

Escape By: Cindyl

Part 1

“Jim Beam…a double.”   
  
“Here you are, sir.”   
  
“Thanks,” Brian said with a small smile as the stewardess handed him his drink. He took a sip, enjoying the slow burn as the amber liquid slid down his throat. His eyes cast toward the window, seeing nothing outside but blackness as the night quickly approached. He sighed heavily, his mind falling into the same pattern that always seemed to overtake it when he made this trip, knowing exactly what was out there but still unbearably out of his reach.

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“Justin!”   
  
“What…oh, sorry.”   
  
Sighing, Jody stood up and moved toward his friend, crouching down beside the man who was still sitting in his chair. He placed his hand on the side of Justin’s face, always slightly amazed at the softness of his pale skin, then smiled, knowing exactly where the younger man’s mind had gone. “Again?”   
  
Softly, Justin replied, “Always.”   
  
Brushing his thumb across Justin’s cheek, Jody knew that even though he loved Justin, the blond would never love him in return. Jody smiled and stood up, looking down at his friend as he did. “One of these days you’re gonna have to get over him.”   
  
“Just tell me how, and I will,” Justin said sadly. He really did want to know the magic secret of how he could just fix everything…everything that was unfixable.   
  
“I wish I could, but unfortunately only you have that power. The thing is, that if you don’t, you’ll never move on.”   
  
“And who says I want to move on? Move on to what? There’s nothing out there for me. Not anymore.” Justin’s blue eyes were blazing as he had the same old argument with his friend. And as always, it got him nowhere.   
  
Shaking his head, softly Jody replied, “There IS more to life than just working here and drugs and dancing and trying to fuck away the pain. I know there is.”   
  
“Well, if you find it, good luck…and watch out, because sooner or later it’ll bite you in the ass,” the blond said bitterly.   
  
Not really sure how to respond and knowing that whatever he said, Justin would just have some lame-assed comeback, Jody bent down and kissed his friend’s cheek then left.   
  
Justin’s eyes focused on his hands that were absently twisting a napkin as they rested on the small table in front of him. Instantly his mind drifted off to the same place it always went when he couldn’t gain control fast enough. Brian.   
  
He didn’t bother with the small tear that escaped from the corner of his left eye and ran down his cheek. There was just one. No more would fall. He wouldn’t allow it.   
  
He frowned, remembering the last time he’d seen the older man. Even though Brian was more furious than he’d ever seen him, he knew, or at least thought he cared about him. Obviously, he’d been wrong. If Brian had cared, he would’ve come after him. He would have tried to make sure that he was alright. He wouldn’t have cancelled his credit card right away, giving Justin no chance to find a decent place to stay or make sure that he had food to eat. No, if Brian had cared, he would have known it. But all he knew was that love and emotions and caring were all fucking lies. They got you nowhere and earned you nothing but heartache in return.   
  
Absently, he rubbed the spot on his left hip that held his private reminder of what life had in store for those saps that bought into the fairy tale of happily ever after. The broken cowry shell tattoo, done solely in white, so you had to really look to see that it was even there. It always seemed to ache a little when he thought of the beautiful, tall man of his dreams. But just like dreams fade away, so did his hopes of ever being with Brian again. He now knew that life was what you made it. And if his reputation as an asshole, only interested in one thing and that being himself was where his path had led him, then that was just the way it was.   
  
He didn’t need love or romance or Brian. He only needed himself. And the faint reminder on his hip never let him forget it.   
  
Even though he was only nineteen and had been on his own for just over a year, he never would forget the way that his life had changed that day…the day he was forced to make his escape.

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“Sir, we’ll be landing in about ten minutes.”   
  
“Thank you,” Brian said, handing the half-empty glass to the stewardess.   
  
The Vangard-Kinney Agency was finally a reality, having opened its New York branch a few months ago, of which Brian was fully in charge. He’d spent the past several months traveling back and forth between the Pitts and New York, but was now ready to relocate.   
  
Brian smiled, realizing that one of his dreams had finally come true, but the smile instantly faded as he remembered that his other dream, the one that kept him up at night, was still missing. Justin. He constantly dreamed of the blond-haired, blue-eyed man that he drove away and wondered if he’d ever find him and make things right.   
  
He figured that Justin would contact him after he thought that Brian had cooled off, but it never happened. Obviously the boy had just given up on him…and that was the last thing he wanted him to do. He knew that he was hard on Justin. Hell, he’d never had things easy and frankly, he didn’t really know how to treat anyone else that way. But Justin was always on to him. Had been from the first night that they’d met, and Brian just figured that he would somehow still be around. But when he’d overheard Deb and Emmett talking one day at the diner about Justin and New York, he felt an instant pain in the pit of his stomach and knew that he’d lost the only thing that he’d ever really wanted.   
  
Brian felt the landing gear lower and closed his eyes, taking a deep breath and slowly releasing it. Even though New York was a large place, he hoped that maybe, just maybe, he’d run into the blond this time. And then, well, who knows? Maybe dreams really do come true.

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“And now, gentlemen, enjoy…” Marty said, opening a private door that led to a large dance floor.   
  
The six men looked out and were astonished to find at least a dozen beautiful men dancing provocatively to the loud, thumping music. They seemed to range in age from around seventeen to twenty-five, give or take, and all were dressed in varying forms of provocative clothing.   
  
“Take your pick and he’s yours for the evening,” Marty instructed and the men moved through the door, each setting their sights on a man and moving toward him.   
  
“Which one is Blaze?” a tall, dark-haired, stunningly handsome man asked, stopping by the owner of the club.   
  
Smiling his predatory smile, Marty replied, “So, THAT’S what you’ve come looking for tonight?”   
  
“Uh, y-yes,” the man said, seeming to blush slightly, knowing that his need for the one named Blaze was a direct give away of what he wanted.   
  
Nodding slightly, Marty held out his hand and pointed towards a lone figure dancing in the dimly lit room. “That’s Blaze…and if you can handle him, he’s yours for the evening.”   
  
Not really sure how to respond, the customer just smiled nervously and headed in the direction of the dancing young man. He couldn’t help but notice how many of the other customer’s eyes were glued to the same man and he felt his gut clench, knowing that he may have some competition in getting what he came for. He moved in closer, finding two other men approaching Blaze in the same manner.   
  
Justin slipped a little white pill on the tip of his tongue then drew it inside, smiling as the tangy substance melted in his mouth. Immediately he felt the familiar chill run down his spine and his head began to swim. He danced, lost in the music and inside his own private world, using whatever help he could to get him there.   
  
He knew the drill. The men came, they selected and then it was time for work. But until then, he just danced. He loved the feeling of letting go, and on the dance floor was the only place left in his life where he let that happen. His eyes were closed, his head tipped slightly off to the side as his hips moved along with the grinding beat.   
  
“Blaze…I think you’re mine for the night.”   
  
Opening his eyes the blond stiffened and thought his senses were playing tricks on him again. ‘Brian?’ he thought and blinked rapidly, trying to focus on the figure before him. He felt a sadness wash over him with the realization that it was just a man…a customer…not the man that he lov…’NO!’ he mentally reprimanded himself. He wouldn’t think of him again. He smiled his predatory smile at the man that looked just a little too much like someone he used to know and nodded…’work time.’

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“Brian, it’s great to see you again.”   
  
Taking the offered hand in a firm handshake, Brian smiled and said, “ John, it’s been ages. How the hell are you?”   
  
“Good…good…can’t complain. So, what brings you to New York?”   
  
“My company just opened a branch here and I’m heading it up.”   
  
“Wow, that’s great. There’s lots of opportunities here and I’m sure you’re eager to take advantage of a few,” the other man said with a smile.   
  
“Yeah, I can’t wait.”   
  
“So, how about I show you a thing or two. The scene here is quite different than what you’re used to.”   
  
“John,” Brian said with a grin, “I’m not a virgin on the prowl. I’ve been to New York a time or two.”   
  
“Yeah, but what I can show you, well, you haven’t seen it before,” John said with a knowing smile, not missing the curiosity brewing in the other man’s eyes.   
  
“And what would that be?”   
  
With a wiggle of his brows and a leering look, John replied, “Something that is sure to blow you away. Literally.”   
  
Both men laughed at the meaning behind the words and Brian agreed to his friend’s generous offer, making plans to meet up after work the following evening. He couldn’t wait to see what was in store.

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“Blaze, it looks like it’s going to be a busy night. You ready?” Marty asked, knowing that the men were always clamoring for his star attraction.   
  
“Ready as I’ll ever be,” came the same monotone response that Justin gave his boss every night, his body never stopping its motion as he moved to the music blaring throughout the club.   
  
Nodding, he wasn’t able to stop himself from wondering just what had led the beautiful, young blond to such a place as The Quoin. Pushing the thought aside, knowing that they all had work to do, Marty smiled half-heartedly then moved toward the door that led to the room where the eager customers were waiting. He knew that they were always raring to be let loose for the night, and that night would be no exception.   
  
Opening the door, just like he had thousands of times before, Marty announced to the men, “And now, gentlemen, enjoy,” then he moved aside to let them into the private club.   
  
“Here you go, Brian. Take your pick and he’s yours for the night,” John said, leading the way as his friend followed behind. He turned and smiled, seeing the astonished look on the other man’s face. “What, did someone finally shock the infamous Brian Kinney?” John asked with a laugh.   
  
“I’ll say,” Brian gasped, barely above a whisper as his eyes caught sight of and remained locked on a lone figure dancing in the middle of the room.   
  
Brian knew it was Justin the moment he laid eyes on him. He’d changed slightly, looked a little thinner but more muscular at the same time. And his hair, his beautiful golden hair was longer and Brian instantly longed to run his fingers through it. But the biggest change, the one that struck Brian like a damaging blow was the coldness and fury, blazing in his deep blue eyes.   
  
“Brian…you okay,” John asked with concern.   
  
“Yeah, yeah, I’m fine,” he lied.   
  
