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Point of View ~ Warning: M-preg

by [GaleandRandy](#)

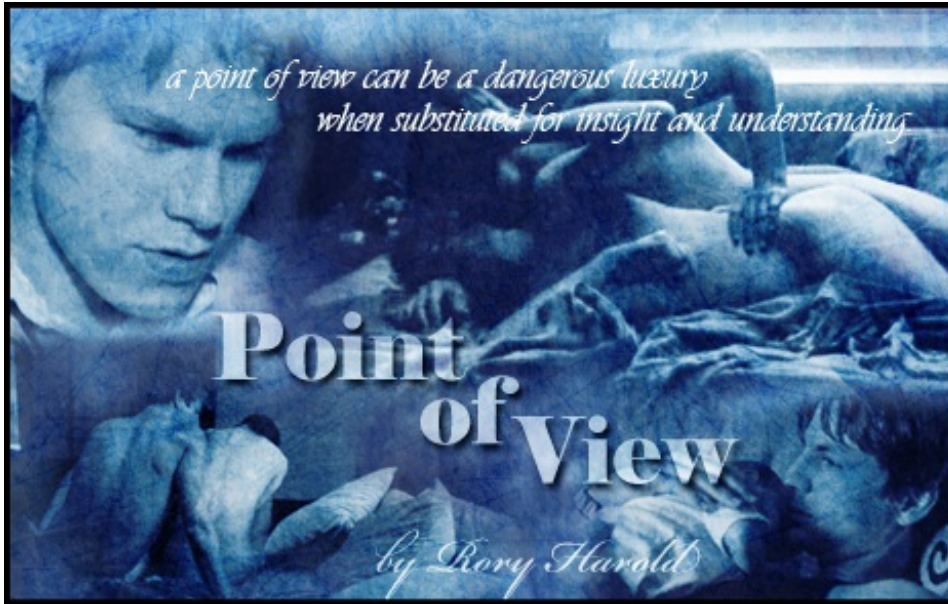
Summary

Summary:"Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with the absolute truth" -Simon de Beauvoir

Notes:This fiction contains male pregnancy and all that comes with having children. It is alternate universe. If at any point in the first chapter you feel that you need to stop reading because you think that Brian and Justin will not be together in the end, don't stop. Brian and Justin will be together in the end. I wouldn't write it any other way. This fiction will begin in January of '07 and continue on. However, in between each present scene will be a scene from the past that in some way connects with the present. Whether you get that connection now or later in the story. This story is written in this order to provide you with a good, unpredictable (for the most part) story that will keep you guessing, will throw you and will make you cry. If you can only read fiction in chronological order then you will be wasting your time with one. The only chronological order is the scenes taking place in the present.

WARNING: Male Pregnancy

Chapter One: "Hurricane"



Point of View Chapter One: "Hurricane"

Tuesday, January 2nd, 2007

Brian's P.O.V.

*Skies ripped open by the sun
Daylight comes but not soon enough
Speed down your track in search of you
Strapped to the back of what we do*

*Anesthetize these troubled nerves
Over to you to make it work*

What do you do when your children's smiles only seem to evoke pain in your heart? How can I be happy about a new life coming into this world when it will surely bring my life, as I know it and love it, to an end? Will that life, that ironically beautiful piece of him and I, know that I wished its existence terminated? Who will I become when it all ends?

Every day seems to stretch into the next in an agonizing, tortured pace. Yet still, I want to slow each moment down. I want to beg the wheels of time to remain as they are. If it did, I would surely smile as I watch my children's faces turn up in delighted expression. I would not resent the life that is growing inside my lover, but cherish the excitement of its pending arrival. Nevertheless, time keeps ticking by and the baby is kicking, moving, living, and pulling the very life from my husband each passing second. And the kids, completely oblivious to our family's Shakespearean level of tragedy, keep on smiling.

I wonder when it will all just *stop*. But really, I don't. I *know* when it will. The scheduled caesarian section is like a scheduled hanging of a man everyone knows to be innocent. Tomorrow, it all may end for him, for us, for our family. He is the one who binds us together. Without him, I don't

think we'll... *I'll* be able to continue with a life that remotely resembles the one we have. I'm not being overly dramatic here. I'm being realistic. I've had months, upon months, to think of what I'll do and how the fallout will settle and eat away at our memories, propelling us into a blind, numb state of being. Being is not living.

The doctors give odds of survival as if the small percentage of hope will be enough to cling to when the outweighing odds rip your life from you without a second's pause. The choice to continue with the little life and abandon the larger, life saving, death-creating measures was never ours to own. Though his specialist pretended as if it were.

