wanted Sullivan.

"Ungh," Sullivan moaned, the gel making it nearly impossible to go slowly. Looking down into Julian's vulnerable but conflicted face, he was determined to go easy if it broke every blood vessel engorging his dick. How long that lasted, well, only time would tell.

Julian, panting, moved his wrists for Sullivan to release him, glad when the man complied. Leaning up for a kiss, Julian refused to believe this was a bow toward comfort during sex. He did not do comfort during sex. He did not bottom. He did not - Oh, God, how far could Sulli go in?!? "Oh … uhh …" Julian whimpered. "Hurts."

"I know," Sulli murmured. "It'll get better."

Julian threw his head back, feeling Sullivan inside him like some leviathan, a great and powerful being filling him to some totality he was not aware he lacked. Until Sullivan pulled out and the feeling was lost once more, Julian never knew he was incomplete. Julian opened his eyes to find Sullivan gazing down at him.

"Tell me to keep goin'," Sullivan said, voice thick with his accent. His arms trembled holding his weight over Julian, his legs trembled with the effort it took to stop.

Julian fought the urge to knee Sulli in the groin. For reasons unknown to him, Julian did not want to hurt Sullivan that way. He wanted to draw blood but he did not want to inflict that much pain. Not in this man. Julian reached up to Sullivan's lip where it had split under Julian's fists. He pinched the cut, brought fresh blood from it and a wince from Sulli, and nodded. "Yes."

Sulli groaned gratefully and pushed himself back to where he was, feeling the tight hotness surround him, adding to the pleasure-pain of the gel, until he was almost out of his mind with sensation. Julian's hands went to the cuts he had inflicted across Sulli's back and ran his hands roughly over them, drawing Sullivan deeper inside his core.

Julian did not want to go slow. Sullivan could not keep his gentle pace. The new lovers looked at one another for only a moment and a silent agreement was reached.

End it.

Sulli pumped himself into Julian with such a ferocious barrage of thrusts Julian clung to the man for dear life. An impossible blanket of stars covered their world, surrounding them with a cottony thickness of bliss. Julian bit into Sullivan's shoulder and tasted blood like a hot, coppery wash. Sullivan cried out but whether it was from his own oncoming orgasm or Julian's teeth, neither knew or cared.

"Oh, Ungh, god, Jul, ba-bee, sugah, ahhh,, ahhhh!" Sullivan howled as the world crashed around him, the damning gel covering his cock reacting to his nerves and flaming over his body until nothing but orgasm remained.

Julian found himself crying, sweet tears of release. His belly was covered in his own juices as Sullivan's onslaught slowed, broken, softer. Neither man had touched Julian's cock, the sheer animalistic sex enough to tear down every wall, every complex or fear, pain felt and pain caused.

Sullivan pulled out of Julian as gently as he could, completely spent. He rolled onto his back in the leafy Louisiana foliage and pulled Julian into the crook of his arm, holding the boy there while he sobbed over what he had done and what he still wanted to do. Sullivan could have soothed his lover with words but something told him what Julian needed was exactly what he was doing at that moment.

Everything else could wait for morning.

Part X

Cameron could not remember the last time she had slept more than an hour here and there. Tonight would not bring that relief. She had too much to do and not enough of a forever left to do it in. Flashes of the monsters that plagued her waking thoughts almost as lucidly as they came in her nightmares had no place in her mind now. There were unwanted images of Brad and their past, more of the before than the aftermath of what the bullet did to him to pay him back. Jennifer and Craig Taylor had not believed their eldest son capable of doing what he did, more power to their denial. Cam found herself distantly glad she had left home, glad that Will left for his own reasons. Brad had left as well, but Cam did not know why. She had a feeling that panged too close to sisterly instinct than she was comfortable with that Brad had done something to Julian, seen the sinister blackness in the boy's eyes, and taken off.

Cam did not want to rehash these events with her family. Not even with her mother who seemed to come to her senses about all of her children with Justin's coming out. Cam was beyond any therapy that did not come with a speeding bullet now but she could not deny feeling like her leaving had done something momentous for the youngest girl in the Taylor family, Molly.

The normal one. Cam wanted nothing to do with her lest she start to care about the girl like she had come to care for Justin. Molly was who Cam could not be but who she had once been. In another life. It was a life she was over now, if only her acidic memories would leave it rest where she had buried it.

More than Brad's face was that of a beautiful but icy woman who trained her to be the best assassin she could be. They had been lovers, once, not so much unlike the experience gap and age difference between Justin and Brian. Moira Kelley had been her name, full-blooded Irishwoman from her ivory skin to her freckles, to her flaming red hair. All that beauty was before she forced Cameron to pull the trigger. To turn her suicide into murder. She had had enough of the game, enough of killing, and only hoped the fact that her death was murder instead of suicide would redeem her in the afterlife. Cam could not afford to dwell on the demons inside her head, to think about the long dead. There was killing to do. Killing that, by now, would likely be to avenge her youngest brother's death rather than to make a statement to anyone else thinking of harming him.

Fat lot of good that did to the bastards who were intent to harm him before, fat lot of good it would do now. But damned if it didn't make her feel better. Killing had become living to Cameron. She knew she was beyond redemption and it did not bother her. The afterlife, what there was of it, would come when she got too slow to anticipate her enemy's move. When it came, Cameron could let herself think about it. She was not big on regret. Moira had insisted when Cam came to her for help defending herself on the streets that regrets be left at the door. It was Cam who far exceeded her teacher's code of conduct and Moira who could not fully let her deeds go internally but that was beside the point. Cameron was here, now. She had gotten her revenge on the man who forced her to leave her once happy home as a girl and now she would get revenge for the man who hurt Justin.

The man who brought such a wave of terror over Will.

The man who would not stop hurting her family until he was dead.

"Well?" Cameron demanded of Bear, faced with a hallway split now into four under the face of her flashlight. "Quickly!" she snapped her fingers.

"Second from the left," Bear supplied, ignoring the feeling that they were wasting their time in these halls. Once Brian stopped screaming, once Justin stopped screaming, it would have been too late. "There's a major room back here for … I'm sure it's the closest room to serve his purpose and time restraint."

Cameron jogged silently down the indicated passage, knowing Will was behind her and Bear brought up the rear, both matching her pace. Her scars, both mental and physical, would never disappear, but the act of doing something, anything, toward the future made those wounds fade just a little bit more.

So long as she did not sleep.

\*\*

Brian shook his head, held his breath against the cloying cinnamon trying to consume him. He did not know where he was going when he began to run again, yanking Justin along, but Brian knew he had to get away from that smell. He knew the moment the airborne drug began to take affect, when his mind slipped into that twilight lassitude right before sleep without him being drowsy, and Brian knew it was the cinnamon which brought it.

"Try not to breathe," Brian muttered.

Justin gripped Brian's hand in affirmation. Having Brian there to steady him made the drug less of a threat to his consciousness. With Brian there, Justin had someone else to think about. A reason to break free.

Dillinger was in the halls, somewhere, spreading his drug of compliance. He likely knew exactly where the lovers were going and where they would end up. But Justin would not stop running as long as Brian was there to run with him.

Justin heard Brian's shoes and then his own meet the concrete, smacking against the change in floor like a death sentence. "No!" Justin whispered harshly, pulling Brian backwards harder than he had meant to in his haste. "That isn't the way out!"

Instead of arguing, Brian felt along the wall and backtracked their journey until the next corner appeared. He was disoriented, in a constant state of vertigo which had nothing to do with the drug and everything to do with the muffled sounds and constant darkness these tunnels provided. He knew it was not safe to talk but Brian wanted nothing more than to tell Justin everything that had been going through his mind since Marquis and Julian had taken them.

Love.

Worry.

Fear.

A new resolve to officiate the union that had been willingly monogamous for years. Not counting anything forced upon the pair.

But he could not speak his thoughts. Not until they could see the light.

"Brian!" Justin whispered. "Look!" he pointed at the slowly brightening beam of light down the length of a tunnel to their left.

"Cameron has a light," Brian said cautiously.

Justin voiced the caution Brian could not, "But she might not be the only one. What do we do?"

Brian took a deep breathe, gratefully cinnamon free, and decided, "We sit and wait."

Justin nodded. "Sitting sounds good."

"Justin … if it's not her, you have to be ready to run again."

"I'm ready if you are, kid," Justin smiled softly knowing Brian would hear the change in his voice from fearful to prepared. He put both of his hands in Brian's and rest his head on Brian's shoulder as both slid down the wall to wait for the light.

\*\*

Sullivan had not realized he had fallen asleep until Julian began to stir beside him. It was still night. Opening one eye, Sulli drank in the sight of his lover before the blue mirrors to his young, dark soul opened up and revealed plenty more work needed for peace.

"What are you staring at?" Julian demanded, more curious than angry.

"You," Sulli answered nonchalantly. They were still nearly fully naked and Julian chose to focus on that instead of Sullivan's comment.

"Where do we go from here?" Julian asked, somewhat subdued. He seemed genuinely unsure and Sulli felt his cock twitch at the vulnerability so few had ever lived to see.

"Well, sugah," he answered, noting silently the slight flush that appeared on Julian's cheeks at having a nickname. Justin, too, had once said he liked being called 'sugah'. "We show our true colors here and now."

"Nude and tan," Julian said with a smirk.

"Not the colors of our flesh, Julian, I mean the color of who we really are."