Nodding with relief, John smiled then asked, “See anything you like?”   
  
“Yeah, that one,” Brian stated, pointing towards Justin who had now commanded many of the customers’ attention.   
  
“Oh, that’s Blaze. You don’t want him. He’s a real asshole. Besides, from what I remember you’re a consummate top and he doesn’t bottom for anyone. Now that one…”   
  
“No, him. Blaze?” Brian questioned, not sure if he’d heard his friend right.   
  
“Yeah, Blaze. They say it’s because of his eyes. They seem to blaze fury, keeping you at a distance, never more than when he’s fucking you. Blaze.”   
  
Nodding, still in a daze, Brian moved forward, closing the distance between himself and Justin. Ignoring the warning voice of his friend calling after him.   
  
Justin was well aware of the men around him, clamoring for his attention, but he wasn’t ready to decide yet who would have the pleasure…he thought with a small laugh…the pleasure of satisfying HIS need to dominate and be in control. He was just about to choose when he heard a voice, calling out a name that he knew didn’t exist there, from a voice that he was sure he’d never hear again.   
  
“Justin.”   
  
Turning sharply, Justin’s eyes blazed a trail all the way to the man that was now standing only a few feet away. He blinked hard, sure that his eyes were playing those cruel tricks on him again, but the image wouldn’t change. He felt a surge of panic within him and instantly wanted to run…hide…escape.   
  
“Justin.”   
  
Again…there it was again. ‘When…what…how the hell could this be happening?’   
  
Quickly, without a moment’s haste Justin pulled the man closest to him and said in an unquestionable voice, “You. Tonight’s your lucky night.” Then ignoring the pleased smile on the chosen one’s face, he turned abruptly and pulled the man along beside him, leading him out of the club.   
  
“JUSTIN!” Brian shouted, frozen in place, watching the man that he’d been dreaming of and longing for walk out of the room. As reality began to crash around him, Brian suddenly realized once again where he was and inwardly recoiled at the knowledge that Justin was there. In this…this place. This whorehouse…regardless of how upscale it was and how private and secretive…it was, none the less, a whorehouse and that made Justin a…   
  
‘NO!’   
  
Brian refused to believe it. It couldn’t be. How the fuck did Justin go from being the good little boy to the sought after whore? But there was no denying it. Not from where he stood and from what he’d seen. He turned around, a little stunned to find John watching him.   
  
“Brian, are you okay?”   
  
“No, not anymore. I don’t think I’ll ever be okay again.” And with that, Brian walked back toward the private entrance and headed out of The Quoin.

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“Oh, God, please…please.”   
  
“You want more…you want me to fuck you harder?” Justin asked, knowing that he was already pounding the man beneath him so fiercely that he wondered how he was managing to keep from toppling forward.   
  
“Yes…yes, Blaze…more…fuck me harder,” the breathless customer begged.   
  
Taking all of his anger and rage out on the willing participant, Justin continued to slam into the man’s ass, never letting up and never slowing down until he felt the battered channel constrict around his swollen cock and heard the man cry out as his orgasm ripped through his body, long and hard, just like his ride. Only then did Justin allow himself to let go as he came with a loud roar, filling the condom as his mind flashed upon the only thing that ever seemed to get him there…Brian.   
  
Pulling out and rolling over, Justin lit up a cigarette and took a long drag, then slowly let the smoke billow out from his parted lips.   
  
“That was…amazing…fucking amazing,” the customer droned, trying to snuggle up against his bedmate.   
  
“Yeah, amazing…now I think it’s time for you to go.”   
  
“What…now?”   
  
“Yeah, NOW. What’d you think…that we were gonna play house? Next time read the fine print. You got what you came for and now it’s time for you to leave. Be sure to close the door on your way out.” And with those parting words, Justin got up and went into the bathroom, firmly shutting the door behind him. Several minutes later, only after he heard lots of huffing and groaning coming from the bedroom, then the slamming of the front door, did he allow himself to let go. Sliding to the bathroom floor as all the feeling in his limbs left him his mind began to reel.   
  
“How the fuck did he find me?”   
  
Justin realized that his emotions were running rampant. There’d been so many times that he’d dreamed about Brian…finally coming to his rescue…dramatically professing his need for him and begging him to come home. But he knew that it had all been just childish dreams…nothing more. Brian would never do those things…Justin wasn’t worth it, and seeing Brian again only reminded him of the fact.   
  
He couldn’t understand it. No one knew where he was. No one. Okay, so they knew that he was in New York. But not a single soul, not even his mom or Daphne knew that he was working at The Quoin. He wouldn’t…couldn’t tell anyone. He knew what they’d think. What he thought. But he couldn’t dwell on that now. Not anymore. He didn’t have a choice. No, not even one.   
  
He’d tried to find legitimate work. He really did. Busboy…waiter…movie theatre attendant. He’d tried the lot. He’d even had a brief stint as a go-go boy, but that didn’t pan out too well, not after he wouldn’t put out for the customers that demanded a little bit more than just a dance. He laughed sadly, realizing that it really wouldn’t have been much different than what he was doing now.   
  
But life was hard when you’re seventeen and all alone in a strange city with no money and no one to count on but yourself. That’s when he found Jody. A brief smile crossed his lips at the thought of the man that he’d become so close to. They were friends…truly friends. Something that he’d never had before in a man. Even though at first he’d been shocked to find out what Jody did for a living, working at The Quoin, he’d slowly come to accept it and when his friend offered to introduce him to his boss, well, Justin wasn’t in any position to refuse. He was at the end of his rope and couldn’t see anywhere else to go.   
  
So he met Marty and was surprised to find that the man wasn’t a sleaze like he’d imagined he’d be. The guy was actually quite friendly and nice and instantly made Justin feel at ease.   
  
But turning his first trick was another matter. That was anything but easy. He had to close his eyes and squeeze them tightly the whole way through for fear that he might burst out crying at any moment. And when the man was done fucking him, he felt a sense of coldness wash over him. A feeling of emptiness like he’d never felt before and he knew that he’d never be the same.   
  
And he was right. He never was.   
  
That was the last time that anyone had fucked him.   
  
From all that sadness his new persona was born…Blaze. They say that with just one look of his baby blues you can feel the fury that burns within him…the blaze. And it was true. He knew it. Because every time he fucked another customer, he felt himself slipping away that little bit more until soon, one day, he knew that Justin wouldn’t exist anymore…only Blaze. And for some reason, he didn’t seem to mind.   
  
But now Brian was there and the way he felt the moment he saw him made him doubt everything he’d gone through since he’d started on his journey of rebirth. He and Brian were, well, sort of friends, but not really. No, they were fuck buddies…nothing more…nothing less. He thought at one time that they must have been friends, but obviously he was wrong. Because if they were truly friends, then he would have come looking for him when he disappeared. Not just cancelled his credit card and left the man to fend for himself. No, they definitely weren’t friends…he and Brian…and they never would be…not if he had anything to say about it…and he did. Now, he did.   
  
Getting up off the bathroom floor, Justin opened the door and pulled on the black silk robe that hung on the other side, tying the belt around his slim waist. He picked up his discarded clothes that lay on a chair and left the room, not even bothering to turn around and look at the mess that had been made. That wasn’t his concern. His job was to make it and it was someone else’s job to clean it up. Everyone had their place and he was well aware of his.   
  
Heading upstairs to the third floor by a set of private stairs down at the far end of the hall, Justin punched in the security code to his apartment and the door popped open. Stepping inside, he quietly closed the door behind him, sliding the lock in place and sighing with the knowledge that he was finally alone and could come undone.   
  
He always gave the appearance to the other boys at The Quoin of not giving a shit about what was happening around him, but inside, he was in a constant state of turmoil. Quite unaware at first, Justin began to take on many of the characteristics of the man that he’d swore he’d never be like. Brian was so brash and unfeeling…a complete asshole most of the time and Justin slowly found himself emanating the man to the point where he wasn’t sure who he was and just who he’d become.   
  
He’d developed a fondness for the finer things in life, like Armani, Versace and Prada. And with the way his services were in such high demand, he could afford the hefty price tags without concern. He often laughed at the thought that Brian’s love of shopping had definitely rubbed off on him…having gained at least something good from the man. But unlike his unknowing role model, he preferred casual slacks and lightweight sweaters compared to Brian’s tailored suits. He liked the benefit that the form-fitting pants afforded him…allowing him to show off his most prized asset. His perfect ass.   
  
He couldn’t help but smile at the thought that THAT which made him so irresistible to so many of his clients was totally off limits. He never allowed anyone to fuck him. No exceptions…ever…not after that first night. If he’d learned one thing from Brian, it was that the best way to not allow yourself to feel anything or let anyone in was to always be in control. And everyone now knew that when you asked for Blaze, what you’d get was one fucking amazing night of mind-blowing sex…never to be repeated again.   
  
That was Justin’s stipulation when he came to work at The Quoin, learning quickly after that first night what he would and wouldn’t do to survive. It was a deal that he made with Marty, not to be refuted at any time, something that his boss knew was not up for discussion. He would satisfy ANY customer, but only once, and then they would leave.   
  
No excuses, no apologies, no regrets.   
  
For all of Brian’s bullshit bravado, Justin now agreed with the older man. Living by his code and knowing with certainty that what you got out of life was only worth what you put into it. And right now, he was getting everything…because he wouldn’t allow Brian, or anyone else to ever hold a piece of his heart again. Never.   
  
But for how long he could go on trying to believe his lies…he didn’t quite know.

Part 2

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Brian woke up the next morning and knew with certainty exactly where he’d be heading that night…but first…   
  
  
”John, yeah, it’s me. Hey, sorry about last night…no, I’m fine. Listen, could you meet me for lunch? Yeah, that’s great…see you around twelve…thanks, bye.”   
  
Getting ready for work, Brian knew that he’d have a hard time concentrating on business, having only one thing on his mind, but he was determined to make it through the day so he could head back to the club, and to Justin.