The blame for this reality is mine and mine alone. It may take two to tango, but it only takes one idiotic misstep to make everyone on the floor stop dancing through life. It only takes one minute of stupidity, grief, fear and longing to create a natural disaster so devastating that it leaves everyone barely standing, only swaying until exhaustion forces everyone left to give up.

No begging or pleading ever got me anywhere. I should have known that if I stooped to that level, **he** would have continued to be the person I love. He would have given me an answer filled with the integrity and strength that wound itself around him and enchanted me into loving him.

I am supposed to be all the things I know he is, but it isn't in me. I cannot bring myself to the point that life has beckoned us to for the last thirty-eight weeks. What is worse than the initial impact is that my children will not only lose him, but they'll lose the child I know and love as my own, but who isn't.

His biological father will never allow him to stay with us, he hates me and I think now is the only time he's ever been glad not to be in my place. I wish, not for the first time since our lives have intertwined, that I could be that man. It must be nice to be an unaccredited character in this tragic play. I suppose though, he might be worthy of a courtesy nod.

I have so many questions that I desperately need answers to. How will I bring home a new life from a birth surrounded by complete and total despair and death? How will I be a father to another child that will undoubtedly have his smile? How in the fuck can I live without him?

He keeps telling me to remain hopeful, as if I haven't seen the letters he's written to each one of us that we will all receive at some point after the departure he has already accepted as truth. How can I be a parent without him? None of this was in my perfectly planned life. Then again, neither was he, at least not in the beginning.

He doesn't look or feel like himself. The only thing on him that looks healthy is his ever-growing abdomen, but naked, even that shows the taint of the disease. Bruises started to appear on his body six weeks ago, and that is when the doctor told us in happy, false-hope filled voice, that we would need to 'set a date'. As if, we were all going to go out for ice cream or something as incredibly delightfully, mundane and forgettable.

His favorite is rocky-road, which I suppose is fitting.

"Brian?"

I turn and look at him. He's smiling at me, but it doesn't reach his eyes.

"Yeah?" My voice sounds like I'm choking on a dirty rag. He probably hasn't heard the real timbre in my words spoken to him in a long time. I hope that doesn't frighten him as much as it does me.

"Come here and feel this." He reaches one hand out, the other pushing the three blankets covering his deteriorating body away from him.

"I should go check on the kids," I tell him. It hurts to look at him, to touch him at all. I know I am an evil man for not wanting to feel my own child move within my husband, but I cannot stop the urge to run.

"Brian, please. They're fine outside playing and having a great time with their Grandma. Can't you hear them laughing? They're happy. They *need* to be happy."

'They won't be for a long time,' goes unsaid, but we're both thinking it. I'm jealous that the kids are so carefree. I don't want them to be sad; there will be time for that later. But, I still wish I could be them right now. "Yeah, they need to be happy," I reply.

"They are. So, come here," he whispers.

I sigh deeply and slowly approach him. I sit on the bed so carefully. He looks like he'll break if I make the wrong move. I try to look away from the bruises on his stomach, the ones the child in him is unknowingly creating. It's sick. This isn't supposed to happen. I'm supposed to want to see the movement, not fear it and wish it would stop.

"Brian, just..." he stops his words and takes a deep rattling breath. "Can you just touch me?"

I feel my heart break, I feel a knife slice my throat and I want to die. Right now I hate myself more than I ever thought was possible. I look through my tears to see his beautiful face. For the first time his smile reaches his eyes and he really does look like the man I married. Then, I feel the baby moving under our hands. He isn't the man I married; he's more than the man he was, he's more of a man than I think I'll ever be.

His skin is still so soft, and I feel a foot under my palm, then a knee kicking out, held inside his body, under his thin mottled colored skin. His eyes have pain in them now and I want to be angry with him again, but I can't be.

"Brian," he gasps.

I nod my heavy head, not able to speak because of all the emotions that wreak havoc on my mind and because I'm afraid of what I'll say. I'm afraid of the hurricane in my heart.

"You will..." he stops and looks outside and then back to me and shakes his head. "You will love this baby too, right?"

I move my head again but I don't know if I moved it up or down, or side to side. I can't utter a sound. I can't think straight when he's looking at me like that. I haven't been able to think straight in months.

"Tell me!"

His voice makes my entire body jump with fear and I can't move my lips, because I want to tell him the truth but I'm too scared of it. I don't want to hurt him more. The fact is that I resent the child, but will try my damndest not to once it's born, *once he dies*. I want to tell him that I'll do everything in my power to protect *all* of our children, just as he has. I want to tell him that I'd die for them just as he... "Yes," I finally speak. The word chases away the darkness for a few moments.

"I couldn't do it," my husband says, not for the first time. He takes my hand in his and kisses my shaking fingers with his dry lips.