"Still not getting you," Julian said, slipping, albeit gingerly, into his pants.

"We go inside Pepper's and stop this from going any further."

Julian's head flew up, eyes blazing. "You mean rescue Justin?!"

"Yeah, or blow Pepper's to smithereens, depending on your mood and what kind of explosives we can find …"

"My brother -"

"What, sugah? Your brother what? Stayed home? Got doted on? Well guess what, darlin', he didn't. I know first hand he had it just as rough at home as you did out on the streets. Maybe his pains were different at a younger age but guess what? Life is a fucked state of affairs no matter who you are or where you go. It's hard all over the place. You rescue Justin and what does it hurt you? You DID help get him into this, and for what? Huh? Jealousy? Spite? I was once in your shoes only on Brian's case instead of Justin's. I hurt a lot of people on my way trying to get back at Brian for something he had absolutely had no control over. I went a little psycho. I don't regret what I've done because, let's face it, what good will that do? I'm who I am today because I went nuts and tried to kill and succeeded in killing a lot of people who either didn't deserve it or did and would have ended up murdered anyway. My point is, why NOT try to save Justin? You can throw it in his face that you can both save him and put him in peril. Besides," Sulli said, seeing Julian's conflict playing out over his face and knowing he had the boy "the whole evil incarnate thing gets monotonous after awhile. You do this one redeeming thing and no one will ever know what you'll do next. No one will ever be able to predict you."

Julian grinned. "I know another way in."

Sullivan returned the grin. "I thought you might."

\*\*

Will felt like shouting to the gods above, whoever and however many they be, that he had had enough. The dark halls, the empty rooms, the torture devices checked and rechecked for fresh blood, had been a fruitless search. Bear was beginning to look like he had no new ideas or routes and Cameron looked like she would go off on her own any moment now. As if independence would get her further.

Dillinger was somewhere in these halls. Justin and Brian were likely dead or beyond saving.

Will decided he had nothing to lose except for the respect of his sister for an unprofessional battle agenda. He did not scream for that one purpose. She and Justin were all he had for family, for completely trusted individuals in his life. If he lost Cameron's respect, as he was teetering on doing so many times during this mission, Will did not know if he could face his reflection. But if \*Cam\* agreed to do the shouting ….

"Cam," Will said in an overly-quiet voice as if making up for his mind's want to shout, "we have to make a choice."

"Options?" she asked without debate. Bear had long since stopped telling them which way to go and it seemed like eons since they had found anything remotely resembling a new path.

"Evacuate," Will muttered dispassionately, "Or start calling for them and attracting all manner of unsettling folk to our location in hopes one of them could lead us to Justin and Brian."

Cameron gave a sly smile. Attracting the bad guys to their position would certainly give her a chance to shoot somebody if nothing else. "Would you like to do the honors?"

Will bowed. "With pleasure." He cleared his throat and shouted, "HEY MOTHERFUCKERS! YOU WANT SOMEONE TO MESS WITH, COME AND GET US! COME ON!!! COWARDS! I FUCKING DARE YOU TO -"

"Will!" Bear bellowed, throwing the younger man down to the ground as a bullet pierced the carpeted wall beside him. Where the bullet had come from, no one knew. Cameron had killed her light the moment the gunshot rang muffled to their ears. This made them hard targets but also reduced their ability to see the enemy from difficult to impossible.

Bear yanked Will to his feet and was vaguely aware of Cameron standing so close to her brother they could have fit into the same shirt. They would not move again until a path presented itself, either with a new sound or the flash of gunpowder.

"Damnit, Julian," the new sound presented itself straight away. "You just shot at your brother!"

"Yeah," Julian laughed. "I know that. You said we had to save Justin, you said nothing about killing Will."

"Aw, hell, you're right, sugah."

Cameron flicked her light back on and glared at her younger brother, shining it purposely in his face. "What the hell are you two still doing here?"

"We're here to save the day!" Sulli said proudly, hand raised to shield his eyes.

"Nice job," Will grumbled.

"Not so nice," Julian groused, "I missed."

"How 'bout I hold the gun, sugah?" Sulli asked sweetly, taking the weapon from Julian's unresisting hands. He told Cameron, "We're on your side tonight, after that, all bets are off."

"Teyo Dillinger is here," Will informed them on the base of being allies. And to make Sullivan exactly as pale as he became.

"Right, Dillinger. Here." Sullivan swallowed thickly, only to be elbowed in the ribs by Julian. The blond pulled Sulli's hair until the taller man bent his ear down to his mouth.

"Dillinger isn't the real threat here. He fears me," Julian whispered boldly, confidently.

"You're a nutter," Sulli sighed.

"I may be a lot of things," Julian said, this time for everyone to hear, "But I'm not a liar."

"Oh yes you are!" Will growled. "Don't tell me you mean to deny any and all things you've done in the past now that you've got yourself a fuck buddy?"

"Choosing that Kinney as a fuck proves he's crazy," Bear muttered to Will.

"I'm not denying anything I've done," Julian said, bristling. "I'm only saying that I'm not a liar."

"Denying that you're denying being a liar makes you a liar!" Will argued.

Cameron punched Will in the shoulder, and not in a sisterly way. She glared at Julian with the threat to do the same if he continued the argument. "Both of you had better shut up right fucking now or I'll kill the lot of you and find Justin myself. If Sullivan and Julian know where they are, I'm more than happy to follow and shoot them later if they turn on us instead of fighting while the bad and worst happens to our resident damsels in distress. Julian, for what it's worth, I'm glad you're trying." Will opened his mouth to refute but Cam cut him off, "Will, for what it's worth, shut up. You've done just fine. Bear is lost, that doesn't mean your idea for backup is a complete failure. He did get Justin away from Marquis. Bear, good work. Sullivan, if you make anything resembling a snide, sarcastic, charming, negative, or misogynistic comment I will shoot you where you stand. Does everybody understand their roles as so far as they hold tonight? Because my life's purpose is to soothe the testosterone poisoned egos of four disgruntled men!"

"Well, I've got a complaint …." Sullivan murmured. "Not bein' able to say anything snide, sarcastic, charming, negative, or misogynistic doesn't leave me with anything to say."

"Exactly. Argue with me, Kinney, see where it gets you."

"Femi-Nazi bitch from hell …." Sulli coughed.

"What was that?" Cam asked, cocking the hammer of her Desert Eagle to punctuate the question.

"Yes, ma'am!" Sulli grinned. Julian poked him in the ribs again, not in reprimand but to stop himself from bursting with laughter. He did not remember the strange feelings running through him enough to recognize innocent laughter for what it was but he knew it was something inappropriate to be exploding with at the moment.

Cameron rolled her eyes. "Where do we go?"

"To find Dillinger, and turn out that light." Julian said simply and offered no other details. He turned and walked away without the aid of the flashlight. Julian had the same abilities as Teyo Dillinger did in seeing the shapes in the darkness; an intricate, handheld heat sensor for a half mile in every direction built into his membership key. It was cheating, technically, but there was a reason only a few people held these special keycards.

Julian knew the others would follow him. They had no choice. He did rather like it when people were choiceless. It gave him a sense of power only a chained and bleeding victim could equal … and something told Julian he would no longer need to see people at his physical mercy to feel adequate, at least not in the near future. He was going to need all the begrudged followers he could get for his power lust. Damn Sullivan Kinney and his charm for making Julian feel like he meant something to someone. And whatever made Sullivan feel the way he did, it wasn't a feeling brought on by a constant stream of torture!

If Sulli was true in his intentions, and Julian had a strange faithfulness that he meant every unsaid word his eyes proclaimed, then Julian knew only one thing rest in his future: he would feel human again.

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Brian knew the light was not Cam the instant it began to swing back and forth over the adjoining hall. For all his time rolling his eyes at her serious military stridency, Brian had not been completely dulled to her actions. Cam would not have moved the light side to side. She would have kept it low, pointed at one constant spot, so if anything made the slightest flicker of life she would not have to waste the second of time it took to figure out if the movement was something inanimate catching on the swinging beam of light. If it was not human or animal, the background stayed in the background and she didn't need to include them in a search. Anything living would either jump out of the light or jump into it, depending on their current level of crazy. Cameron always kept her gun level with the flashlight's direction, often using one in each hand to brace the other. Easier to shoot the thing caught in her light that way.

Brian got up and Justin followed, wordlessly, a silent agreement that the light did not belong to their rescuer. They walked briskly in the opposite direction of the swinging beam, holding hands as if it was a normal stroll. Brian didn't think the owner of the light was Teyo Goddamn Dillinger, either, since the man had traveled in the darkness for every previous encounter, but he was not going to risk himself or Justin to find out who else was in these halls.

Justin wholeheartedly agreed. His head had cleared and although the temptation of going toward a light like moths to a flame after so much darkness was strong, he knew it was better to be cautious. Cliché, sure, but better safe than sorry. He tightened his hold on Brian's hand, having missed the safety his lover exuded despite the obvious danger they were in. Brian squeezed his hand back, needing the contact as much as Justin did, and led them around another bend.

Suddenly, Brian stopped dead in his tracks, falling back against Justin in a haste to hurry his lover back the way they had come. Another light was in the hall ahead of them, seconds away from breaching the corridor Brian had just turned them down. There were two people with lights now, and Brian could not help but wonder if they were trying some sort of pincer movement; attempting to trap their prey between the hunters.

Crap.