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“Brian,” John greeted his friend with a smile, so glad to see the man looking better than he had the night before.   
  
“John, thanks for meeting me,” Brian said as he joined the other man at his table. “Jim Beam,” he said to the waiter that came to take his drink order then focused back on his friend.   
  
“No problem. I have to admit that I was a little worried about you. I’m really glad that you called.” The concern in John’s voice was genuine and touching.   
  
Smiling slightly, Brian replied, “Yeah, well, I was a little concerned for me too. I tell ya, I don’t think I’ve ever had quite a shock as I did last night at that club. The Quoin?”   
  
“Yeah, that’s what it’s called. Look, Brian, I’m really sorry if it wasn’t what you were expecting and if it threw you a little. I guess I’ve always thought that you were up for anything, even someplace like THAT,” John said apologetically.   
  
“No, that wasn’t it. John, what can you tell me about that guy, the one you said they call Blaze?”   
  
John’s brows furrowed together and he wondered why Brian was so concerned about a whore, and couldn’t help asking the man so.   
  
“JOHN,” Brian barked rather loudly, gaining the attention of several of the other diners and earning him a startled look from his friend. Settling down, he took a deep breath and slowly released it, then tried again. “What do you know about the one they call Blaze, and if I were you, I wouldn’t be so quick to call him a whore again,” he warned.   
  
Keeping the other man’s words in mind, John spoke slowly and carefully. “Well, I know that he started there about a year ago and that he never does the same customer twice. They say once he’s had you he throws you out and never looks back. He’s supposed to be a phenomenal fuck…hard and fast and completely worth the effort. But he’s emotionally unavailable. I heard about this one guy, who thought that maybe he’d be able to talk Blaze into letting him fuck him. Well, let’s just say that the guy was quickly disposed of without even getting a taste of the merchandise and never let back into the place.”   
  
Brian listened intently to his friend and couldn’t help but think of who it sounded like John was describing….HIM. He was describing Brian down to a tee. And that scared him…more than seeing Justin at that place…even more than finding out that the man was selling himself to survive. Because if what his friend was telling him was true, then Justin was gone and in his place was a uncaring, unfeeling asshole who thought that the world was just a bitter place in which you learned to screw or be screwed…literally…and he didn’t think that he could bear the thought of HIS Justin being that way. The blond was way too good for that.

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After hearing all that John had to say at lunch, Brian felt even more determined that he had to see Justin and try to talk to the man. He headed back to the exclusive club, gaining easy entrance as the doorman and owner remembered him from the previous night.   
  
Waiting in the now familiar room, Brian knew that at any moment the door would open, allowing the customers out into the spacious club, setting them free to choose their entertainment for the evening. But all he could think about was that on the other side of the door was Justin. And he needed to make sure that he would be his.   
  
“Marty, right?” Brian asked, walking up to the well-dressed, middle-aged man.   
  
“Yes, that’s right. What can I do for you, Mr. Kinney?”   
  
“I want to make sure that I get the one they call Blaze for the evening.”   
  
Admiring the bluntness in the handsome man’s tone, Marty nodded his head and smiled, wondering if the man knew exactly what he was in for. He didn’t seem like a bottom, but then again, so many of the ones that requested Blaze never did. Looking at his watch he excused himself and went over to the door that led to the club, placed his hand on the knob and turned it, opening it onto a buffet of hot, young men that waited to be claimed. “And now, gentlemen, enjoy.”   
  
Justin felt a shock pass through his body and he knew, without opening his eyes that Brian was there. ‘Fuck!’, he thought then straightened up, ready to face whatever came his way. Opening his eyes, they landed squarely on the man standing in front of him and he quickly took a step back, started by Brian’s closeness.   
  
“Sorry, Sunshine, I didn’t mean to scare you.”   
  
“There’s no Sunshine here. I think you’ve got me confused with someone else,” Justin said harshly, not caring if he hurt the other man’s feelings. But then he remembered, Brian didn’t DO feelings, so he really had nothing to worry about. And yet, looking into the older man’s eyes, Justin couldn’t help but notice a slight difference in the way they seemed to soften as they met his. But…no…it must be the lights. Yeah, it had to be the lights.   
  
“Sorry, Blaze,” Brian said, his voice dripping with sarcasm.   
  
The blond ground his teeth together, holding back from lacing into the man as he spoke again in a controlled voice. “I have clients to see, so if you’ll excuse me.”   
  
“Sorry, Blaze, but you’re mine for the night,” Brian stated, not missing the flash of fury in the bright blue eyes. Suddenly, he realized that the name DID suit Justin perfectly.   
  
“What the fuck are you talking about? I’m not yours. I’ll never be yours. I…” Justin stammered, shooting a killer gaze in Marty’s direction and receiving nothing more than a sympathetic look in return.   
  
“Ah, but see, you are mine, so I suggest that we go to wherever it is you take your, uh, customers and get things moving along.” Brian knew that he was pushing the younger man, but he couldn’t help it. He had to make sure that he didn’t lose him…not that night…not ever again.   
  
“I…but…urgghhh, fine, follow me,” Justin growled and started out of the club, leading Brian through a door then up a set of stairs and finally to a row of doors in a long hallway. For a moment he was tempted to take him to one of the theme rooms. He’d often had customers who wanted to be treated to a night of dominance in the Ancient Greece room. But he decided that Brian wasn’t worth the effort and quickly bypassed the red door. Walking up to another one, he opened it then stepped inside, moving to the side, allowing Brian to pass through before slamming the door quite loudly behind him and locking it.   
  
“So glad to see you’ve kept up with your manners, Sunshine,” Brian mocked.   
  
“Don’t fucking call me that. I’m not that person anymore.”   
  
Brian was stunned by the tenacity in the blond’s words and wondered if he truly believed them. But deciding to take it easy on the younger man, he smiled and held up his hands in surrender. “Fine, you win, I’ll call you Blaze. Is that better?”   
  
“Much. Now, take off your clothes and get on the bed. It’s time to get what you paid for.”   
  
Again, Brian was a little taken back by Justin but followed his instructions, never able to resist the man when the offer of him…naked…and sex were involved. Quickly, Brian pulled off his clothes, tossing them into a pile on a chair to the side and climbed into bed. He couldn’t help but notice that Justin hadn’t moved an inch and remained fully clothed at the end of the bed, just watching him. “Aren’t you going to join me?”   
  
“When I’m ready. Now shut the fuck up and lie back,” the young man commanded, deciding to treat Brian like every other trick. That was the only way he was going to get through it. Justin began to remove his clothes, torturously slow. Teasing and taunting Brian as he watched with darkening eyes, the lust so clearly etched across the older man’s stunning face.   
  
Once Justin was naked, he climbed onto the bed, making his way up the length of Brian’s slightly trembling body, his eyes blazing a trail along the way until they finally locked onto the other man’s and held his gaze.   
  
Brian was startled by what he saw in Justin’s eyes and couldn’t help searching deep inside of them for even a hint of the man that he knew still had to be in there. “Justin.”   
  
“NO, Blaze…there is no Justin in here anymore. Only Blaze.”   
  
Brian was surprised but determined to bring out the man that he’d been thinking of nonstop for the past year. He wasn’t about to let go of the dream that maybe, just maybe, he would get a second chance. “Justin, please,” he whispered, almost pleading.   
  
Justin was stunned by the gentleness in Brian’s voice and for just a second, his mask dropped and his eyes that were still locked in the other man’s stare opened up and revealed a hint of the man inside…the Justin that was still there.   
  
Seeing the smile that quickly spread across Brian’s face, and realizing why it was there made Justin’s armor quickly rise again, bringing back the hardened look and impenetrable, blazing eyes, instantly wiping the grin off of the dark-haired man’s face and bringing a small amount of satisfaction to Justin.   
  
“I told you…Justin’s dead. Now shut the fuck up or get the fuck out. It’s your choice, but make it now,” the young man ordered.   
  
Justin felt a little twinge of guilt gnawing at his gut from the sadness that enveloped the man beneath him, but he couldn’t…no, he wouldn’t allow it to affect him. He took Brian’s silence as a form of resignation and was perversely pleased with the control that he seemed to have gained.   
  
“Good, we seem to understand each other now.”   
  
Brian didn’t comment, but the way his eyes remained locked on Justin’s brought a sense of eeriness to the younger man’s soul. Steeling himself, remembering that Brian was just another trick, nothing more, Justin smiled his predatory smile, the one that he’d learned from Brian himself and slowly began to rock his hips ever so slightly back and forth, earning him a soft growl from the older man.   
  
“Like that?”   
  
“Y-yes,” Brian replied softly.   
  
Justin was surprised by the response, figuring that Brian wouldn’t give in to his desires and actually reply. Suddenly, as if a light went off inside the blond’s tortured mind he realized that the man beneath him, the one that he’d seen the night before and the way he was right then, wasn’t the same as the one that had kicked him out not that long ago. He seemed different…softer…gentler. And his eyes, they weren’t as hardened or full of rage like they always seemed to be before. Maybe…just maybe….’NO!’, he reprimanded himself. ‘No.’   
  
He’s just fucking with my mind, just like he used to. He let me go, kicked me out, without a thought or care. And look where it got me. Here. Now. With HIM again. Well, this time, I’M the one that’s in control and I think, no I know, that I’m going to like it.   
  
Brian couldn’t help but notice the evil grin that spread across Justin’s face and the way his eyes seemed to darken even further, blazing the fury that burned within. It was a strange look, not one that he remembered and not one that he liked.   
  
‘Turn over,” Justin commanded in a voice that left no room for debate.   
  
“But, I…”   
  
“Turn the fuck over…NOW,” he growled and Brian hesitantly obeyed.   
  
“I thought that…”   
  
“I don’t give a shit what you thought. You’re in MY world now, and when you ask for Blaze, you get what you came for.”   
  