"I know," I tell him. And I do. I really do know. I know because if it had been me, I would have done the same thing. But that doesn't make it better. That doesn't make the hours that loom before us, that will guide us into tomorrow, any easier to bear.

"I love you but I want you to know that even after I'm gone you can't just..."

"Don't give me that speech. Please, can you just tell me you're going to be okay?" I'm sitting closer to him now and my hands are wiping and pushing back the invisible bangs from his forehead. I imagine I'm pushing them out of his teary eyes.

"I've never lied to you Brian," he tells me and places my hands in his.

I have never been able to admit the same to him. "I want you to." I take my hands away, crawl closer to him, and take him into my arms. "Please," I beg him. "I give you permission, I'll forgive you." I'm shaking everywhere and I feel like my heart is going to burst out of my body. I want my body to be the one that dies. Not his, it isn't right.

"I can't Brian. I can't lie to you," he whispers and painfully turns onto his side so that I can spoon his body into my own.

Oh god, I think. He's so small, *so fucking small*. I feel like I barely have anything to hold on to when I tighten my arms around his chest. Then he brings them down, sliding them until they rest on his round stomach.

"I love you. I'll love you forever," I whisper. I rub my hands over his belly, and there it is, the life, moving again, under our fingertips moving us forward.

And I feel like I can grasp it. I have to. I have to hold on.

Tuesday, September 2nd 1980
3rd Person P.O.V.

"Brian Kinney, this is, Justin Taylor. Why don't you sit down and get to know each other while we wait for the Welcome assembly to start?" Miss Janis spoke in a cheerful tone.

"Okay," Brian agreed. He sat down on the hard, cool gym floor beside the younger boy.

"Are you my fit grade buddy?" Justin asked and moved to sit Indian style, copying the brunet boy's position.

Brian shook his head. "Nope. I'm in the third grade but there weren't enough *fifth* graders to go around."

The little blond boy gave the older boy a confused look and asked, "What do you mean?"

Brian sighed in annoyance. "There are more kindergartners than fifth graders. So, some kindergartners have been assigned buddies in another grade."

"Oh." Justin twiddled the straps of his Mickey Mouse backpack and rocked back and forth nervously.

"Can you stop that?" Brian snipped.

Justin stopped moving and looked over at Brian. His bottom lip quivered and his blue eyes watered. "I wanna go home," he whispered and drew his knees up to his chest.

Brian rolled his big hazel eyes. "Well you can't. You're five years old and that means you have to be at school. If you miss too many days they'll be mad at your Mom and Dad and then they'll be mad at you."

"Mommy won't be mad. She said I could come home if I got sick," Justin spoke defiantly. He moved his backpack, put his small hand over his stomach, and rubbed it over his red Mickey Mouse overalls. "My tummy hurts."

Brian laughed. "You're just nervy. Weren't you here yesterday?"

"No, that's why I got a buddy today. I was sick like now. What's nervy?" Justin wondered. He hoped the bigger boy wasn't calling him a bad name.

Brian sighed in annoyance once again. "Don't you know *anything*? It means you aren't sick you're just anxious inside you."

"Oh. No, I didn't know that."

"Well that's what makes your tummy hurt. If you think of happy things you won't feel sick no more," Brian said matter of fact.

"I got a baby sister." Justin gave Brian a small smile. "She's cute."

"I got a big sister," Brian replied. "She went to High School this year. She's ugly."

Justin giggled and his smile grew brighter. "My sister cries a lot!"

"So does mine," Brian, joked.

"How old are you, Brian?"

"I'm eight, but I turn nine in April."

"I turn six in Feb...Febr..." Justin huffed. "What's that word?"

Brian grinned. "February. That's the second month of the year. April is the fourth month."

Justin nodded. "I know. I know that Month song." He sat Indian style once again and made one of his hands into a tiny fist.

Brian put his hand on top of Justin's and held it. "You don't have to sing it. I learned it in pre-school too. 'Sides, we're supposed to talk quietly until the assembly starts. Singing is too loud."

"Do we sing songs in Kindergarten?"

"Yeah, lots of them. But in 1st grade, you don't sing a lot. They make you read."

"I like reading," Justin said happily. "I read to my Mommy and Daddy and they read to me before bedtime."

Brian laughed. "You *can't* read yet."

"Yes I can," Justin said firmly. His bottom lip stuck out, but this time it wasn't because he felt sad.

"Really?" Brian opened the school handbook and opened it to the first page. "What does this say?"

Justin looked at the words and sounded them out in his head. "St. James Academy. Kindergarten, dash, eighth grade Handbook. Principal Janis Lockwood. Vice Principal Mary Jana..." Justin trailed off. "I can't read that one."

A broad grin spread across Brian's face. "Janogrowitch," he informed Justin. "But everyone calls her 'the witch' because she always yells at all the kids."