Justin stumbled but did not fall as Brian yanked him forward down another black hall. Brian's free hand was tracing a direction down the carpeted halls to assure neither man would slam into a sudden turn or new wall. His other hand never slackened its hold on Justin's.

A new light, either one of the first or a third, showed in a hallway almost directly in front of the fleeing couple and only Justin's quick reflexes pulled them into the darkness of another hall just in time. Justin was not alone in thinking that the hallways were getting shorter, the openings more explicit and far more frequent now. It was almost as if they were being forced deeper into the carpeted labyrinth, further into the abyss. Neither man doubted that was exactly what was happening. It was either run or face their hunters and Justin and Brian wanted as little contact with the unidentified lights as possible.

Justin felt the change in the air from stifling to cold and knew they were once again on the path to the blood floor. He knew they had run out of tunnels to backtrack into; seeing the lights reflected in hard angles in the hall behind them.

"Brian!" Justin whispered harshly. "We're about to hit a floor covered in what I can only guess is blood. If we're running at the time, we'll never get back up." Justin shuddered but tried to only think of the positives. He was not alone now, at least, and he was prepared to go into the room with the knowledge of what he was heading into.

Brian nodded and the two slowed back to a vigorous walk, each reaching their free hands to brace against the opposite walls, Brian on the left and Justin on the right. Their shoes hit solid pavement, colder air, and then the side walls disappeared. Brian stepped cautiously forward to regain hold on the new wall, bringing Justin to the front and switched the hands he was holding so the blond could also keep contact with the wall.

"Slowly," Justin whispered needlessly as the two made their way to the next corner of the room and went along the wall there. Eventually there had to be a door, an exit, a way back to even ground.

Unless this was the room they were to find their fates in. If this was a dead end and the flashlight holders had purposely led them here ….

Justin's fingers hit the doorframe first and he couldn't help a small lilting laugh of joy. "Here, in here," he whispered, finding the doorknob and leading them into the unknown room.

It was dark, of course, and horribly cold, but it had a floor that did not splash or squelch under their feet. Brian let his hand travel up and down the door frame in search of a light switch or circuit breaker. He found the switch, a burst of glee bubbling in his chest but keeping to itself. Brian turned the light on and when Justin gasped in horror, whirled around prepared for an attack.

The room was one neither ever wanted to have in their nightmares but that was where it would stay. Devices that could only be described as Dark Age torture machines sat ready for use, gleaming with a sinister sort of otherworldly light. Brian was reminded vaguely of the Spanish Inquisition special on the History Channel he watched when nothing else was on. Specific people were given permission by the Pope to weed out deviants during a time when heresy and freedom of religious choice was punishable with death by torture. The devices in this room were meant to kill slowly, to break bones, to sever sinew and tissue, and every last machine was polished lovingly by some devoted zealot ready and willing to use them.

Brian shook his head, trying to clear his mind of any thoughts relating to that program. He looked at Justin, usually the best way to deter himself from dwelling on anything dark or unwanted. Justin was covered in blood. A moan came from Brian that sounded more than defeated, more than drained. It sounded like a moan of mourning.

Justin went to him, taking the time to wrap his arms securely around Brian, laying his ear over his lover's quickening heartbeat. He didn't need to see himself to know what had disturbed Brian more than the devices around them; the sound that had escaped Brian was something uniquely belonging to situations that placed Justin in life-threatening danger.

"It's not mine, Bri," Justin soothed. "I fell in that other room before. It's not mine."

Brian shook his head dully, coming out of a daze. For one horrible moment he had thought that Justin had been injured this entire time and had said nothing while Brian yanked him around the maze. But Justin was fine. Justin was alright. He had been drugged but not hurt. They would still escape this place together.

There was another door to the far right, half obscured by an upright bed of nails. Brian focused on that and not the what ifs that had not happened.

If the lovers had any inclination that door number one was the lesser of two evils, they never showed it. What they were seeing now could not possibly be better than the second door. Brian headed toward it with renewed fervor, bringing Justin with him.

Justin stopped. "Wait."

"Justin, no. Not now, whatever you're thinking, I know it isn't as important as us getting out -"

"Help me, Brian," Justin said, moving to a machine that looked like a Medieval weight set, likely meant to hang off someone's toes over a pit as they were stretched to confession. "If they're following us, let's block the door!"

Brian nodded, the barest of smiles on his face. "Good thinking, Sunshine."

Justin returned the smile, the first real light on his face in what seemed like an eternity. They would be alright, like they always were. It was almost over now, his smile said to Brian. There was light ahead, real light. Daylight. Innocent, pure, happy daylight. Even if it was the middle of the night outside.

Brian and Justin had a time attempting to move the heavy historic replica but they successfully, finally, moved the thing to block their hunters. Neither noticed the lengthy amount of time it had taken the flashlight holders to catch up when they had been so close before. That was unimportant. The people following them were not in sight any longer and their previous path had been blocked, nothing else mattered.

"Come on," Brian said, taking Justin's hand again and leading the way to the door. They moved the bed of nails, surprisingly light for its bulky frame, and took a collective breath of anticipation.

Justin reached out and opened the door.

Part XI

"We're really just leaving them there, aren't we?" Mark chastised heatedly.

"We are going to get help," Melanie told her surrogate son.

"But dad'n Justin -"

"Are going to be just fine," Lindsay said. "They've got Cam and Will there to help."

"Yeah, and Sullivan and Julian and Dillinger and who knows who else there to hinder!" Mark argued. "I want to go back. You have cell phones, why not just call the police?"

"Because we are not going to stay in a place that can put you in danger," Melanie said calmly. "You know what we mean," she added, softer than before. Brian had informed she and Lindsay, briefly, that Mark had once been victim to the Marquis when he was much younger, same as Justin had. Neither woman was willing to put Mark into the line of fire which he so desperately seemed to want to put himself into.

"Please, let's just stop here. We're far enough away that we're out of danger. Call the police and we'll head back to meet them," Mark suggested eagerly.

"You promise to stay in the car with us?" Lindsay asked suspiciously.

"I promise. Cross my heart. Anything you want, but let's go back," Mark nodded. "When dad and Justin come out, safe and sound, they've got to have an escape car, right? Julian fucked the other one up and we couldn't start the second one that I stole from Julian. This is the only car out of there and they could need emergency medical assistance!"

Melanie swerved a U-Turn in the middle of the still strangely empty highway. She couldn't help but shudder with a chill only the monster under the bed could insight. People, for whatever reasons, had seemed to desert this road. Whether it was intentional, subconscious, or other, Melanie did not want to know. Lindsay was on the phone in the backseat, making half-questions and subtle, surprised noises.

"Oh, I see … thank you," Lindsay said and closed her phone.

"Don't tell me the police are afraid to come," Melanie muttered, more to herself than her wife.

"No. They … they're already there."

"What?!" Mark asked.

"The police! They're already at Pepper's! The operator told me they had been called fifteen minutes ago."

"Michael!" Mark said suddenly. No one had known where the other man had gone, his presence nearly forgotten in the fray between Julian, Sulli, and the screams of everyone else. Melanie believed Michael had gone in after Brian and Justin, on his own or with Cam. It was the only logical explanation for his sudden and conspicuous absence. No one had wanted to believe Michael had been somehow caught by the phantom sadist called Teyo Dillinger.

"He's getting sneakier," Lindsay said with a reassured smile. "Been hanging around Cam and Will too often."

"We all have. And better for it." Melanie added, putting on speed, "But that doesn't mean he's smart enough to stay out of the club once he called the police. If he went in there alone … he's concerned for his friends, that never makes for the smartest of men, even in Michael. We very well could have three victims instead of two."

\*\*

Julian flirted with the idea of leaving everyone in a sharp turn, their being completely in the dark, turning only when and where Julian told them to. They would not know he had gone until it was too late. But then, being alone in these halls was never fun. Not because Julian himself was scared but because there would be no one to be amazed at his tracking skills when he centered in on the singular spark of warmth on an otherwise blank screen. Justin or Brian? Justin or Brian? Neither would stick around if it was only Julian who came upon them in the darkness.

Whoever the dot of warmth turned out to be, Julian knew one thing: he would be the first face they saw. If they were scared to death, it would not be his fault. \*He\* was the rescuer, after all. Everything else was up to them.

Sullivan's warm hand fell on Julian's shoulder as if sensing Julian's thoughts of leaving the others behind. Julian liked to think Sulli could read his mind. He wanted to Sullivan to see every single crossed wire and neurosis every misfiring synapse could offer, and after seeing all that was Julian's twisted mind, he wanted Sullivan to still be by his side. If the older man knew how sickly mental Julian was and stayed regardless … He \*had\* promised to show the Devil what Heaven looked like. It would be the only time anyone kept their promise to him if Sulli's words rang true. Julian did not know why he had fallen so hard so quickly for the southern man and for some reason he could not fathom, Julian did not care about the why. For the first time in his life, nothing had to be explained away by violence and psychotic episodes of nightmarish fear, both in his victims and in himself. Julian could finally just let things be.

"I've found someone, a single person. Don't know who it is," Julian reported, low enough for Sullivan to hear but too low for the others to be able to pick up without straining. "But we're coming up quick. Left here."

"What if it's Dillinger?" Sullivan asked suddenly, wanting to stop but unable to so long as Julian continued.

"Then it's Dillinger," Julian shrugged despite his group's inability to see it. "And we can ask where Justin and Brian are. Don't you think Dillinger would be one of three, though?" he asked, showing Sullivan his secret means of reconnaissance.