“Urghhhh,” Brian groaned, unprepared for the intrusion as Justin’s slick finger pressed against his hole, pressing forward until one long digit was buried deep inside.   
  
“Yeah, I know what you want. Just let that tight ass of yours relax and take it…take it all,” Justin rasped as his finger slid in and out of the puckered opening, adding a second, then a third as he felt the muscles begin to loosen. He couldn’t help but feel his own excitement swell as he watched his fingers disappear inside of the man that he’d been longing for…dreaming of…wishing that…’Fuck,’ he thought, desperately needing to stop his train of thought. Unable to hold back the anger and resentment he felt bubbling to the surface, he harshly shoved his fingers back into Brian’s ass, earning him a sharp gasp and then deep moan from the older man.   
  
“Ready for more?” Justin asked as he managed to sheath his angry-red dick with his free hand as he watched in fascinated amazement as Brian began to buck back wildly, trying to get his fingers even deeper inside.   
  
“Ughh…I…oh, God, Justin…”   
  
“Blaze…Blaze…FUCKING, BLAZE,” Justin shouted as he angrily pulled his fingers out and shoved his cock forcefully into Brian’s ass.   
  
“Ahhhhhh,” Brian shouted out, his hole burning from the quick and sudden penetration.   
  
“This is what you came for…so enjoy it,” Justin growled, digging his fingers into the flesh on Brian’s slender hips. Abruptly he pulled back so just the head of his cock remained inside. Teasingly, he bounced his hips before slamming back in, earning him another shout from the unsuspecting man.   
  
“Is this what you wanted?” Justin asked, panting hard as he continued to fuck his former whateverthefuckhewas with raw abandon. Jerking out then thrusting back in, hard and fast…deep and relentlessly.   
  
“I…I…” Brian stammered, unable to get his mind and mouth to work together. He wasn’t used to being fucked, being a consummate top. And when he went looking for Justin again, knowing a little about his reputation that he’d earned himself at The Quoin, having been enlightened by John, he still didn’t think that THIS was the position he’d be in. He figured that once they got started, Justin would fall back into his previous role and let Brian fuck him within an inch of his life…just like old times. But what he was experiencing at the hands, or rather dick of his protégé, was nothing that he could have prepared himself for. But Brian was sure of one thing, that Justin wasn’t in the room. Only Blaze.   
  
Roughly, Justin reached down, his sweaty body coming into full contact with Brian’s. His chest sliding along Brian’s back, sending unfamiliar and unwanted chills up his spine.   
  
‘Oh, God, he feels…his skin’s so…his scent…I feel like…’ Justin’s mind was on overload. All his senses working against him, betraying him…trying to let his body travel back in time to a place where being with Brian was right and good and…”NO!” he shouted, unable to stop the word from tumbling out.   
  
“Wha’?” Brian mumbled.   
  
Justin squeezed his eyes shut tightly, trying to regain his composure then opened them, unable to avoid the deep-green orbs that seemed to be locked on his face as Brian’s head twisted back toward him. He felt himself stumble slightly, completely caught off guard by the openness and raw emotion playing through the other man’s eyes.   
  
“Justin,” Brian breathed softly.   
  
“No…no, I…” the younger man faltered and closed his eyes, needing to stop the connection. There was no connection with a trick. His hand moved downwards toward Brian’s cock and wrapped snugly around it, earning him a loud, feral moan as Brian’s channel tightened impossibly further around his dick, pulling an unexpected moan from his own lips.   
  
“Justin,” Brian tried again, hearing the wavering in the younger man’s voice and hoping that it was just a matter of wearing him down.   
  
But he was wrong. This wasn’t the Justin he’d thrown out many months ago. It was a harder…unemotional, unavailable, uncaring version of the man.   
  
Brian felt the change…especially in his ass…as Justin’s persona took over once again. The blond’s cock rammed mercilessly into him, rocking him forward with every thrust. And the fingers wrapped around his dick tightened slightly and jerked harder and faster as a menacing growl erupted from the man on top of him. Then….   
  
“Ah…ahhhhh…ahhhhhhh,” Brian screamed, his ass clamping down as his orgasm tore through his body…ripping the cum from his slit in long, sharp waves that shot out onto the headboard in front of him. He felt the cock inside him swell even further and heard the muffled groan from behind him and knew that Justin had come as well.   
  
What Brian hadn’t expected was the immediate and abrupt withdrawal as Justin pulled out of him, leaving him feeling cold and empty. He slumped forward, sprawling out on the bed, trying to catch his breath as he heard a voice moving off to the side.   
  
“You got what you paid for. Now get dressed and get out.”   
  
“Justin,” Brian said in a panic, gingerly pulling himself up so that he could see the other man as he headed toward what Brian assumed was a bathroom.   
  
Turning around, willing himself to look Brian in the eye…Justin needed to make sure that the man saw the blank look in his eyes and knew, without a doubt that he shouldn’t make the same mistake again. Justin held back the satisfied grin as he watched Brian try not to wince as he sat up. In a strong, clear voice, Justin replied, “Blaze,” enjoying the look of defeat that spread across the older man’s face. Then he turned and continued into the bathroom, slamming the door forcefully behind him.   
  
Shaking uncontrollably and trying his best to keep from sliding to the floor, Justin silently prayed that when he came out, Brian would be gone. He didn’t think he’d be able to keep it together if he wasn’t.

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Brian walked out of The Quoin and hailed a cab, climbing in slowly and easing onto the seat. His face scrunched up in pain as the driver seemed to hit every single fucking bump in the road on the way to his apartment. With a scowl he paid the fare and smiled slightly at the doorman as he passed through into the secured building.   
  
Once inside his apartment, he locked the door and set the alarm then moved toward his bedroom, stripping off his clothes along the way and instantly heading into the shower. He needed to wash away the sick feeling he had. The feeling that maybe he’d lost the only thing that had ever really mattered to him after all. Maybe after all his hoping and now finally finding the man, Justin was really gone.   
  
And he knew that Blaze just wouldn’t do.

Part 3

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“Justin, are you alright?”   
  
“No.”   
  
Laughing softly, Jody pulled back the covers, revealing a crumpled blond head underneath. “What’s wrong?” he asked, the genuine concern evident in his voice.   
  
“Everything.”   
  
“While I’m really enjoying this witty banter of yours,” Jody said sarcastically, running his fingers soothingly through the silky blond hair to take the sting out of his words. He smiled and continued, “I’ve got a better idea. How about YOU tell me what’s wrong and I don’t have to suffer any longer.”   
  
Pulling the covers back over his head, Justin mumbled something then slumped back down.   
  
“What?” the other man laughed. He could have sworn he’d heard his friend say something, but he knew that there was no way…   
  
“Brian…okay, I said, Brian,” Justin shouted, flinging back the covers and flipping over onto his back.   
  
“Urggh,” Jody groaned in frustration as he threw himself down beside his friend.   
  
“I know, I know. It’s just that he was here, last night.”   
  
“WHAT?” Jody shouted, pulling himself up so that he could see Justin’s face. “What the fuck was he doing here…wait…don’t answer that…obviously I KNOW what he was doing here. But…and I hope I don’t hear the answer I’m dreading, but was he here, at the club or actually HERE, as in with YOU?”   
  
“Here, with me,” the blond answered quietly.   
  
“Oh, shit!” Jody groaned.   
  
“Yeah, that’s pretty much what I thought.”

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“I’m glad that we could get that settled, Mr. Hampson. Now, I’m sure that we can work out the rest of the details at our meeting on Wednesday. Yes…thank you…goodbye.”   
  
Brian hung up the phone and slumped back in his chair. He was glad that with a few well chosen words he’d managed to stave off any problems with his new client. The last thing he needed right now was something else to worry about.   
  
He already had more than he could handle.   
  
Justin.   
  
He couldn’t seem to get the man out of his mind. Not for a second. No matter what he tried, the picture of the blond fucking the shit out of him kept playing across his mind. It was like a song that you just can’t seem to get out of your head, no matter how many times you try to switch the station. Well, that’s how he felt now. And even though the idea of being with the beautiful, young man after all their time apart should be something that made Brian smile, it had the exact opposite effect.   
  
Because as far as he was concerned, Brian hadn’t been with Justin the night before. He’d been with Blaze. And that was something that he didn’t want to repeat.   
  
It wasn’t just the fact that their positions had been switched on him so fiercely. No, he’d bottomed for Justin before, though not another soul knew it. It was the way that the blond looked at him. The younger man’s mask so clearly in place, hiding his feelings, making him cold and distant, just as Brian had been not too long ago.   
  
But Brian knew that he had to try to get to Justin. To make him see that he was still there. Blaze couldn’t win. Brian was determined NOT to let that happen.

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“Hey, Justin, how’s it going?”   
  
“Great, Sam, just great. Anything new that you think I’d be interested in?”   
  
“Yep, we just got in a shipment of Armani casual wear and some Prada. I tell you, there were so many pieces that screamed your name that I finally had to box them back up,” the salesman said with a laugh.   
  
“Right, of course they did,” Justin returned with a bright smile. ‘I knew that shopping would do the trick today.’ He scowled at his own choice of words, immediately brought back to the night before and the man that he was trying his hardest to forget…but wasn’t having much luck at it.   
  
“Come on to the back and I’ll show you what I’ve got,” Sam said, motioning with his head toward the change rooms.   
  
“In case you’ve forgotten, I’ve already seen what you’ve got, Sam, so the idea doesn’t look too promising for me.”   
  
“Smart ass,” Sam chided, shaking his head.   
  
“Perfect ass is more like it, but smart will do,” Justin teased, happy for the easy exchange.   
  
“Come on, let’s see what I can talk you into buying.”   
  
“Yeah, yeah, alright,” Justin said with a smile, following closely behind.   
  
Neither Justin nor Sam noticed the tall, handsome man lurking in the shadows just inside the store’s main doors.   
  