Justin put his hand over his mouth and giggled. "That's mean."

"She's mean," Brian, told him. "Stay out of trouble because she'll call your Mom and Dad over nothin'."

"I *can* read Brian," Justin reiterated.

Brian threaded his fingers through Justin's smaller ones. "Yeah. I guess I

got lucky and got a smart buddy. None of the other kindergartners can read you know?"

"Mommy and Daddy said they wanted me prepared."

Brian felt a little jealous that Justin had parents that helped him with school, even before he got to 'real' school. But he thought Justin was pretty cool for a little kid. "You talk good for a five year old," he commented.

Justin smiled at the praise from his buddy. "Why did you get to be my buddy Brian?"

"Because I make good grades and Miss Janis says I'm friendly."

Justin batted his dark lashes and nodded at Brian. "You are. I like holding your hand. It makes my tummy not hurt."

Brian smiled at the young boy. "Me too."

Brian's stomach hurt because his Dad punched him in it right after he ate breakfast. He hadn't meant to step on the little stale cheerio on the tile floor and rub it in. But, his Dad said he'd done it on purpose and Brian wasn't supposed to disagree with his Father but he accidentally did tell him he didn't mean to step on the piece of cereal. His Dad didn't like that and punched him in his tummy *really* hard.

Brian didn't have many friends at school. He was only able to go the expensive private school because he was very smart and his grandmother paid for it because it was where she'd gone to school. Most of the kids at St. James were mean to Brian because he didn't wear the 'cool' clothes or have any of the 'cool' toys to play with. His Mom never helped with the P.T.A. and never gave him snacks to bring on party days.

Justin was young, but Brian thought he read much better than students did in his grade. He thought Justin was pretty rad for a kindergartner and now that they were buddies, he'd have a friend to hang out with at school all the time. No one could make fun of him for it either. Being an assigned friend to a kindergartener was a special job that only special, super-cool students had. He hoped that Justin would continue to want to be his buddy; even though the nice clean clothes he wore told Brian that Justin was probably a rich kid too.

January 3rd 2007

Brian's P.O.V.

Agents of change set headfires
I'd rather starve than fake alive
Lost to the cities of the night
Lost in the world to make it right

"Brian?"

I look over to the passenger seat at my partner and frankly, it makes me want to puke. I've tried to keep my eyes on the road and not think about where we are going. I haven't been able to look at him much today. He looks worse as the sunlight streams in, highlighting all the sickness I see on his face, neck and twig-like fingers. "Yeah?" I take one of his cold, constantly sweating hands in mine.

"You missed the entrance," he whispers softly to me.

I snap my gaze back to the road and realize I'm at the end of the hospital block. I quickly turn the car around in a nearby drive way and head back to our destination. Thankfully, there is a space in the long-term lot, not too far from the doors. Even though it's nice outside, it's windy and I'm sure the way it's blowing it might make him fall over before I can get him into his wheelchair. "Stay in the car until I get everything," I order him.

"Okay," his voiced reply is strong and almost happy.

I hate him for being able to smile and be happy at a time like this. It isn't right.

I get the bag he packed, grab his wheelchair out of the trunk, and bring it over to his side. He opens the door and starts to climb out. "Hey... I told you to stay until..."

"Stop it Brian!" He bats my hands that are on his arms and hoists himself out of the car's seat and into the chair. "I can do it."

He did do it. I almost wish he couldn't, it would save me from thinking about how strong he is and how weak I am in comparison. It would save my mind from thinking there is hope when the chances of there being any at all, is in the single digits.

Fuck. Was that the last time his feet will touch the ground? Is this the last time he'll feel the sun warm his skin. Does he know that it is? Has he been counting off all the last things as I have? Does he know that the last time he brushed his teeth himself was last Friday? Was this morning the last time I'll comb his thin, dull hair? Does he know that six weeks ago is really the last time we'll ever make love? Does he realize that today was the last time I'll ever see him hold both of his children? Has he thought about the fact that he'll never see the kids hold the baby inside him?

"Brian." He can barely gasp my name through his always parched lips.

I grab his hand for a second. This won't be the last time I hold his hand, I tell myself. I have to stop behaving like this. I can see I'm scaring him. "I'm okay," I lie. I get him situated in the chair and put his bag onto his legs. He holds onto the straps with one hand and then he reaches back and covers one of mine with the other. This isn't the last time either, I think.

I push him up to the hospital. The closer we get to it, the more it looks to me like a prison. I feel like I'm condemning my husband, but I realize I did that long ago.

Friday, October 31st 1980
3rd Person P.O.V.