"For the sake of Angelface and my asshole cousin, I hope we find Dillinger alone. For our sake, I hope we find him dead."

Julian stopped suddenly, holding up a hand to halt Sulli who, in turn, stopped the rest of the line. "He's right around the corner," Julian said without the barest hint of covertness.

"Oi! Who's there?" Sullivan asked in a burst of bravery.

"Sullivan Kinney?" Michael shouted. "What the hell are you doing in here?!"

"Was gonna ask you the same question, Novotny."

"No more questions," Cam said. "Michael, get back with Will and don't speak. Turn off your light. NO ARGUMENTS," she said to stem the one about to come forth. "Julian, get tracking. Sullivan, don't even start."

"You remind me a lot of my mother," Michael said in a manner that could only have been complimentary. "Bossy as hell and right about whatever she tells me to do."

"You think so?" Cam asked.

"Yeah!"

"Then why are you still talking?!?" Cam growled. "Julian, let's go. Will, keep tabs on Michael. Michael, keep tabs on Will. Bear, bring up the rear."

Julian started off but Cam stopped him. "Hey! You just said to -"

Cameron turned on her light and flashed it past Will and Michael. There had been a reason the last of the peanut gallery had been quiet. "Fucking figures!" she said with barely controlled rage. Bear was gone.

\*\*

"More halls. More fucking halls," Brian groused for the hundredth time in the hundredth cement corridor.

"At least they're lit halls, Brian," Justin said. The two now had their arms around each other's waists as if the simple presence of the white halogen bulbs overhead had reinforced their safety.

"We're still -"

"We are NOT lost. We're just a little turned around."

Brian chuckled. "That's different from lost how?"

"'Lost' would have us crash landed and marooned on a tropical island with strange polar bears and unknown flying beasts and scary little psychic kids named Walt," Justin explained. "Turned around is us walking in unfamiliar halls that are not so much removed from society as, say, a subway station."

"One, you have got to cut back on your television. Do I not give you enough distraction?" Brian asked in a mock-hurt tone. "Two, there's no subway here. There's no distinguishing maps telling us where exactly underground we are in the form of little colored dots or, maybe, a great big X. We're walking and the only thing we've come across that's different than the slate gray of our surroundings are our own bloody footprints when we cross over a path we've been in before."

"At least the halls aren't carpeted." Justin said, then, "I think that's another reason for the carpeting," he added. "So if someone just happened to have a flashlight and escaped the blood room, they would not know whether they had retraced their steps or not just by looking on the ground."

"Frightening thought," Brian sighed. "And I'd stake my life it's true."

"Don't do that." Justin said. "Don't stake your life on anything in this place," he added at Brian's quizzical look.

Stopping at a flat, unblemished wall at the end of the corridor, Brian and Justin sighed in unison. There were more dead ends here in the light than there had been in the dark. Or so it seemed. Brian uttered a silent "fuck" and Justin nodded appreciatively. The last time either had slept had been in a drug-induced state, not an incredibly happy experience.

"Okay, so we go back, turn left where we turned right last time …" Justin tried optimistically. "And keep going."

Brian nodded solemnly. He felt about as optimistic as Justin did, which was not at all no matter what he tried to show on the outside. "Or we could sit here like lumps, discuss building our future summer home here in the great gray halls of doom, maybe put in a little track lighting, some Italian chairs, maybe that frosted Russian glass table I've had my eye on, and wait until the building crumbles around us revealing a clear path out."

Justin chuckled tiredly. "Oh, Brian, I revel in the cleverness of you."

Brian snickered despite himself. "I revel in the cleverness of me, too."

"Brian," Justin asked, almost hopefully, after a few steps backward, "Do you really want to stop?"

"Stop?"

"Sit down, rest. Here, in the middle of the hall?" Justin shifted his steps in a way that screamed with discomfort, his head hung and eyes downcast.

"You mean do I want you to rest?" Brian asked softly.

Justin's head snapped up. "No, I didn't mean -"

Brian stopped walking, halting Justin as well. "Yes, I think that's exactly what you meant. We're both exhausted, we have had more than enough brutality thrown our way in the last few years. I won't deny that we have had a lot of good, too. Mark coming to our family, Will and Cam reuniting with you, everything in between … but it is time we get a break. If that means we have to make a break for ourselves to get one, lets do it. We can sit down, we can take naps in shifts if you think it's possible for you to sleep. Or we could keep walking, saving up all those small breaks we could have taken up to this point, and later, once we're out, go on a well deserved … oh, what's that word…?"

"Vacation?" Justin asked wearily.

Brian shook his head determinedly. "No, that's not it."

"Holiday?"

"No, that's not it," Brian shook his head again, drawing Justin in for a deep, soul searching kiss. "Try again."

"Retreat?" Justin asked, slowly becoming agitated. He was not in the mood to play word games and had no idea what Brian was on about.

"Nope. I was thinking," Brian said, sensing Justin's tension and wisely moving past it, "Honeymoon?"

Justin stared at Brian for a few moments, searching his eyes for some lie, any lie. Teasing, a ploy to distract Justin from their situation …anything. There was nothing but truth in those deep hazel eyes, in that worn and drawn face lit by ghastly lights but still beautiful. Brian was serious.

"If we get out of here," Justin said softly. "we'll … honeymoon?"

"When we get out of here, we will, Justin. If … you want to."

Justin beamed, putting the lights overhead to shame. "I do. Want to."

"Well okay, then. Let's get out of here." Brian put his arm around Justin's shoulders, the thought that the person he had become differed in any way from the person he wanted to be a dim thought. Nearly imperceptible. Brian had changed when he met Justin, that first night. He had continued to change through the years with Justin at his side. The man he had changed from would hate the man he had become. Brian felt perfectly free to hate that man right back. "Together."

Part XII

Mark hated breaking his promises. It was not the first time he had done so, nor would it be the last. Just because he hated doing it did not mean he was not \*going\* to. Melanie pulled into the lane in front of Pepper's beside several police cars and emergency vehicles which had obviously come from the opposite direction, from New Orleans. Mark bided his time, knowing he would not only have to get past his mothers but past the police and EMT's wrapping yellow crime scene tape around the entrance. Watching the officers collect the broken and bleeding body of Marquis, slowly unwrapping him to treat his injuries, then to bring him in for questioning, Mark got an idea.

"Mel," he whispered, sounding horrified. "If he gets away… if they fix him up and don't know what he's done, why he was tied up … he could tell them anything!"

"It's okay, Mark," Lindsay said soothingly as she got out of the car. "I'll tell them."

"And I'll stay here and make sure you don't do anything that would incur the wrath of Cameron Taylor," Melanie said with a glance at Mark in the rearview mirror.

"What? I wouldn't -"

"Potentially ruin the rescue mission by putting yourself in between Justin's attacker and her bullet? Think about it, Mark, and please, really think. You go in there and Cam doesn't know it. She doesn't put you into her equation and you, unintentionally and with your dad's and Justin's best interests at heart, get in the way. If you do that, whether or not everyone gets out safe or not, Cam is going to string you up. But she would have to dig you up, first, because Lindsay and I will have killed you. Stay in the car and wait. Please. It's damn hard, the hardest thing a person can do, but we need to do it. For Justin and Brian, we need to do it."

"Aw goddamn it, Mel. Where'd all that psychoanalytical intelligence come from?" Mark huffed. "Geez, my moms are starting to make sense. I must have died back there and gone to hell."

Melanie made a half-scowl, half lovingly bemused smile only mothers could manage. "If I say we know you well enough to anticipate your actions, would you believe it?"

"Hardly," Mark sighed. "Unless you would believe my actions are nothing but faulty paternal genes and therefore, anything bad I do is though no fault of my own and not punishable by the current standards of groundings, yelling, or guilt."

With a wry smile Mark could not interpret, Melanie agreed, "Bad paternal genes notwithstanding, I still know myself and Lindsay well enough to know if you get out of this car, you will still get a whopping load of punishment including but not limited to groundings, yelling, and guilt. How's that?"

"I think my head is going to explode," Mark groaned. "Adults today and their big words."

Mel grinned. "Which one of the basics are you stuck on? 'You' , 'groundings', 'yelling', or 'guilt'?"

Rolling his eyes, Mark said, "Ha, ha, very funny. So funny I think I'll just skip laughing and go right to death-by-joy if you don't mind."

Melanie didn't mind at all. At least Mark was staying where he was told. No small feat considering his hand was still residing uncertainly on the door handle between safety and stupidity.

\*\*

Bear moved through the hallways in the absolute darkness as if he were borne into it. With no one to give him orders, no time wasted in arguments over who had the bigger dick (he firmly believed the trophy on that one went to Cameron), and no wondering whether Julian would lead them away from Justin or to him, Bear had nothing to slow him down. He would find Justin before the others. Call it a hunch, but he knew exactly where they would be.

Justin, while resourceful, was exhausted. Brian, however hurt the other man was now, may not have even found his lover before encountering Dillinger. Both of them would look for the most difficult means of escape. It was in their nature to find freedom, yes, but not without struggling for it. As if freedom meant more to them through strife. No matter what, Bear believed Justin and Brian, together or apart, would have gone deeper into the maze rather than back the way they had come. Instinctually, Bear thought Justin and Brian had to know that they could not stay in the carpeted area unless they wanted to be caught. It did not likely make sense but it didn't have to.