Brian decided to take the day off in hopes of catching Justin in his daily routine, trying to see if maybe there was more of the blond that he once knew just waiting to get back out.   
  
He smiled to himself proudly, amazed at what a hefty tip could buy you. The information that the more than willing doorman of The Quoin had provided into the blond’s daily outings had been more than enough to get Brian started.   
  
He arrived at the exclusive club early and waited outside, hoping that Justin would make his appearance, and just as the doorman had promised the young man headed out promptly on schedule. He followed behind, close enough to not get lost but not close enough to be seen. A few times Justin had turned around, maybe sensing that something was amuck, but so far Brian hadn’t been discovered.   
  
He’d followed him to the cleaners, where Justin dropped off several items. As Brian watched him smile genuinely at the man behind the counter he felt his jealousy rise as the handsome clerk spent a little too much time with Justin and seemed a little too friendly. But he quickly got a handle on it, reminding himself that Justin wasn’t his anymore…at least not yet.   
  
The next stop was Starbucks. Brian laughed softly as he remembered all the times that Justin had ragged on him about drinking too much coffee and the undesired effects that it could have. Apparently, the man had decided to ignore his own complaints, as he spied Justin walking out of the coffee shop with a double large cup of steaming brew.   
  
The rest of Brian’s morning was spent looming about inside the large men’s wear store, trying to keep out of sight but not able to keep from catching a glimpse of Justin as he appeared and disappeared into the change room. Each time the man came out in another stunning ensemble, worthy of Brian’s praise and approval.   
  
It seemed that as the morning progressed, Brian was at a loss for how much the young blond had emulated him. His dress, his attitude, his need for sexual control, his reputation…all the way right down to his choice of beverage.   
  
But Brian also saw the characteristics that were uniquely Justin. The easiness of his stance, the friendly way he interacted with other people and most of all, that beautiful smile that he seemed to give so freely to those that he met. Yes, there was definitely more of HIS Justin there and he knew that it was up to him to set him free.   
  
“Thanks, Sam, I’ll see you soon.”   
  
“Don’t be a stranger, Justin. You know how much I look forward to your visits.”   
  
”Right, you just look forward to those hefty commission checks you get from my visits,” the blond said with a broad smile.   
  
“Uh, yeah, okay, you got me there. But, hey, getting to watch you try on all those hot clothes, not to mention peeking inside the dressing room while you’re changing every so often aren’t bad perks either,” the salesman said with a laugh.   
  
“You’re bad, Sam…so bad,” Justin chuckled as he walked out of the front doors.   
  
“Tell me something I don’t know,” the salesman called after him, earning himself one last smile as Justin moved out of view.   
  
Well, at least Sam’s view, but not Brian’s. He was right behind.   
  
“Hey, Sunshine.”   
  
Justin abruptly turned at the sound of the nickname and the all too familiar voice from which it came. “Brian, what the fuck are you doing here?” he asked, in a not too pleased tone.   
  
“Just out and about…you know…seeing the sights…taking in all the great shops that New York has to offer. That’s all,” the older man replied innocently.   
  
“Right, and it’s just a coincidence that you happen to be outside of the store that I was just in.”   
  
Justin’s brow raised in question, immediately reminding Brian of another thing that the blond had apparently stolen from him.   
  
“I guess so. Well, now that we’ve gotten the formalities out of the way, how about lunch? My treat.”   
  
“I don’t think so,” Justin said over his shoulder as he began to walk away.   
  
“Hey, after all we’ve been through, I think that lunch is the least you owe me.”   
  
Justin spun around, fury instantly blazing in his bright blue eyes as they locked onto Brian’s. When he finally spoke, his voice was low and brimming over with anger. “What I owe YOU? I’ll tell you what the fuck I owe YOU,” the younger man growled, moving dangerously closer to a startled Brian.   
  
“I owe you payback for all the shit that you dealt me. I owe you crude and belittling remarks. I owe you heartache and loneliness. I owe you pain and solitude and fear. I owe you nothingness and worthlessness and desperation. But most of all, what I OWE you, you fucking piece of shit, is gratitude. For making me what I am today.”   
  
Justin couldn’t believe that after all he’d been through…running away…his horrible start in New York…desperately trying anything to forget about the man that had branded his heart…the tricks…the pain…the memories…after all of that he couldn’t believe that he was standing in the street, finally having it out with Brian. Finally letting the man know just what the fuck he’d done to him. What he’d forced him to become.   
  
Afraid to say any more, knowing that at any moment he might burst into tears, Justin turned and whistled, his hand flying into the air, summoning the cab that was conveniently coming near. Not looking back, not wanting to see the expression on Brian’s face, Justin opened the door and hopped into the cab, shutting the door behind him. And as the cab pulled away, he couldn’t help but glance back and was floored to see the utter look of despair so clearly written over Brian’s face, and he wondered, was it possible that maybe…just maybe…he’d been wrong all along…and Brian wasn’t the enemy.

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“Hey, Bri, how’s it going up in New York?”   
  
“Great, Mikey, just great,” Brian droned out, wondering if he sounded even half as bad as he felt.   
  
“That’s super,” Michael said, completely oblivious of the fact that his friend was in pain.   
  
Closing his eyes, Brian resignedly shook his head. Would his friend EVER get him?   
  
“So, I was wondering if maybe you wanted some company, you know, for the weekend?”  
  
“Uh, sorry, Mikey, but it’s not a good time right now. Work is crazy and I wouldn’t be around to baby sit you. Who knows what kind of trouble you could get into,” Brian said sarcastically.   
  
“Oh, come on, Bri. I haven’t seen you in like two whole weeks and I’ve really missed you.”   
  
“Quit the whining, Michael, it’s not becoming, especially since you’re not a twelve year old girl.”   
  
“But, Briiiiiiannnnn.”   
  
For a split second Brian wondered if it was physically possible to reach through the telephone and strangle his supposedly best friend. “Michael, not now. Maybe soon, when things calm down.”   
  
“But…”   
  
“Look, I’ve gotta go. I’ll call you soon.” And with that, Brian quickly hung up before Michael had a chance to irritate him further.   
  
The truth was that things at work were busy, but nothing out of the ordinary. He really could spare the time to have his friend visit, but right now, that was the last thing that he wanted. What he wanted was Justin, and having Michael even in the vicinity of the young blond was something that Brian was NOT prepared to do.   
  
Especially if he intended to continue with his plan of wearing Justin down.   
  
He still couldn’t believe the way Justin had attacked him in the street the previous day. It was frightening and exhilarating, both at the same time. For he realized, that if Justin still held that much anger, that much resentment towards him, then at least he was still feeling, that Blaze hadn’t entirely taken over. And Brian knew that for him to rescue Justin from his bonds of the life that he was held captive by, he was going to have to use those feelings, those demons that were still locked inside of the fragile man to help him make his escape.

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“Justin, someone’s here to see you.”   
  
“Who the fuck is it? It’s my day off and I’m not interested in any unwanted customers,” the blond drowsily groaned into the phone. The persistent ringing woke him from a deep sleep in which he was dreaming of a time and place, long ago and far away where things were still simple and good.   
  
“What’s your name again…Oh, Brian, he says to tell you it’s Brian,” the doorman said, giving Brian a conspiratorial smile and a wink as he spoke into the telephone-intercom system.   
  
Growling, Justin relented, not wanting to air his dirty laundry for all the other boys to hear. “Fine, let him in and tell him to come up to my apartment.” He was too tired to argue and for some reason, the thought of seeing the other man again was just something that he couldn’t pass up…no matter how much he didn’t want to admit it.   
  
“Will do,” the employee said before hanging up, then ushering Brian inside, giving him directions to Justin’s place on the third floor.   
  
A few moments later there was a short rap on the door and Justin quickly opened it, glaring at the man on the other side. “What the hell do you want, Brian? I thought I made it perfectly clear to you the other day that I wasn’t interested in your bullshit.”   
  
“May I come in?” Brian asked with a smile, ignoring the irate blond staring daggers at him.   
  
Huffing, Justin moved aside and let Brian into his apartment then closed and locked the door behind him. Wordlessly he moved into the small kitchen, starting the coffee maker and popping a few slices of toast into the toaster. He was well aware of the set of hazel eyes following his every move. “Coffee?” he asked casually.   
  
“Please.” Brian sat down at the small table, leaning back in his chair, keeping his focus on the slightly disheveled man before him. Obviously his visit had woken Justin from his sleep, and he wondered what the hell the man was doing sleeping in the middle of the day. But he couldn’t help but notice that even in his too large sweatpants and slightly rumpled wife beater, the man was breathtaking…just as he’d always been.   
  
So, what brings you out on such a lovely day?” Justin asked sarcastically, placing a steaming cup of coffee down in front of Brian.   
  
Brian wasn’t sure how to start. He opened his mouth then closed it again without saying a word. There were so many things that he wanted to say, but as Justin and pretty much everyone knew, talking wasn’t Brian’s strong point.   
  
“Well?” Justin prompted, becoming increasingly uneasy with the other man’s presence.   
  
“This is a nice apartment you’ve got here,” Brian said lamely.   
  
Laughing, Justin replied, “Yeah, and I’m sure that’s exactly what you came here to see. My apartment. Well, since you’ve seen it and me, how about we call it a day?” Justin moved out of the kitchen toward the front door and was just about to unlock it when he felt a familiar pair of arms wrap around him from behind. Instantly his breath caught in his chest and he felt like he might pass out from the wave of dizziness that came over him.   
  
“Justin,” Brian breathed softly against the younger man’s neck, his warm breath washing over the tingling skin.   
  
Justin froze. He couldn’t move, no matter how desperately he wanted to. Inside he was screaming, ‘Move you fucker…get the hell away from him…NOW!’ But on the outside, all he could do was stand there and ever so slightly lean back into the comforting embrace.   
  
“Justin,” Brian repeated, letting his lips brush against the sweet and soft paleness of Justin’s shoulder.   
  