Brian knocked on door of the large, intimidating looking house. He'd seen the man that answered the door at the school's open house. "Hi, Mr. Taylor," he spoke softly.

"It's not time for trick-or-treaters buddy. We haven't got our candy..."

"I'm not here to trick or treat," Brian interrupted the man. He waved the two library books in his hands. "Justin forgot to take them home today."

"Oh, Justin had a doctor appointment and left school early. Why do you have them?" the man asked briskly.

"I'm Brian Kinney, Justin's 3rd grade buddy. Mrs. Noonan asked me to bring them to him. He's supposed to have you or Mrs. Taylor read them to him and return them to school on Monday. But I told her that Justin didn't need you to read them, because he can read almost as good as me," Brian said proudly.

"Who's here, Craig?" Jennifer called from inside the house.

"A kid from Justin's school," Craig replied. He didn't like the looks of the boy before him, even if he had complimented his son.

"Brian?" Jennifer said, coming over to the doorway. "Come inside."

Brian scuffled his feet nervously. "I.. I just came to drop these books off."

"Well come inside. Justin's upstairs in the playroom getting his costume on. I'm sure he'd like to show you."

Craig mumbled something unintelligible and walked back into the house.

Jennifer took the books from Brian, ushered him into the house and led him upstairs to Justin's room.

Brian looked around in awe at the home. He'd never been in any place that looked so nice. When Mrs. Taylor opened the door to the playroom, he almost squealed in delight. The room had bright colors painted on the walls and it was devoted only to toys. Tons and tons of toys.

"Justin? Where are you?" Jennifer asked. She walked over to the playpen and picked up her daughter who was dressed up as Minnie Mouse.

"Here I am!" Justin jumped out of the closet doors, dressed in a Mickey Mouse wizard costume. "Brian! What are you doing here?" He ran over to the older boy and gave him a big hug.

Brian uncomfortably extracted himself from the boy's embrace. Justin didn't know bruises covered his back and chest and that it hurt him to be touched. He winced but tried to cover the pain with a small smile. "I

brought your library books from Mrs. Noonan."

"Are you going to go trick or treating with us?" Justin didn't wait for Brian to answer. "Can he, Mom? Can Brian come with us?"

"Of course he can," Jennifer said. She was happy that Justin had Brian; he hadn't made many other friends at school or in their neighborhood. "But, I'd have to call your Mother and make sure it's okay."

"I don't have a costume," Brian said. He'd never been trick or treating before, he wanted to go, but his Mom and Dad always came up with excuses as to why they couldn't make or buy him something to wear for the holiday.

"That's okay," Justin said excitedly. "You can be a ghost! Mommy will make you one with an old sheet."

"Or we can cut up some sheets and make you a zombie," Jennifer suggested. "I've got some face paint left over from Justin and Molly. I can make you have a very scary face."

"Really?" Brian asked. "I don't wanna be trouble to you, Mrs. Taylor. My mom and dad wouldn't like it."

Jennifer looked at the boy and saw fear brimming in his hazel eyes. She'd met him a few times since school started and noticed how different he looked than the other kids. It wasn't just his ill-fitting, old clothing or towering height. His expressions always had hints of fear in them. She knew Brian was hiding something. Jennifer rubbed his silky auburn hair head with the palm of her hand. "You aren't any trouble Brian. Why don't I call your Mom and ask her if you can stay for dinner too."

"And a sleep-over?" Justin begged his mother.

Jennifer laughed at her son's enthusiasm. "Well, that's up to Brian and his mother."

Justin took Brian's hands and bounced in front of him. "You've got to stay, Brian! We'll have so much fun and Mommy will let us watch movies and make a tent in here. I've even got an extra sleepin' bag."

"Okay," Brian giggled, starting to feel the blond's excitement.

"If you give me your phone number I'll call your Mom Brian," Jennifer suggested. "Justin, you can go get those white and gray sheets from the chest in the guest room."

"Hooray!" Justin shouted and pumped his fists in the air.

Brian quickly spouted off his phone number and Jennifer left the two boys in the playroom and took her daughter into the den. "Craig, can you keep an eye on Molly? I'm going to call Brian's mother."

"Did he do something wrong?" Craig asked. He stood up from the couch and took his daughter in his arms.

Jennifer gave her husband a confused look. "Of course not. Why?"

"He looks like trouble," Craig commented and sat down on the floor with his daughter.

"Craig, I don't think Brian will be any trouble at all," she told him. She was unsure though if she should tell him what she observed in the boy. "I'm going to call his mother to see if he can go trick or treating with us and stay the night."

"Don't you think he's a little too....*old* to hang out with Justin?" Craig asked.

"Justin could use some friends. Brian's only three years older than he is so I don't think he's too old to play with our son. You don't think anything of James spending the night and he's five years older."