They knew what they were doing, even if it didn't seem that way at the time.

The carpets were affixed with heat sensors, no doubt the same sensors Julian was using like some archeological cheat sheet into a hidden temple. Beyond the carpeted walls were twelve different rooms like a slaughterhouse of sorts - the 'of sorts' meaning more human than animal meat made for consumption - which made the borders between Pepper's and Dillinger's offices. After the slaughtering rooms were torture chambers, places made to ready people for their individual grand finale. Like tenderizing the meat.

Bear knew all of this. He had helped incorporate Pepper's into Dillinger's own personal labyrinth. Too many years had gone by since that little fiasco, far too many for the work to still leave a stain on his soul. Bear had done a lot of unseemly things in his life - The far worst being done to Justin - but it had not been fruitless. Not only had working manually for Dillinger kept him from being Dillinger's private executioner or worse, but it had saved Will from being part of the main course. Will would never know, of course, how Bradley had unintentionally (back before he sold his soul completely to the devil) set all of his siblings up for unspeakable futures. But Bear knew. He had saved Will and Cameron and for a time, Justin as well. By working for Dillinger, Bear had the clout to ask for favors. To protect those he had known since childhood. He did not need a medal for this, nor did he think he deserved one. Nobody needed to know, especially since Bear's work and his contract of protection from the Grand Marquis had turned sour years ago.

Still, Bear knew how to get around without using sensors. Without any lights. He may not have had sources of heat to look for but he did not need them. Justin and Brian had to be beyond the cold of the slaughtering rooms, past the membership card's ability to track living human beings.

There was only one way out of Pepper's once a person entered the maze. The door between Pepper's and Dillinger's underground would not open from this side. Bear knew that Justin and Brian were well on their way to finding that escape.

If only they didn't have to go through Dillinger's offices to see sunlight again.

\*\*

"I called the cops," Michael said in a voice full of 'can't help speaking' apology. "They're here, too, searching. I told them about Justin and Brian but … I said, um …"

"Shoot the rest?" Cam guessed correctly with more than a little pride.

"I didn't know what to say about you two, being assassins and all. And since I didn't think 'assassin' was a legal career choice in these parts I left you out … but I guess …yeah, something like that. Except with a bit more language when I described Julian and Sullivan that would get me grounded no matter how old I am," Michael admitted sheepishly.

"Any idea how many patrols are in here?" Cam asked diligently, watching the way ahead of her as if she could see a damn thing.

"Lots. There were squad cars up the ass when I came in here. They've been looking for a way to get into this place for ages. They couldn't get a warrant, so I gave them reasonable doubt in its place. They needed a reason to come in, those who weren't taking bribes."

"Right," Cameron said, prodding him on.

Michael, encouraged by apparently doing something right despite setting the scene up for an unhealthy dose of friendly fire, continued, "They came in right before I did but they wouldn't let me help so … I snuck in after them."

"So there are cops in here, a wanted criminal in however many southern states which can claim actually 'wanting' him, a maniac -"

"I'm not a maniac!" Julian argued spitefully.

"I was talking about Dillinger but if the shoe fits …" Will let the words fade into his previous tangent, "A couple of assassins for hire, another maniac, pint-sized," he added for Julian's benefit, "a big man who's hard to miss no matter how blind you are -"

"He's also technically a dead man," Cam muttered, sounding exactly as she felt about that technicality being false.

"Right. So … the only one in here who's actually safe from doing jail time is you, Michael." Will sighed, "Well, it's not like we've not faced worse."

"True. I think cops are the least of our problems," Cam agreed. "And they can draw the wrath of anyone watching for big clusters of people. We can easily avoid them, since I'm sure they've got flashlights shining every which way. We keep moving. Julian?" Silence. "Julian? So help me if you're not there when I turn on my light I will kill you myself!"

Julian snickered, more maniacally than cheerfully. "And if I wasn't here, how would I know you had threatened my life?"

"Which," Cam said through gritted teeth, "way?"

"Make Will apologize," Julian insisted.

Will rolled his eyes, though no one could see it. "I apologize for calling you a maniac, you fucking psycho."

"Will," Cam warned, "remember before, in the car? The me shooting you part of our journey? We're about to repeat it."

"Fine! Goddamn, woman! Julian, I apologize for calling you a maniac and a fucking psycho. Crybaby."

"Cam!" Julian whined.

"Shut up, Julian, you ARE a crybaby. They're just words. You're a psycho and a maniac, too, just so's you know. You and your big brother! Now get along or shut up, I don't care which, and let's get moving before we let some dimwitted uniformed tenderfoots find Justin and Brian while we sit here debating why I ended up killing three of my brothers instead of just Brad!"

"She killed Brad?" Julian whispered to Will.

"Yep."

"Hey, how could we sit here debating her killing us if we were dead?"

"Dunno. We're not sitting, though, we're standing."

Sulli grinned and practically radiated his amusement at the brothers uniting to battle their sister's orders. Just because they could. Reaching out to slightly pull Julian away from Will, Sullivan whispered, "Hey, tell them to go left. Let's go find our own way."

Julian nodded, silky blond hair moving against Sullivan's face. "Go left up here," he said, proud of himself for not releasing the giggle he felt. Sullivan had a whole new type of mischievousness, one that didn't involve putting out the energy to torture someone. Julian felt he could get quite used to this. "There's a cop cluster to the right."

\*\*

"Brian, is it just me or is it getting colder?" Justin asked, sounding calm with Brian's arm around his waist but was fighting not to turn around every step of the way inside his mind. The walls were still a plain, slate gray, the lights one monotonous white bulb after another. Justin doubted it was his exhaustion which made the temperature continue to drop.

Brian nodded but said nothing. Goosebumps had broken out over his arms and climbed all along his spine for the past five minutes but he had not wanted to alarm Justin if the feeling was psychological. He had hoped it was only in his head.

"Bri?"

"It's not you. I don't know what this means but it isn't you."

"Do we keep going?"

"If we stop and head back to where it was warm, it would bring us back to where we started, wouldn't it?" Brian rationalized, suppressing a shudder from the cold. Justin was wet, sticky with some stranger's blood, and it didn't seem fair for Brian to shiver, at least in his own mind it didn't.

"Yeah, you're right." Justin sighed, glanced back over his shoulder, and let Brian pull him along. He ran his hand over Brian's forearm, trying to massage away the goosebumps. "But … what if we're heading toward where they store the … things that gave their blood to cover the floor?" he questioned reluctantly, not sure if he really wanted an answer.

"Then, I guess we do. I guess we -" Brian stopped walking too suddenly for it to have been intentional.

"Bri?" Justin asked, more than frightened as he looked into the wide-eyed, slack-jawed face of his lover. As Brian slowly leaned his weight completely onto Justin's shoulder, the younger man lowering them both unsystematically to the floor, Justin knew Brian was unconscious. "Brian?!" he screamed, trying desperately not to give into the terror boiling in his blood, his lungs, searing up his throat in ragged breaths. "BRIAN!"

Justin searched his love's body for injuries, something the older man had not disclosed to Justin to keep the blond from worrying. It took him less than a frantic heartbeat to find what had down Brian so quickly. So anonymously.

A tranquilizer dart.

\*\*

Julian led Sulli quickly down the corridors, zeroing in on what was and was not a direct hallway and which paths broke into smaller passages for the sole use of catching an escaping prey quickly and efficiently. He knew where the police were and easily avoided them. Taking Sullivan by the hand so they could move faster, Julian turned a sharp right, a left, another right, and once they hit the cement floor, flung his new lover into the blood room.

"Sulli! Honestly! Get up. We haven't got all day! I thought you wanted to save Justin and Brian!" Julian mock-wailed, knowing from the older man's curses he was trying to get up and had been quite unsuccessful at it.

"Gonna ram your ass, sweetheart," Sullivan grumbled. Instead of trying to get to his feet, Sulli changed tactics, got on his back, and began using his heels to push himself through the blood. It worked so long as he didn't think about exactly what he was slithering through. He was going to tear Julian a new one, and then he was going to fuck him in the new hole.

Julian, busy using the walls as support, ignored his indignant lover. He was surprised to find that Sulli had not only beat him to the door but was still lying on the ground, perfectly prepared to be a stumbling block in Julian's path. A scream of disgust tore out of Julian so loud it almost masked the hideously satisfying sound of the lithe body splattering in the blood.

Almost.

"Sonuva-motherfucking-goddamn-bitch-fuck-you-Sullivan-all-to-hell!" Julian wailed, his legs tangled in what had to be Sullivan's arms.

Or leftovers from some other body ….

"Not so pretty when you're down in it with the rest of us, are ya, sugah?" Sullivan asked smugly.

"Get UP!" Julian squealed, obviously repulsed. "There's BLOOD down here!"

"And you've never gotten bloody?"

Julian seemed to sober a bit and calmly pulled himself free of Sullivan. "Touché, you fucking bastard."

Sulli grinned. "Well, now, shall we claim eye for an eye, all even now, and continue?"

"I think we should, yes."

Sulli used the door for leverage and helped Julian to stand. "You really should be nice, you know."

"And why should I do that?" Julian asked heatedly.

"Because every time you think you get the upper hand with me, darlin', I'll pull you right down with me."

"Just open the door, Sullivan!"

"Yes, Sir."

"Oooh, I like that."