The blond felt himself melting…drowning in a sea of his own emotions. He wanted to run, to bolt, to push Brian so far away that he’d never be able to reach him again. But at the same time he just wanted to stay locked forever in his arms. He felt safe and wanted and…and home. But, no…no, he wasn’t safe…he wasn’t wanted…he knew that. Brian had proven to him time and time again that he wasn’t wanted and now…”N-no,” he stammered, breaking free of the embrace and turning around to face the other man.   
  
“Jus…”   
  
“No, I told you, Justin doesn’t exist anymore. He’s gone, dead, forever.” Justin tried to sound strong and bold and fierce, but he knew that he sounded anything but. He sounded small and weak and broken…exactly how he felt.   
  
“He’s not gone. You’re here. With me. Where I need you to be.”   
  
Justin’s eyes widened in shock. Brian sounded…he sounded almost genuine and sweet. But the blond knew that it was a trick. It had to be. The Brian he knew wasn’t any of those things. Standing taller, trying desperately to hold onto any semblance of control that he could muster, Justin replied, “No, you don’t need me. You never needed me. I was just a convenient place to stick your dick. That’s all. And when you got tired of me, when I forgot to do one fucking thing you got rid of me. Just like that,” the blond snapped his fingers for effect. “I was nothing more to you than any of the other thousands of tricks that you picked up…except for the fact that I was too fuckin’ stupid to realize it until…until…”   
  
“You were NEVER just a trick. Never, Justin.”   
  
Laughing at the mockery before him, Justin smiled and said, “You’re right, I wasn’t, I was just a brainless little faggot, trying desperately to fit in, to be part of something, but you didn’t care. I slip up one time and that’s it, I’m history. Well, I just want to thank you, Brian. Because without your kind and generous parting gift I wouldn’t even have made it this far.” Justin laughed again, humorlessly, and continued softly, “If only you could have given me the benefit a little longer, well, who knows where I could have ended up. Certainly not here.”   
  
“What the fuck are you talking about?”   
  
“Why, what’s with the innocent act, Mr. Kinney? I’m sure that’s one that’s new in your repertoire.”   
  
“Justin, I don’t have a clue what you’re talking about.”   
  
“Well, let’s just say that while I did appreciate the lift, the rather efficient effort with which you cancelled your credit card sure did put a little dent in my otherwise perfect plan. Well, and the absence of YOU as well. Now that certainly did screw things up even more.”   
  
Shaking his head, watching as the blond moved toward the sofa and plunked down, Brian tried to piece together what the man was referring to but didn’t have a fucking idea of what he was saying.   
  
Seeing the look of confusion on the older man’s face, Justin said, “Oh, come on, Brian. You can admit it. I know it was poor manners to swipe your credit card in the first place. What would the country club set think about me now?” Justin asked with a laugh then said, “But when you’re desperate and the only person who you think you can count on, well, when you find out that you were fucking WRONG, you do what you need to. To survive.” Justin was shaking and he couldn’t seem to stop.   
  
“You took my credit card?  
  
“Give the man a cigar,” Justin teased. “And although it was quite generous of you to NOT make me pay back the flight and the few charges that I made those first nights while I waited for you to come find me, I must say that your speedy cancellation was rather hard to deal with.” Justin felt himself breaking. He’d said more…way more than he’d intended, but he couldn’t seem to stop. And by the look on Brian’s face, it seemed that the older man had heard way more than he’d bargained for.   
  
Moving forward, Brian kneeled at Justin’s feet, the look on his face a dead giveaway of his turmoil within. “Justin, I swear, I didn’t know you took it.” Seeming to search his memory Brian’s eyes flitted downwards then up again as he said, “I do remember mentioning something to Cynthia about one of my cards…that I thought I’d misplaced it…and she cancelled it and they sent me a new one. That’s it. I didn’t know you had it. And when the bill came in Cynthia must have just paid it, she always does. I didn’t know you’d used it. I wouldn’t have cancelled it and left you out there without any money.”   
  
“But you did. And I waited for you, but you never came.”   
  
Brian looked into the bright blue eyes now laden with tears and without a doubt knew that HIS Justin was still there. There wasn’t any fury…no anger…no Blaze. Just sadness and doubt. He took the trembling man in his arms and sighed softly when he didn’t resist. “Justin,” he began, gently rubbing his face against the silkiness of the man’s golden locks. “I didn’t know where you were. I thought…” Brian stumbled, unsure of how much he wanted to reveal. But instantly he knew that if he intended to bring Justin back to him, and he did, that he’d have to go all the way. “I thought that you didn’t want me anymore. That you’d had enough of my bullshit and were gone for good.”   
  
Pulling back, Justin needed to see Brian’s face.   
  
“I needed you, but…” Brian whispered.   
  
“You kicked me out. You didn’t even give me a chance. Not one fucking chance, Brian.” The tears that had pooled in the corners of the younger man’s eyes now spilled freely down his flushed cheeks.   
  
“I know. I just, I didn’t know how to react to what you did. And by the time I’d realized what I’d done, no one knew where you were. And then a while later I heard Deb and Emmett talking and they mentioned that you were in New York. I felt like someone had punched me in the stomach and I realized that you were really gone. After always claiming that you were on to me, I had to accept the fact that one time too many I’d pushed you away and you weren’t coming back.” Brian didn’t even try to hide the sadness. He felt his own tears slip from his eyes and run down his face and didn’t even bother to wipe them away. He felt exposed and raw.   
  
Shaking his head, Justin couldn’t help but laugh out loud. “What a fucking sorry pair we are,” he said, wiping away his tears and then Brian’s.   
  
“Yeah, well…” Brian paused. Taking a deep breath and looking straight into the other man’s blue eyes, he opened himself up, removed all traces of his walls and masks and said, “I’m sorry, Justin. So fuckin’ sorry.”   
  
Understanding how hard the words were for Brian and seeing how deeply he felt them Justin smiled and tentatively leaned forward, brushing a soft kiss against the other man’s lips.   
  
Sighing contentedly, Brian closed his eyes and rested his forehead against Justin’s. Silently, he gave thanks to whatever higher power that had pulled some strings and called in some favors, allowing him the honor of being in Justin’s presence once more. Hopefully giving him a second chance.   
  
“I’m tired,” Justin whispered, his warm breath washing over Brian’s face.   
  
“Can I stay?” Brian timidly asked, afraid to hear the answer.   
  
Pulling back, Justin’s weary blue eyes locked on Brian’s, flitting back and forth from right to left, searching the hazel depths for what he desperately needed to see. Smiling warmly, finally seeing what he’d missed and longed for over the past year, he stood up and held out his hand. “Come and lie down with me. I think we deserve a rest.”   
  
Brian took hold of the offered hand and silently followed. There was no place else he’d rather be.

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“Hey, sleepy,” Brian breathed, his hand brushing back the long bangs from Justin’s forehead.   
  
“Mmmmm, how long was I out?” Justin asked as he stretched leisurely, raising his arms above his head and inadvertently exposing the tempting flesh of his belly.   
  
Swallowing hard, trying to control the growing need that Brian felt coursing within him, he said, “Well, it’s ten o’clock, so I’d say you flaked out for quite a while.”   
  
“Holy shit!” the blond shouted, bolting upright and looking at the clock on his nightstand, then back at Brian. “Why didn’t you wake me?”   
  
“What for? You were obviously exhausted, so I let you sleep.”   
  
“But, I…I have to work.”   
  
Feeling his body tense from the knowledge of what Justin’s work implied, Brian smiled awkwardly and said, “I thought it was your day off.”   
  
Becoming a little uncomfortable with the sudden shift in the brunet’s mood, Justin stood and began to strip off his sweatpants and wife beater, tossing them aside as he strode into the bathroom, calling back over his shoulder, “Yeah, it was, but that was the day and this is the night. I don’t have the night off.” Then he started the shower and got in, enjoying the feel of the hot spray as it cascaded down his body. He wasn’t used to being accountable to anyone and was happy for the escape from Brian’s prying questions.   
  
“Well, maybe I’ll have to do something about that then,” the older man said, startling Justin as he quietly stepped into the enclosure and wrapped his arms around his waist.   
  
Turning around, Justin came face to face with the man that he’d longed to be with and couldn’t help but smile. “Brian,” he said sweetly, “I’m sorry, but I have to go to work. It’s just the way things are.”   
  
Nodding, Brian lowered his gaze and replied, “I…I don’t like it.”   
  
Justin was a little taken back by the direct response, and had to remind himself that the Brian before him was NOT the same Brian that had thrown him out of his loft and his life those many months before. This was a different man. One that had also suffered, just as he had, just in a different way. “I understand, but…” He didn’t know what more to say.   
  
Silently…for the right words just didn’t exist…Justin allowed Brian to wash him. The gentleness and sensuality filled the small stall as it seeped and wove its way deep into the two men, leaving their senses reeling on overload. The sexual energy was palpable, but neither one acted upon it, fearing that once they started, they wouldn’t be able to stop. And knowing where Justin was headed and what he was about to do made both of them feel a little uneasy and a lot unsure of what the future held and how they would get it.

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“So, um, I guess I’ll see you soon?”   
  
“Uh, yeah, soon.”   
  
“A-are you busy tomorrow night?” Brian asked, feeling awkward as he stood just outside of Justin’s apartment door before leaving the man to go to work.   
  
“I have to work,” Justin said, not able to miss the way that Brian’s face instantly fell. “But, I’m off the following day and night.”   
  
“Well, okay, how about dinner then?”   
  
“Are you asking me out on a date, Mr. Kinney?” the blond asked, playfully batting his eyes.   
  
Laughing softly, Brian replied, “Yeah, I guess I am.”   
  
“Well, then, I guess I’ll just have to say yes. Why don’t you pick me up here at around six o’clock.”  
  
“Great, six o’clock it is.” Slowly Brian leaned in, placing a sweet kiss against Justin’s full, ripe lips, moaning quietly when he felt the blond’s tongue slip out and glide over his sensitive flesh.   
  