"That's different," Craig replied. "James is his cousin. Besides, I thought Frank's little girl was in his class. Isn't she going trick or treating with him?"

"Yes. Daphne's coming. But I think it'd be nice for Justin to have a boy be his friend. They spend time together every day at school. Brian's helped Justin out a lot Craig. He actually *wants* to go to school now. He hasn't had a stomach ache or asked to stay home for weeks."

"We don't know his parents," Craig told his wife in distaste. "He doesn't look like he lives in this neighborhood."

"Is that what your problem is with him?" Jennifer asked angered.

Craig sighed. "I just don't want Justin to be exposed to..."

"Stop it," Jennifer interrupted. "It doesn't matter where Brian lives. What matters is that he's nice to our son and our son likes him."

"Fine," Craig relented. "Have the kid over for the night."

Jennifer walked toward the kitchen. She called over her shoulder, "Remember Craig Taylor, you didn't come from this neighborhood either."

"Yeah, yeah," Craig sighed. He smiled a little realizing that Jennifer was right.

Jennifer picked up the phone and dialed the number Brian had told her. She almost lost hope that someone would answer after the fifth ring.

Finally, a rough, weary woman's voice came on the line. "Hello?"

"Hi, Mrs. Kinney?"

"I don't wanna buy anything," the woman spoke.

"I'm not selling anything Mam," Jennifer said quickly. "I'm Jennifer Taylor. Your son Brian, he's at my house. He's friends with my son,

Justin.”

“What’s he done now?” Joan asked, her words slurred together.

“Whatever it is I’ll make sure my husband gives him a firm talk.”

Jennifer felt a little flustered at the woman’s assumption. “He’s not done anything wrong. He’s a very kind, bright boy,” she felt compelled to say.

Joan laughed and slurred, “So why are you calling?”

“I wanted to ask permission to have Brian sleep-over with us tonight.”

“That’s fine,” Mrs. Kinney spoke quickly. “Just make sure he’s back for church Sunday morning.”

Jennifer was going to explain to the woman that she’d only meant for Brian to stay one night, but then she heard a man’s loud voice yelling on the other end.

“Who’re you yapping to now woman?”

“Mind your business Jack. It’s Brian’s friend’s Mother. She wants him to stay the weekend at her house.”

“I was gonna have the kid clean out the basement,” he roared. “But he can pay for it Sunday.”

“Okay Jack,” Joan spoke, her voice shaky. She turned her conversation back to Jennifer. “He’ll have to walk home Sunday. Our car broke down this morning.”

“That’s okay,” Jennifer spoke softly. “I can drive him home.”

“Don’t let him be no trouble to you. If he is, just send him home and my husband will teach him some manners.”

Jennifer tried her best to reel in her anger. She couldn’t understand the parent’s behavior. But, she didn’t want to cause the boy any problems at home. Or, more than it sounded like he already had. “I’m sure that won’t be necessary,” Jennifer spoke calmly. “Brian seems like a well-behaved boy and we’re happy to have him here.”

“I’ve got to get to my bridge club. Is there anything else you wanted?”

Jennifer wanted to ask the woman a million questions. But she didn’t.

“No, I’ll have my husband drive him home Sunday. Enjoy your weekend Mrs. Kinney.”

“You too,” Joan replied quickly and hung up.

Jennifer knew that she was a little over-protective of her children. She babied them a little more than needed at times and tried her best to keep Justin and Molly innocent to the world’s pain and hatred. Molly was only a little baby, but often Craig would chastise her for the abundance of care Jennifer gave Justin. But, hearing the woman on the phone and the man in the background made a sick, foreboding feeling spread

through her gut and chills to prickle up her spine.

Brian Kinney was in trouble and not by his own volition.

Jennifer found Justin and Brian sitting on the floor in the playroom. Unnoticed, she watched as they zoomed matchbox cars around each other. She assessed the auburn haired child and could see that Brian was a gentle, kind boy. When Justin had accidentally run his race car a little too hard over Brian's fingers, the child winced but didn't say a word to stop their play. He didn't lash out as many kids might. He didn't even bring her son's attention to his mishap, not even the third time.

"I've got the scissors." Jennifer held them up and walked into the playroom. "Who's ready to help tear some old sheets?"

"I am!" Justin spoke happily, rising to his feet.

Brian slowly stood up. "Me too Mrs. Taylor. Did...did you talk to my mother?"

"I did Brian," Jennifer told him. "She said that you can stay the weekend if you'd like. But I'll have to have you home Sunday morning in time for church."

"You want me to stay the *whole* weekend?" Brian asked.

"If you'd like to Brian," Jennifer replied.

"You wanna, don't you Brian?" Justin asked.