Sulli scoffed. "Good, then you know how to use it the next time I'm fucking you over the nearest hard surface." Laughing, Sulli opened the door, blinking in the sudden harsh light.

"Someone's definitely been in here recently," Julian observed, his vision clearing quicker that Sulli's. "Looks like someone else followed them, too. Someone big enough to push \*that\* monstrosity out of the path of the door."

"So, Big Bear is hot on the trail, eh?" Sulli said appreciatively.

"Looks like. Come on!"

"You're in a hurry all of a sudden, love!" Sulli laughed.

Julian stared at Sullivan for a beat and then said with a rueful smile. "Sulli, dear, do you smell that?"

Sullivan sniffed the air. "Yeah. It's … what is that? Faintly like …cinnamon?"

"Yep. Guess who's hot on \*our\* trail."

Sullivan swallowed thickly. "Shit, no, we're not staying here!"

"I told you, I'm not afraid of -"

Sullivan grabbed Julian's hand and led him through the second door. "I don't care what you're not afraid of, sugah. \*I'm\* afraid enough for the both of us."

"That's an awful lot of fear for someone who would sooner feed me to Dillinger than himself," Julian said astutely, as if commenting on the weather.

Sulli stopped. "You think I would do that?"

"Of course. I would feed you to him as quick as I could blink if it came down to it."

Sullivan's eyes went cold. "Naturally," he said, voice clipped and razor sharp. "How silly of me to think otherwise."

Julian frowned confusedly. "What's wrong with your face?"

With a glare, Sullivan said, "Not so much the psycho as you are an emotional leper, eh?"

Julian stepped back, scalded by the words. He had no idea what he had done wrong to deserve the chill running through his heart when he only just found out he had that organ to have a chill through. "I … I'm not a psycho!"

"You stay here, Julian. Greet Dillinger, reminisce on good times gone by. I can find the others by myself." Sullivan snapped, stalking off down the hallway before Julian could reply.

Left standing by himself, Julian looked back at the door through which Dillinger would soon emerge. He looked toward the last place Sullivan had been before he disappeared. There was something missing inside of him without Sulli bantering by his side and Julian did not like losing the feeling now he knew he could have it. That … happiness. It was gone, fled on the coattails of Sullivan Kinney.

Julian had to get it back.

That, and he did not want to be around when Dillinger came forth. The Grand Marquis was bound to be furious at Julian for the way they spoke on the phone. Julian had enjoyed it at the time but he also knew that Dillinger was going to kill him no matter what. He had angered the man and would soon pay for it. Julian could increase Dillinger's rage all he wanted, he would still end up just as dead. Might as well earn the tortures to come.

"Sullivan!" Julian yelled with his decision made, running after his lover.

Just as the halls went black.

\*\*

Justin screamed, high pitched and horrified. The lights which he had begun to think of as only a reminder that they were walking back and forth in monotony, were now gone. Stranded in the center of a cement hallway, Brian out cold from a dart containing who knew what, Justin knew he was about to be caught if he didn't do something immediately.

Grabbing one of Brian's arms and hunching over, bending toward Brian. He hoisted Brian onto his shoulder, using his lover's arm to guide the man safely over into a fireman's carry.

There were footsteps behind them. An even, slow, and searching slap-slap, slap-slap.

Justin ignored it. If he noticed it, that meant their hunter was actually there.

Slap-slap. Slap-slap.

With a muffled grunt of effort, Justin stood and walked away from the footsteps. He made no noise, though in his ears, all he could hear were his own amplified steps. Neither man sped up, hunter or prey. It was difficult walking a straight line with the added weight, though Justin would sooner gut himself from groin to sternum than leave Brian for that twisted fuck. Reaching his free hand out, the other clutching Brian's upper thigh protectively, Justin tried to trace the walls. He knew he had to somehow keep track of where he was going. If he ran into anything it would most definitely make a sound to reveal their position to Dillinger.

Justin kept walking.

\*\*

Sullivan furiously slammed into one wall, kept walking at the same angry speed, and ran into another one. With a curse, he punched the offending curse. With another curse, this one much louder and less suitable for children under thirteen, Sulli held his hand tenderly against his chest.

"Goddamn kid, who needs him, anyway?" Sullivan groused, still nursing his tender fist while walking at a more sensible pace. "What the fuck was I thinking, anyway? He's not all there! What'd I want? Some charity case? No, no …" he shook his head in disagreement with himself. "What'd I want? To show someone that … naw. Shit. To show somebody who didn't have a moral high horse to begin with that I wasn't such a bad … fuck it. I wanted to help the little shit and what'd I get for it? 'What's wrong with your face?' ? Dickhead. DICKHEAD! Ugh! I put up with his shit for nothing. He's no more ready for a relationship than I am and -" Sullivan stopped himself. "I am \*NOT\* ready for a relationship. My head's gone all screwy. I can't believe I just said that. Huh. At least I didn't say 'love'. I'd never let myself live it down. Julian, little fucker, what he needs is a good swift kick in the - What the FUCK happened to the lights?!?"

\*\*

Bear had not counted on having the lights stolen from him again, but he did not let it slow his progress. He knew Sullivan and Julian were here, just around the bend, but he had to make sure they didn't realize Bear was there. The big man wanted to stay covert. He supposed now, with the cover of darkness, it would be easier to hide.

\*\*

Julian heard the door creak behind him; a soft sound yet no less magnified by fear. He wanted to call out to Sulli but the man was too far ahead. Farther from him, at least, than Dillinger was. Picking up the pace, painfully aware that his shoes and socks were soaked with blood and every step made a stupidly funny (had the situation been less grave) squelching sound on the floor.

The footsteps behind him -

Running!

- did not squelch.

Julian ran faster, a scream only just held captive in his throat. He slipped and felt the floor greet him with a cruel slap that went right through his tortured soul. Julian got up, turned a corner, and lay flat on the ground, pressed as far into the wall as he could go without breaking through. He waited, holding his breath until he thought he would burst, for Dillinger to run past.

The footsteps stopped.

Julian closed his eyes as if that would dissuade the monster from seeing him. His hands balled into fists, flashes of faces come late at night before he could defend himself haunting his terrified mind. The raunchy scent of an overabundance of cinnamon infiltrated Julian's nostrils, filled his mouth like some sort of liquid death. A huff of hot breath curled over Julian's cheek, the man bending down to smell the fear rolling off Julian in rivulets. The blond fought the urge to scream, though he knew Dillinger had found him. Screaming would only make it worse.

\*\*

Justin's hand frantically searched the wall in front of him for an opening, a crack he had missed. \*Pleaseohpleaseohplease,\* his mind screamed, \*don't let this be a dead end!\* His fingers felt like they were touching ice but Justin did not care. He took a side-step, searching the wall, another step, still searching.

The footsteps were getting closer. Slap-slap. Slap-slap.

\*Pleaseohpleaseohplease!\*

Slap-slap. Slap-slap.

Brian moaned in a haze and Justin nearly pissed himself. Both from the unexpected noise and the unexpected noise summoning their hunter to their position. Justin continued to move along the wall, looking for a way out.

Slap-slap. Slap-slap.

\*PleaseohpleaseohGodfuckingplease!\*

"Uhn…" Brian moaned.

Slap-slap. Slap -

\*Pleaseohpleaseoh-\* Justin's mind shut off, his body going rigid. He knew the man had heard them. Knew the man had stopped.

Like an explosion, a scream that froze Justin's blood echoed through the hallways. The footsteps that had been following them turned tail and ran like great, booming aftershocks through the halls. Away.

Running steps, a different weight from the first, came speeding toward Justin. The blond pushed himself and Brian into the corner and waited for impact. If the man could see them, he had his prey. If he couldn't then he would -

SMACK!

"Goddamnmotherfuckingsonofabitch!" Sullivan bellowed so loudly his cries drowned all fear out of Justin.

Justin, despite himself, the situation, and the fact that he had no idea if Sulli was a friend or foe today, laughed until he could no longer stand.

"Angelface?" Sullivan asked nasally. Apparently, he had stopped his momentum with his face.

"I think you found the dead end, too," Justin said, still sniggering.

"Aw, damn, kid! You're laughing here and we're trying to rescue -"

Another scream splintered through the air, loud enough to peel paint off walls.

"Julian!" Sulli gasped. He grabbed Justin's hand and tried to pull his newly liberated charge forward, but ended up with a mess of tangled limbs.

"Brian's been drugged."

"By WHO?"

"Dillinger!"

"Dillinger has Julian, listen to him!" Sullivan said in a panic.

"Then who?!" Justin asked, unsure whether Julian being with Dillinger was necessarily a bad thing.

Sullivan shook his head. "Bear."

"WHAT?!?"

"Bear! He left the main group, didn't play nicely with the other kiddies. Now he's here in the halls, tracking you. Julian and I were tracking you, too, and then we … well, Dillinger was right behind \*US\*!"

"Great, so Bear isn't on our side anymore?"

"You're asking me to decipher mountain troll psyche? Sorry, I skipped that class. Come ON!" Sullivan gave Justin's hand a yank.

"Not without Brian!"

"Jesus Tapdancing Christ on a splintering wooden crutch are you impossible!!!"

"You've really got to work on your anger issues," Justin pointed out, feeling better to have conscious company no matter who it was.

"I'm gonna work my anger issues out on your round little ass if you don't come with me!" Sullivan yelled, grabbing Brian over his own shoulder and leading Justin away. "I'm so fucking lost I could die in here before we get out!" he muttered, more to himself than anyone else.