“Until then,” Justin whispered as he moved back and smiled, one of his trademark best. And as he watched the smile being returned before Brian turned and walked away, he couldn’t help but feel that maybe things were looking up. Maybe he was going to finally get what he so desperately longed for.

Part 4

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“Cynthia, I’m leaving.”   
  
“Okay, have a great dinner, Brian and be good.”   
  
“I’m always good. Ask anyone,” the handsome man said with a wicked smile.   
  
“I’m sure. But remember what I said. Second chances don’t come along every day. Don’t fuck this one up.”   
  
Brian nodded and took in the serious look on his assistant’s face. She knew where he was going and with whom. Over the past year or so, after Justin had left, Brian finally caved in one day, when he was at the end of his rope and told her what’d happened. He knew he could trust her. She would never betray him and that trust and friendship had grown even more over time. And when she’d agreed to relocate to New York with him, he couldn’t have been happier. He didn’t know what he would have done without her.   
  
“I won’t fuck it up, Cynthia. I can’t. I just can’t.”   
  
Offering up her most supportive smile, Cynthia left Brian’s office and hoped, for the sake of her boss and probably Justin too, that this time the men would find a way to make it work. They just had to.

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“Justin, you look beautiful.” Brian’s breath caught at the sight of the incredible man that greeted him at the door. Justin was dressed in a casual but fitted pair of black on black pinstripe Armani slacks and a sky-blue round neck cashmere sweater. The pants hugged him in all the right places and the sweater’s neckline dipped down ever so slightly giving a glimpse of the flawless, pale skin that was just begging to be touched.   
  
“So do you,” Justin said with a smile, his eyes running first downward then up the long, lean body. Brian was impeccably dressed in a pair of charcoal gray trousers that fit as if they were made specifically for his body and a slightly deeper matching shirt that looked like the silk had been poured over his torso, just waiting to be peeled off.   
  
Absently Justin licked his lips, and Brian felt himself harden, tenting his pants slightly. He was unable to hold back a moan when Justin’s eyes lowered, taking in the growing bulge, then raised and locked with his, giving him a glimpse of the incredible lust glowing in the blue depths.   
  
“Later,” Justin promised.   
  
“Later,” Brian sighed.

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“This place is amazing. The artwork is incredible. Thank you for bringing me here, Brian.”   
  
“You’re welcome. I knew you’d like it.”   
  
“I do.”   
  
“I’m glad.”   
  
With every word, the two men seemed to be drawn together until they were merely a breath away from being joined.   
  
“The food was delicious,” Justin whispered.   
  
“Mmm, it was.”   
  
“But I can think of something that I know would be even tastier,” the blond purred.   
  
Furrowing his brows in mock ignorance, Brian asked, “I can’t imagine what you’re thinking of.”   
  
Smiling seductively, Justin replied, “Me.”   
  
Nodding, Brian returned the smile, moving so that his lips were now pressed lightly against the other man’s and said, “I think you’re right.”   
  
Having already paid the check, Brian stood and held out his hand to Justin, feeling a surge of happiness pass through him as the younger man stood and placed his hand in his.   
  
Weaving their fingers together the couple headed out of the restaurant.

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“It’s really nice.”   
  
“Thanks, I haven’t had too much time to get everything, but it’s slowly coming together,” Brian answered, handing a beer to Justin then settling on the sofa.   
  
“Mmm, I guess moving to New York and setting up house can be oh, so tedious,” the blond said with a wave of his hand and a fake snotty accent, earning him a laugh from the other man.   
  
“Yeah, well, it can be when you know that something is missing and you’d do anything to get it back where it belongs.”   
  
The smile faded from Justin’s face as he took in Brian’s seriousness. He nodded and moved off to look out of one of the large windows that faced the city. “These window’s remind me of the loft,” he said quietly, jumping slightly then settling as he felt Brian come up from behind and embrace him.   
  
“I know. It’s what sold me on the place. It made it feel kinda like I was home.” Brian’s arms tightened and he said, “But now it feels even more like it. With you…in my arms…it feels…it feels right.”   
  
Again Justin nodded. He was so overcome with emotion that he knew if he tried to speak he’d start crying. Taking a deep breath, he tried to lighten the mood. “So, does this place have a bedroom?”   
  
“Your wish is my command.”   
  
“Oh, I like the sound of that,” Justin said playfully, letting Brian lead him into the bedroom and smiling when he saw the familiar blue tubes of light hung over the bed. “I see that some things never change.”   
  
“Oh they do change. But sometimes, when you know what’s right, there’s no need to mess with it.”   
  
The look in Brian’s eyes let Justin know that he was talking about much more than lights and once again the blond was grateful that he was there, with Brian, getting another chance at happiness.   
  
Wordlessly, Brian moved forward, closing the small gap between them, his eyes never leaving Justin’s.   
  
Nervously, Justin began, “Bri…I…”   
  
“Shhh, just relax,” the older man said softly as his hands ran slowly and sensuously up and down the younger man’s back. With every stroke, they moved closer and closer to Justin’s perfect ass, forcing the blond to hold his breath with anticipation of that moment when they would actually make contact. And when they did, he shuddered out a long and shaky breath as his eyes closed and a low moan escaped his parted lips.   
  
“Baby, breathe,” Brian purred, barely remembering to do the same as every nerve in his body was on fire. His eyes washed over Justin’s face, delighting in fact that once again he had the man with him. “You’re so fucking beautiful.”   
  
Justin’s blue eyes fluttered open and he smiled, loving the raw emotion so clear in Brian’s words. He opened his mouth to speak, but was so scared to say what he was feeling. So scared that maybe it was all a dream and at any minute he’d wake up and be alone, in his bed, without Brian.   
  
“What?” Brian urged, sensing the need in the other man.   
  
Justin’s eyes flitted downwards cautiously, and when he looked back, once again locking his gaze with Brian, he was amazed that what he found in the older man’s eyes was what he’d been dreaming of and longing for. Taking a deep breath and slowly releasing it, he said, “I’ve missed you.”   
  
The instant smile that beamed across Brian’s face was the best response that Justin could have ever hoped for. The words that came next were just a bonus. “I’ve missed you too. I thought I’d never get to hold you again. Never be with you…like this. I’m so sorry, Justin. I hope that you can forgive me.”   
  
Sadly, the blond shook his head, dropping his eyes again, needing to tear away from Brian’s knowing gaze. “How could you want to be with me now? After what I’ve done…what I’ve become. How can you even look at me?”   
  
Taking the younger man’s chin in his hand, Brian raised it, forcing Justin’s eyes to meet his and feeling a searing pain in his heart at the unbelievable pain so clear in the man’s tear filled eyes. “Justin, you did what you had to, to survive. Trust me, I’ve done a thing or two growing up that I’d rather forget, but when you think that you’ve got no other choice, there’s no other way, you do what you need to. It doesn’t change who you are…not in here,” Brian said, gently brushing his hand over the other man’s heart. “And it doesn’t change the way I feel about you…in here.” Moving his hand he held it over his own heart, wanting and needing Justin to understand what he was trying to say.   
  
“Oh, Brian.”   
  
As the tears rolled down Justin’s cheeks, Brian quickly thumbed them away then placed a gentle kiss against the younger man’s irresistible mouth. “You’re still the one I want, Justin. The only one I’ve ever wanted.”   
  
Justin’s head was spinning. He couldn’t believe that Brian wanted him, no matter what he’d done. Deciding that sometimes, actions really were better than words, he pressed forward, his right hand snaking up behind the taller man’s neck and pushing downwards until their lips met in a fiery, passionate kiss. His other hand moved downward and tugged out the hem of Brian’s shirt then slipped inside, needing to feel the warmth of the man’s long missed flesh.   
  
The low and feral moan that bubbled from Justin’s chest and the almost desperate growl that flew from Brian’s throat mixed together inside the frantic mouths. Their tongues dueling mercilessly, searching for every single nuance…every forgotten taste of the other’s mouth.   
  
Breaking apart, the need for air overtaking all else, chests heaving and hearts racing they once again locked gazes. The desire and desperate need for each was so pure and raw in their clouded and glazed over eyes.   
  
“I want to make love to you,” Brian breathed.   
  
For a single moment fear coursed through every fiber of Justin’s body. He hadn’t been with anyone else since Brian. Hadn’t let anyone inside of him. And he’d heard the words that the other man said. Not fuck…make love. He knew the difference and apparently now so did Brian. Calming himself, he let his hands wander to the buttons on the older man’s shirt and began to undo them. “I want that too…but…just take it easy, okay?  
  
“Like the first time?” the brunet asked, the edges of his lips turning up slightly for a split second.   
  
Nodding gently, Justin smiled and replied, “Yeah, but even better.”   
  
Brian understood.   
  
Slowly they removed each other’s clothes. Touching, caressing, tasting every bit of newly revealed skin. The room seemed to be blanketed in a fog of lust and desire, growing more and more dense as their passion built.   
  
Finally naked, Brian eased Justin backwards and onto the large bed, flipping on the blue lights and gasping at the sight before him. The deep richness of the dark velvet duvet contrasted so perfectly against the blond’s porcelain skin. “God, you’re even more amazing than I remembered,” Brian said in awe as he looked down upon the man adorning his bed.   
  
Justin didn’t say a word. His shining eyes and beaming smile said it all.   
  
Smoothly, like a giant cat moving in on his waiting prey, Brian gracefully moved up Justin’s body, sliding against every inch of the younger man’s heated flesh as he went.   
  
“Brian,” Justin sighed with relief when the man was finally lying fully on top of him. Every part of the taller man molding into him. “You feel so good.”   
  
“Mmm, you too, baby.”   
  
“Brian, please, touch me,” Justin begged. It’d been so long since he’d wanted anyone to touch him. And now, lying beneath the other man’s warmth and security, he couldn’t focus on anything else but the incredible need to feel Brian’s hands roam all over him.   
  