"Definitely," Brian said, smiling. "But I don't have any extra clothes."

"Well I've got some hand-me down's from Justin's cousin that he can't fit into yet. I'll dig those out for you, unless you'd like me to drive you home to get some."

"No," Brian said quickly. "I mean... well those clothes will be okay."

Jennifer pretended not to notice the flash of fear in Brian's eyes. Though, at this point, she was determined to find out why it was there. "Okay, well let's get your costume made."

Jennifer helped the boys cut and tear strips of sheets. She and Justin tied the pieces around Brian's knees. Then Jennifer gave Brian one of Craig's old flannel shirts they cut up to change into. As the boy took off his faded brown sweater, she sucked in a gasp.

Brian had forgotten that he wasn't supposed to change in front of people. For gym class he usually waited until all the other boys had gone into the gymnasium before he got into his uniform. But, with all the fun he'd been having with Justin and his mother, Brian was so excited to change into the last piece of his costume, he hadn't thought of the marks on his body.

"Brian," Jennifer spoke softly.

Brian held the flannel against his chest and backed away from Jennifer. "I'm sorry," he muttered and cast his eyes to the floor.

"What's wrong?" Justin asked, not understanding what his mother saw.

"Justin, can you go downstairs and ask Daddy to make some kool aid?"

"But I wanna see Brian with his costume," Justin groaned and pouted.

"You will," Jennifer said gently. She didn't want her son to be alarmed. "I'm really thirsty and I bet Brian is too."

"I'm thirsty," Brian mumbled. He didn't want to make Jennifer mad at him so he agreed with her.

Justin looked worriedly at his friend and then back to his mother. "Oooohkay," he relented and ran from the room.

Jennifer slowly approached Brian. Her heart broke into a million pieces when the little brunet boy flinched as she knelt in front of him and touched his arm. "Brian, I'm *not* going to hurt you."

Brian wasn't sure if he could believe the woman or not. He kept his eyes cast to the floor. "I'm sorry," he whispered.

"You don't have to be sorry Brian," Jennifer said in a firm but gentle voice. She moved the flannel shirt and got a clear look at the countless bruises and welts that ran across Brian's torso. "Who did this?"

"I can't tell you," Brian said.

"You can," Jennifer replied. She tilted Brian's chin up to look at her. "I won't hurt you Brian and I promise I'll do everything I can to keep you safe. Tell me who hurt you."

Brian's lip trembled and he fought the tears that sprung into his eyes. "Daddy," Brian whimpered.

"Oh Brian," Jennifer gasped. She wrapped her arms around the boy but backed off when he let out a small wail. "Brian?"

"I hurt here too." Brian slowly turned around and showed the woman his battered back.

Jennifer wiped the tears from her eyes, took Brian's hand, and turned him around. "Have you ever told anyone about this?"

"No," Brian said emphatically. "Mommy said I'd go to Hell if I talked bad about my Daddy to anyone. Am I going to go to Hell now?"

"No Brian. Your Daddy shouldn't have hurt you and your Mommy is wrong. This isn't right. You're a good boy. No one should *ever* hurt children."

"But...but sometimes I'm *really* bad. Mommy says I make Daddy angry all the time."

Jennifer sighed and gently hugged Brian to her. "No matter how angry you make anyone it doesn't give them the right to hurt you."

January 3rd 2007

Brian's P.O.V.

Heartbreak

Heartbreaking
Novocaine won't help the pain
I'm out of control
I'm a hurricane
Head and heart are broken down
Out of control, I'm in a hurricane
Hurricane

"You're going to feel a lot of pressure now," the doctor's voice rings through the room.

Pressure? He wouldn't know the meaning of pressure.

"Do you see the baby Brian?" My husband asks this as he breathes deep, labored breaths, inside the oxygen mask.

I don't want to take my eyes off him, but I do, I do it for him. I look over the sheet that is supposed to shield our view from the surgery. I have to brace myself as not to pass out at the sight. The doctor has his hands inside him and I can see a tiny little arm sticking out of the large incision.

"Do you see the baby Brian?" he prompts me again.

"They're pulling the baby out now," I confirm.

He smiles inside the mask and his eyes cloud with tears. "Take a picture when the baby comes out Brian."

I really don't want to, I've forgotten I even have the camera in my scrub's pocket, but he told me that just like with his other children, he wants the moment of their birth captured. I pull out the Polaroid camera and cautiously click the picture as they pull the baby out of him.

This isn't like Evelyn's birth and this isn't like Leighton's birth. I was excited, thrilled about those. I know I'm a fucking asshole for this, but I wish we weren't here right now.

"It's a girl!" a nurse yells excitedly.

Doesn't she know that this isn't a happy moment?

"Another girl Brian," he gasps and squeezes my hand.