Justin sighed, "I think that's the plan."

\*\*

Julian knew he was dead. Death was something that happened to everyone eventually and from a very young age, he accepted that. But he never imagined he would be this scared when it came.

Dillinger had not touched him. Had only knelt down beside him, reeking of that cinnamon drug he used to block mental synapses from firing properly, instilling his voice into the voids created until he was all that existed for his victim. He placed something on the ground that sounded like a tool made of heavy metal, muffled only slightly by a layer or two of cloth.

Julian knew what it was. He had his own tool kit back in his car. There were pliers in there, a hammer and some nails, a scalpel as sharp as the Devil himself, a filet knife, two serrated-edged knives, and the destructive little piece de resistance: a miniature culinary torch. All in its own neat little carrying case of doom.

Hearing Dillinger first unroll the case, then put his fingers lovingly over every instrument before deciding which to use first, Julian could not hold back his screams. The man \*still\* had not touched him. He didn't have to.

It was part of his charm.

\*

Michael sat with his wrists bound behind him, a barely controlled rage burning in his blood. Will, equally bound by his side, was on the verge of a wild, hysterical laughter. Michael, for all he was worth, was trying to get them out of the trap but to no avail. He had never been one for handcuffs and breaking himself free now would have gotten him in even more trouble.

"But officer," Lindsay continued, voice borderline whine.

"Ma'am, we can't have civilians in there," the sergeant replied in a tone that yielded no arguments. A tone that said he had been doing this for far too long and seen more bad than good while doing it.

Lindsay looked pleadingly at Mel, who was whittling down her own officer down the driveway. Will and Michael had been caught by a passing police patrol busily working through the maze. They had a team open the door from Pepper's back up and, pending legal prosecution for interfering with a crime scene, had brought the two men out to sit in a nice, cozy backseat bullpen made for two.

Where Cam had vanished to at the last moment before the police convergence, neither man knew but were equally and unequivocally glad for it. At least one person who had a true allegiance to their side remained in the building. And no one was better for the job.

\*

Cam could have cursed to all the high hells at how wrong this entire mission had gone. This was what happened when she got too emotionally involved in a case; her blood boiling, her heart pounding, and her fists clenching around her gun so hard she could have cracked the handle. There were calming techniques she had been trained to utilize, methods of letting the angry breath leave her body and only accepting new breath when all the anger was gone. She knew better than to get so emotionally charged, to let what was at stake battle with the success of the mission. But for everything she knew, every ounce of training, it all did her no good when she tried to use it to convince herself failure this time would not be catastrophic.

This was her little brother and damn him for meaning something to her. If Cam failed, she knew deep within her heart that the pieces would be too tiny to pick up completely. Like Moira's death, like Brad's sins, this would leave an irrevocable stain on her heart. One more piece chipped away.

That was why she could not fail. Would not. This mission was different than any other before it and Cam knew it. She had been alone before and was partial to it but on the other missions, Cam could quit. She never had, but she could have given up. Those other case files were strangers, people to be saved or killed. Those others were paid for in advance in untraceable cash or, in some cases, expensive imported artillery to call her own. But she could have dumped the clients had the heat been turned up to this magnitude. If it looked like she were walking into a deathtrap, there was always a refund or a rescheduling of her assistance.

Justin could not be rescheduled. Brian did not come with a refund, though everything he owned, wore, or bought did.

Cam could not give up. Even if she wanted to, no matter how sticky the situation had become, Cam would not leave her brothers behind. Will and Michael were no longer variables to worry over, safe from harm on the outside. Cam was confident in Will's abilities on every other mission and a surge of unexpected pride had gone through her when Will overcame his fears and followed her into this dark madness. But she worried about him down here. Secretly, she was glad he had a viable excuse to cease his search for Justin and Brian. If Will was in no danger, Cam was free to shoot all and kill all in her way without concern over the fear one man brought.

Fear was unpredictable. If it came back with a vengeance, despite Will's best efforts, it took her brother from being a valuable second gun to a liability. Cam did not want to think of Will as a liability.

Shaking her head, forcing the breath from her lungs until all that remained was a white void, Cam centered herself. Seconds counted in a place like this and she counted them off, all the way to thirty, before she allowed a slow inhalation of clean air.

Cam raised her gun, renewed, and forced all other distractions from her mind. Will, Michael, and the others she knew were undeniably on her side, were all aboveground. Bear, Julian, and Sullivan were the inconstant she could kill if need be; if they got in her way of carrying out the mission objective. Cam no longer had to listen to petty fraternal squabbles between Julian and Will, nor did she have to keep the unprofessional Michael and Sullivan in line. It was just her down here now.

It was time to get it on.

Part XIII

Bear knew he had tranquilized the wrong man. It had been unintentional. Brian and Sullivan were the same height and Julian and Justin were not discernable from the back. The fact that both men were standing and walking relatively unhindered by massive injuries after a bout with Teyo Dillinger only hit the point home. These two had to be the new trouble duo, Sullivan Kinney and Julian Taylor. Bear had intended to knock both of them out and leave them. Not for Dillinger to find, no one deserved that, but to return for at a later time, once Justin and Brian were safe.

Of course, then the unaffected victim of his tranq dart began screaming Brian's name and Bear knew the mistake he had made was a big one. If he still had Justin's complete trust, Bear could have explained his err. That was wishful thinking and Bear was not so much a fool as to believe he could ever completely regain the explicit trust he had once had. Then the lights went out and he decided, for all unobtrusive purposes, to follow Justin and make sure no harm came to them from a distance. Justin would likely not react well knowing Bear was this close to him in a dark corridor with Brian incapacitated by Bear's own weapon.

He heard Justin's hands scrambling over the wall of a dead end like the silent, desperate sound of a trapped butterfly's wings. Bear had turned Justin into this dead end by making his footsteps more obvious than they would have been otherwise. Big man as he was, Bear could still blend completely into his situation if he wanted to. Now with only one way open to Justin, Bear hoped he could better protect his charges simply by staying where he was. Justin would not leave the dead end without knowing the way out was clear of the man following him.

Then Julian began to scream. The one thing a warrior the likes of Bear, Cam, and Will dreaded beyond all else was the knowledge that they could prevent the suffering of someone undeserving but did nothing to help. Bear was not sure Julian was undeserving of a great many things, like a long stay in hell, but becoming Dillinger's victim was not a punishment anybody \*except\* Dillinger deserved to endure.

Justin was safe, backed into a dead end with nowhere to go except where he believed his hunter to stand. If Bear went back for Julian, he could kill Dillinger.

Try to kill Dillinger.

Bear assured himself that Justin would stay where he was until Brian completely woke up. That gave Bear roughly ten minutes to eliminate the threat. To save Julian and everyone else in these tunnels from a man who would make anyone his victim had he the chance. Bear would not give him that chance.

\*\*

Julian could imagine the filet knife slicing under the first layer of his skin even before the cold metal touched him. He could see the flesh peel back from the blade as if trying to escape. First would be a layer on his abdomen, somewhere without an abundance of blood vessels near the immediate surface. Never cut too deep. Just one layer. Then another. If the sadist was in his element, back where he regularly practiced, there would be tiny jars full of horrid substances; Tabasco sauce, jalapeño juice, rubbing alcohol, salt solution, lemon juice, and the like. All in the darkness. It was Dillinger's specialty.

He had to lay perfectly still. If he didn't, the cut would be deeper, possibly fatal. And Julian did not want to die, not by the hand of Teyo Dillinger. In an amazing blaze of glory no one would ever forget, perhaps taking a whole handful of people down with him, yes, but not cowering in the darkness helpless and alone and deserving of every last torturous bit of agony.

Dillinger laid the blade flat against Julian's stomach, pressing the point just enough to break the skin. Julian went rigid, forcing himself to go stone still. He felt the blade just under his belly button like a searing hot poker, his fear multiplying tenfold. Dillinger slid the knife slowly, oh so slowly, along. It would have looked to be unmoving to the naked eye but Julian could feel it. Dillinger had all the time in the world.

"I was so furious," Dillinger said in an eerie calm. "I got off the phone with you and suddenly I did not want to keep Savage Gardens open. My empire has crumbled; too many young upstarts vying for the top spot. So undeserving. Never work for what they want, not today's generation of degenerates. It's an art form, sadism."

Julian closed his eyes tight, tears slipping down his face and into his hairline. His fists clenched at his sides, trembling with the entire energy of his body's need to flee. The blade was steadily making it's way along underneath his skin, tearing him apart piece by piece.

"An art," Dillinger repeated softly, voice full of concentration. "Such a shame. I saw such potential in you at one time. Got too full of pride for the simplest of torments. You are frightening in your own right; your name synonymous in the same circle mine, though I know for a fact only half of what you claim to have done is true. Your creative side needs such development. Now, it will have all been for naught. Your undiscovered talents are going to die with you."

Julian swallowed a sob.

"You cannot be immortal if you are afraid to die," Dillinger said, almost soothingly. "You must be willing and able to rise above and beyond death. One thing most young people cannot comprehend is that skill. Of course, most men underneath my hold cannot rise to that standard, either. If only you could have lived to meet your promise, I could have done so much with -"

"You've done quite enough, Dillinger," Bear rumbled, a sudden light illuminating the hall. Whatever he was doing beyond Julian's squeezed tight eyelids, Dillinger's cutting had stopped. "Kindly remove that blade and walk away immediately or try to kill him and die in the attempt."