Sensuously slow, Brian rained touches and kisses and licks and even gentle bites all over Justin’s supple skin, egged on by the incredible sounds pouring from the younger man’s lips. Soft, low moans and loud primal growls filled the air. Brian loved the way the blue eyes fluttered closed but continued to move as the feelings raging through the younger man overtook his body. The strong, lithe form writhed on the bed, his back arching high into the air and his hips rocking upward, trying desperately to relieve the ache in the deep-red erection that continuously seeped precum from the bubbling tip.   
  
Purposely Brian avoided Justin’s cock , gently brushing against it in passing on his endeavor to devour his body. He smiled each time he’d teasingly pass by, hearing the loud groan rumble from the frustrated blond.   
  
“Bri…please…I need…oh, God, I need you to…”   
  
“What, baby? Tell me.”   
  
Fighting to open his eyes but wining the battle, Justin’s blue orbs locked onto the deep-green ones hovering over him. The warmth and love that radiated from Brian was unmistakable and Justin knew that he’d never be able to do without those feelings again. Sighing contentedly, he shyly asked, “Please, make love to me.”   
  
Reaching across to the nightstand, retrieving the lube and a condom, Brian quickly opened and donned the latex sheath then squeezed a generous amount of lube onto his fingers, tossing the tube aside. Warming the slick fluid, the men never broke their gaze as gently, Brian inserted the tip of his slender finger into Justin’s hole.   
  
Gasping at the intrusion, the blond quickly recovered and smiled slightly then purred as the remainder of Brian’s long digit slid inside. Fighting desperately to keep his eyes open, needing to keep that connection, Justin moaned with delight as his lover’s finger began to pump in and out of him, loosening the tight channel, adding a second and then third finger along the way.   
  
Justin laughed out loud unexpectedly at the thought that kept running through his mind. ‘Brian…my lover…Brian.’   
  
“What’s so funny?” the older man asked, perplexed by the outburst.   
  
“Nothing…everything…I’m just so…so happy,” Justin panted, his face beaming and his eyes shining brightly.   
  
“So am I, Sunshine…so am I.”   
  
And with those words, Brian, so overwhelmed with love and need, pulled his hand away, took hold of his aching shaft, positioning the head against the relaxed opening and gently pushed in.   
  
“Ahhhhh,” Justin shouted, losing the battle as his eyes slid shut and his back arched sharply off the bed, forcing Brian even deeper into his slightly spasming channel.   
  
“Oh, fuck…Justin…Justin.” Brian was lost, drowning in the ecstasy that raced through his body. The warmth and tightness that surrounded him felt like home. Like he was finally home.   
  
They both knew that their first time together was going to be over much too soon. As the feelings…the overwhelming feelings that raced through them seemed to heighten their arousal to a fiery state.   
  
Trying to remember to breathe seemed extremely difficult for both men as they rocked against each other, wanting and needing to get impossibly deeper and closer with every thrust.   
  
“Bri…I…I…argghhh,” Justin moaned. With every move Brian’s sweat slicked body slid against his, rubbing deliciously against his pulsing cock. And the feeling of having the man inside of him, of being filled by him, it was so…so….   
  
“Yeah…baby…so good…so fuckin’ good.” Brian couldn’t believe how much he’d missed being inside of Justin. He never wanted to leave. But…but…”Oh, God, Justin…I…”   
  
“Yeah, Brian…come with me…ahhhhhhh…now…NOW!”   
  
“Yyyeeaaaahhhhh.”   
  
For both men it felt as if their bodies had exploded into a million little pieces, and each of those smaller pieces exploding once again. The pleasure was unimaginable and seemed to go on forever, leaving them both spent and trembling against the other.   
  
“Urrrghhhh,” Brian groaned, losing all control over his seemingly boneless body as it slumped down against the smaller man beneath him, earning him a satisfied sigh from the blond.   
  
No words were necessary. They’d said it all with their bodies and as they finally calmed and began to recover from the mind altering experience, Brian lifted slightly and rolled sideways, his softened dick slipping from Justin’s still spasming hole.   
  
“Briiaannnn,” Justin whimpered, sad for the loss.   
  
“Sorry, baby, but I didn’t want to flatten you.” Tenderly his hands swept up and down the length of Justin’s left side, brushing over the damp, smooth skin. But as his fingers brushed over the blond’s hip, he felt a roughness that seemed out of place. Looking down at the spot, Brian’s eyes widened in surprise at what he found.   
  
“Justin?”   
  
The younger man felt like he was floating. It felt amazing. The slight tickle of Brian’s fingers playing across his skin was so…calming…so…   
  
“Justin?”   
  
Instantly brought out of his happy daze, Justin felt himself falling and crash landing as he heard his name and felt his lover’s fingers moving against his hip. He knew what he’d discovered. Taking a deep breath and slowly releasing it, Justin steadied himself as he replied, “Uh, yeah?”   
  
“What’s this?”  
  
Knowing exactly what Brian was referring to but really not wanting to get into it right then, not after what they’d just done, he played dumb. “What?”   
  
“Justin, don’t,” was all the brunet said, his tone forceful yet soft at the same time.   
  
Opening his eyes, the younger man looked down to see Brian’s finger brushing over the tattoo of the broken cowry shell. He knew he had to explain.   
  
“Brian, you have to understand. I didn’t think I’d ever see you again. And my life, it wasn’t what you’d call happy or pleasant. So I did what I had to do. I needed a reminder of what you got when you gave yourself to someone. When you gave your heart.”   
  
Brian’s eyes flickered between the white tattoo and Justin’s sorrow filled eyes. He did understand. He’d fucked up. He’d been given this precious gift and had been too fucking blind to see it for what it was. Well, not anymore. He wouldn’t be that stupid again.   
  
As his fingers continued to trace the raised pattern on Justin’s hip, he knew that there was only one thing…one thing that would make his life complete. Taking a deep breath and summoning all the courage he possessed, Brian said, “Justin, I want you to come home.”   
  
Completely stunned, wondering for a moment if he’d actually heard correctly, Justin didn’t say a thing.   
  
“Justin?” Brian asked, beginning to panic from the imposed silence.   
  
“Yes.” Just one single word, whispered into the darkened room was all that was said.   
  
It was all that was needed.

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Several months later…   
  
“Brian, what if someone recognizes me?”   
  
The older man turned, surprised to find his lover’s face full of fear and apprehension. He hadn’t seen that look in a while. Slowly he crossed the short distance between them, wrapping his long arms around the small waist and pulling the blond head lovingly against his chest. “Baby, it doesn’t matter. That was a lifetime ago. All that matters is now…here…you and me.”   
  
Sighing contentedly, Justin knew that Brian was right. There was nothing he could do. He didn’t have a magic wand or time machine. He couldn’t change the things that were, only focus on the things that were to come. “Thanks. You always make me feel better, Bri,” the younger man purred.   
  
“I remember a cocky young twink telling me something one time when I asked him what he was doing, he said, ‘Waiting for you.’ And that’s all I’ve been doing my whole life, baby. Just waiting for you.”   
  
Justin reached up, placing a sweet kiss against his lover’s lips and smiled.   
  
“Now, let’s get the hell out of here before we miss it all.”   
  
Groaning, Justin allowed himself to be pulled out of the door, then into the limo that was waiting by the front door of their building.   
  
“Bri, you didn’t have to get a limo. A cab would’ve been fine.”   
  
The older man looked at his partner incredulously and said, “Justin, this is your night, and everyone will be there to share it with you. I couldn’t have the star of the evening arriving at his first big gallery show in a cab. What have I always told you? App…”   
  
“I know, I know…appearance is everything. You never get a second chance to make a first impression. Okay, I get it. I’ll shut up now,” the drama queen said, flopping back in his seat and huffing out loud.   
  
The smile on Brian’s face was priceless. His baby was back alright, and with a vengeance.   
  
The evening couldn’t have gone better. Everyone that mattered was there. Jennifer, Molly and Daphne had made the trip to see his work. So had the gang from Pittsburgh…as Justin had reconnected with them all shortly after getting back with Brian. He didn’t tell them about The Quoin. He didn’t feel the need for them to know.   
  
The critics were out in full force and the buzz around the crowded gallery was one of praise and worship of the incredible talent that the young artist possessed.   
  
There were a few tense moments throughout the evening when Justin found himself caught in the stare of a familiar face from his past. But just as the panic was about to set in, he’d feel them, Brian’s arms, as they wrapped possessively around his body…and he knew that he’d be alright.   
  
“I think that we might just sell everything here, Justin.”   
  
The blond smiled and looked up at his lover, seeing the same thrilled expression on his beautiful face, then back at the man who was speaking. “Wow, that’s amazing, Gary. I can’t believe it.”   
  
“Well, believe it. Like I’ve been telling you for months now, you’re talent is wonderful. Fresh, innovative and remarkable,” the gallery owner said with unmistakable confidence in the artist.   
  
“Thanks, Gary. Thanks so much.”   
  
Nodding in response, the man walked away, eager to make sure that they DID sell every one of the pieces there that night.   
  
“Hey, Justin, I was wondering something.”   
  
“What was that?” Justin asked, turning in his lover’s arms to face Michael, his body tensing slightly, never too sure of what the other man was up to.   
  
Brian felt the change in Justin and tightened his arms slightly, reassuringly.   
  
“Why did you call the showing ‘Escape’? I don’t get it.”   
  
Justin’s mind drifted back over the past few years…meeting Brian…being outed at school…coming out to his parents…losing his home…losing Brian…then finding him again. He knew the answer and as he relaxed, letting his body settle against the man behind him, he said, “Because life is a series of escapes, Michael. So choose them wisely because sometimes, you don’t get a second chance.”   
  
“And sometimes, you do,” Brian whispered against the softness of the silky blond hair.   
  
‘Yeah, sometimes, you do.’