Dillinger nodded, eyes shirking away from the flashlight beam. He removed the filet knife gingerly, with the utmost care. His art, the human body, was not something to slaughter lightly.

"Stand up, Dillinger," Bear said in that same controlled, rolling bass. He seemed to have a gun to the man's back but Julian did not want to open his eyes to see it. The damage on his stomach could have been negligible or massive and he did not want to see either way.

"So crude a weapon, guns. So impersonal," Dillinger said with the lament of a psychosomatic man. A man who had no true grasp on reality.

"Just stand up," Bear repeated.

Dillinger stood. Julian, sensing the danger move away, curled to face the wall to collect himself.

"Are you hurt?" Bear asked Julian, gun pointed at the Grand Marquis' stomach.

"I'm fine," Julian said in a clipped voice. He let his fingers travel down his torso to feel the cut, amazed that the flap of skin Dillinger cut against was only a square inch. There was no blood. Dillinger, regardless of his tyrannical mentality, was good at what he did.

"You promised I could walk away," Dillinger reminded Bear serenely. "Even if you break your word and bring me to justice, no jury would convict me. I would go to a hospital where they would observe me in a tiny room until it appeared my psychosis had been cured. Six months at the longest and then, Bear, I would have to seek my -"

"Revenge, yes, I understand." Bear said. "And you're right, they would use the insanity plea and release you back into the wild in a few months. I'm not going to bring you to justice, Dillinger. I don't have that much faith in them to do the right thing."

"Good boy," Dillinger nodded. "Then this is where we part ways."

"I said I wouldn't bring you to justice, Dillinger. I didn't say I would keep my promise to let you walk away." Bear shot Dillinger.

With a tranquilizer dart.

"Jesus," Julian simpered as Dillinger fell unconscious. The light in addition to seeing his terror crumple like any other mortal renewing his stubborn vigor. "Did you just knock him out?"

"Yes."

"What the hell for?!? The cops find any of us and he's still alive, he'll get away!"

"He has no chance of getting free now. I only rendered him unconscious to buy time in deciding what next to do with him."

"You mean how best to kill him and get our trouble's worth?"

"Exactly."

"Bear, tie him up. Let's hide him for now."

"And then?"

Julian smiled wickedly. "When the police leave, let's give him to Cam."

Sullivan burst into the hallway carrying Brian over his shoulder, dragging Justin along by the hand. His stunned expression at seeing Bear standing, Julian relatively unharmed, and Teyo Dillinger in a heap turned to instant relief. Justin's quick reflexes helped him catch Brian as Sullivan dropped his cousin.

"You're fine?" Sulli said, apprehension making it more of a question than a statement. After those chilling screams, Julian was alright?

"I will be," Julian said with a hopeful smile in Sullivan's direction no one but the southern man could decipher.

Sulli nodded, pulling Julian into an embrace and kissing the top of his head. Justin blinked at the two with curiosity but said nothing. Sullivan was acting as if he had just found something cherished which had been lost and Julian was beaming with the look of knowing he was that something cherished.

Stranger things had happened.

Maybe.

"Justin!" Cam said in the same breath as she raised her gun, cocked the hammer, and pointed it at Bear, the largest target in the wide display of enemies.

"Cam!" Justin smiled.

"Cam?" Brian murmured sleepily.

"Shh, Brian, it's okay," Justin soothed his lover.

"Justin, can you lift him?" Cam asked.

"Yeah, if I have to."

"You have to. Get him and come here behind me."

"We're on your side, chere," Sulli claimed, looking much more stricken than he actually was. Still holding Julian, Sulli whispered, "Do you know the way out of here that can bypass all sorts of police and other gun-totin' types?"

"Yes," Julian nodded.

"Bears, Taylors, and madmen, oh, my. We're leavin' now," Sullivan informed Cameron.

"I believe your next line is: 'and you'll never catch us alive. Muah ha ha ha' or similar evil laughter," Justin said.

"Get the hell out of here," Cam snarled as if waiting for Justin's permission to release them.

Julian gave Justin a sloppy salute. "Justin."

Justin glared at him. Did Julian actually expect forgiveness? That his actions would just disappear if they shoved everything far enough under the carpet? "You kidnapped us."

"And I saved you."

"Not really."

"Eh, maybe next time."

"Just go, Julian," Justin said soberly.

"Fine." Julian looked at Cam and did not salute her. "Cameron."

"Just go, Julian," Cam repeated.

Sulli pulled Julian away, whispering, "They need time to forgive you. And themselves. And whoever else might need it. You need time to forgive yourself."

"I don't -"

"Yes, you do. Once they realize that you could have killed them all, sugah, but you came back to save them at risk to yourself, things'll fall back into place. Keep in mind, they haven't forgiven Bear, either, and he'll be workin' to redeem himself constantly. Let them work out their own stuff and they'll notice you came back to help no matter what you had done before. Time, she has her own way of fixin' things. You, they don't get to see for quite a long length of time. I've got plans for you that don't involve your family's flaws."

"Sulli?" Julian asked, absorbing his lover's words as they walked through the dark halls guided only by the inane directions in Julian's mind.

"Yeah, sugah?"

"Are you hungry? I know this great diner in New Orleans that serves breakfast all day long."

Sulli grinned. "You know, I've had a strange hankerin' for eggs for the longest time … I could just go for some breakfast right about now."

EPILOGUE

Justin, supporting most of Brian's weight even though the man was awake now, led the precession out of Pepper's. Bear and Cameron were nowhere in sight amongst the sea of flashing lights and dark blue uniforms.

Mark ran to greet Justin and Brian before Melanie and Lindsay had even noticed the safe return of their friends. Reminding Brian of a yipping dog, a terrier of sorts, Mark instantly began explaining the plan he was about to spring into action with if his friend and father stayed missing for much longer. He then told them what had happened to the Marquis the moment he was taken to a holding cell; the man had hung himself with his own pants when he found out what charges he faced.

Justin blinked at the first hint of dawn, feeling it fill him with a new hope. This was the start of the rest of his life. He and Brian had agreed to take an ambulance ride to the hospital after they assured their friends and family they were alright. Marquis had done some damage to Justin in the forest while Brian was still unconscious and both had been drugged and beaten repeatedly. Only once they were safely in the clear did their aches, pains, and exhaustions begin to make themselves fully know. There would be no return of Dillinger. Even without seeing the body which had not yet been killed, Justin and Brian trusted Cam to make sure he paid for everything he had done.

Bear was currently occupied with being the strong arm, carrying Dillinger through the dark halls toward the man's own offices. Knowing they would run into some of Dillinger's zealots eventually, Cameron led the way with both guns ready. If worse came to worse, they would claim the Master had been injured and was to only be attended by Bear or Cam, bodyguards so trusted no one had ever been allowed to see them before. Dillinger would be unconscious and unable to verify that claim but no one in his service had much of a mind to go against anything even remotely resembling a command the man would give. His reign of terror was finally working against him.

Will and Michael, who had survived life with little or no police records, were released in an attempt to wash the state's hands of the entire scene. With a little coaxing from Melanie and her law firm, of course. Nobody in the department wanted to admit that they had lost Dillinger again, though the police would never really know the man would never harm another soul. Pepper's was shut down on principle, the torture devices taken for evidence and those victims found still locked in hidden rooms were freed.

Will disappeared without a word, presumably to find Bear and Cam and get a piece of Dillinger's death.

Melanie and Lindsay extended Mark's curfew on four conditions: he kept his grades up, his driving record spotless, he quit making promises he did not intend to keep, and he let them live in sweet denial about who the 'anonymously yours, sugah' he kept getting mail from.

Sullivan sent postcards to Mark from all over the United States. None described a bank heist here or a high-scale burglary there, but they didn't have to. Mark's imagination was doing just fine without details, every postcard coinciding with some state or another's latest crime spree. There had been statewide reports on the television about a string of crimes, a Bonnie and Clyde for the new era. Their faces wore masks but it was obvious both robbers, lovers, were men. The media ate it up, showing as much of scenes from bank cameras as they could get past their censors; the two unknown criminals kissing while holding guns on the poor, unsuspecting public. So far, no one had been hurt or killed and only money had been taken. All the police had on the dubbed 'Gentlemen Thieves' was the getaway car. A bright red, brand new hardtop Jeep.

Brian decided to take the honeymoon before the wedding. Once both were released from the hospital with strict doctor's instructions to take it easy, Brian concluded that only one serious question lay ahead of them: Bahamas, Spain, or Italy? Justin, unable to make a decision, found out Brian had already bought them tickets to all three during a six month span. They were not going to set a date to get married, knowing that dates and plans were made to be broken. Neither man noticed three sets of eyes constantly assuring their overseas safety. Will, Cameron, and Bear, their differences aside, had a common interest at heart: keeping Justin and Brian safe. Cam still did not let Bear out of her sight without Will to watch him, though when the two were around her, their secretive glances and knowing smiles promised only one person occupying the other's bed. Will had forgiven Bear and for now, repairing their decades old relationship was what mattered to make the other look forward to a new day. When Brian and Justin returned to Pittsburgh for Mark's sixteenth birthday they would announce they had already been married whether it was true or not. It would happen officially someday but to Brian and Justin, they had been married for years. Their happily ever after had happened the first night they met.

Even if they didn't know it at the time.

End