I turn to watch as the woman brings the baby over, holding her out, next to her papa's head.

He turns and looks at the baby, still covered in goo, he kisses her chubby cheek anyway and she starts to cry. His free hand reaches up and he touches her cheek with his free hand, his fingers shaking from the drugs.

I don't know what to feel when I look at them together. I want to be happy that my daughter is born, alive and screaming as all newborns do. But I'm numb right now. Somehow, I manage to snap a couple pictures of him beside the crying infant. Everyone and everything else fades away as I watch him with her.

"Hold her," he says turning back to me. Tears stream down his sunken cheeks and he moves his breathing mask out of the way. "Let me see you hold her Brian, please," he speaks with a painstaking tired voice.

I start to put the camera back into my pocket, to free my hands so that I can hold the newborn. But the nurse holding our baby takes it from me and places the little wiggling bundle into my arms. I stare down at my child and don't even realize when the flashes of the camera are taken and I barely regard the nurse's words as I look at the tiny being in my arms. I examine her as best I can but then commotion begins around us that I cannot ignore.

"Brian!"

I look back to him and see a doctor covering his mouth with the mask again. His expression fills with fear.

"Let me take the baby, Mr. Kinney."

I look at the nurse as she holds out her arms and give the child to her willingly and she disappears from my sight. I don't even know where she takes her. I don't think I care in that moment because his eyes are closing and his grip on my hand is slack. I'm the only one holding on to us as the spinning world threatens to tear us apart.

I crouch beside him, my heart pounding erratically. I yell into his ear, "Wake up! Don't fucking leave me here now!"

His eyes pop open and meet mine for just a second. He looks at me as if he doesn't recognize my face and I think I scream at him when his eyes close again. I'm not sure though. I don't know what the fuck is happening. Then, everything is a blur. I'm ushered from the room, and the last thing I see before they close the door to the room is his slack, skinny arm hanging off the side of the bed.

Win some ground but I lose you
It's never explained how to make it through
No rope, no cash, no serpentine
All love buried on a bonfire

Thursday, December 25th 1980
3rd Person P.O.V.

Brian helped Jennifer make his bed with his brand new Alvin and the Chipmunks bedding. Justin had gotten the same set for his bed, doing away with the Mickey Mouse sheets because he wanted to be just like Brian. When they were finished, Jennifer sat on the bed beside Brian and asked, "Why haven't you opened any of your toys?"

Brian eyed the box of super hero action figures that sat on top of the other boxed toys on his desk. "Well you can't take them back if I unwrap them," he explained. "I don't even need to pick one out to keep."

Jennifer didn't understand this logic. "Of course not. Santa's not going to take them back. They're yours, hunny. You can have them all."

Brian looked Jennifer in the eyes. "I *know* Santa isn't real," he whispered. "I didn't tell you because I didn't want to ruin Molly and Justin's Christmas. You and Mr. Taylor can take them back now."

Jennifer shook her head. "Why would we do that?"

"Because presents are for good little boys and girls who don't cause their parents trouble. My parents bought them for Claire and me because Father Ronald always came for Christmas brunch. They didn't want anyone from the Church to know that we were bad. But sometimes Mom would let us pick out one gift to keep if we recited 'The Lord's Prayer' the way she wanted. Claire is better at it than me."

Jennifer's eyes filled with tears and she brought Brian into her arms. She kissed his silky auburn head and whispered, "You've not been bad Brian. You're always a very good boy. Craig and I bought you those presents because you deserve them. We want you to open every one and play with them. Unless, you want to return them and we'll get you something else if you don't like them."

Uncomfortable with the woman's touch, Brian wiggled out of Jennifer's arms. He looked longingly at the Christmas gifts. He saw the blond woman's tears and feared that he'd upset her. "I know you waste a lot of money on taking care of me. You and Mr. Taylor need the money from the presents."

"No Brian," Jennifer spoke softly. "I told you. We want you to have the presents. Parents take care of their children because they love them. It's a parent's job to give their child things they need. It's a parent's joy to give their children things they want. The money we spend is to make you healthy and happy. It is *not* a waste. Do you understand Brian?"

"But... but I'm not your child," Brian spoke.

Jennifer wiped her tears away and smiled at the little boy. "We're your foster parents Brian. You don't have to call us Mom and Dad if you don't want to. But, we'll still think of you as a son, just the same as Justin. We love you, Brian and that's reason enough to take care of you."

Brian's eyes widened as he looked at Jennifer. "You love me?"

"Yes," Jennifer affirmed and cautiously reached her hand out to hold Brian's. "I love you, Brian."

Brian slowly leaned forward and hugged Jennifer. It was one small step to learning to accept his new caregiver's love and comfort.

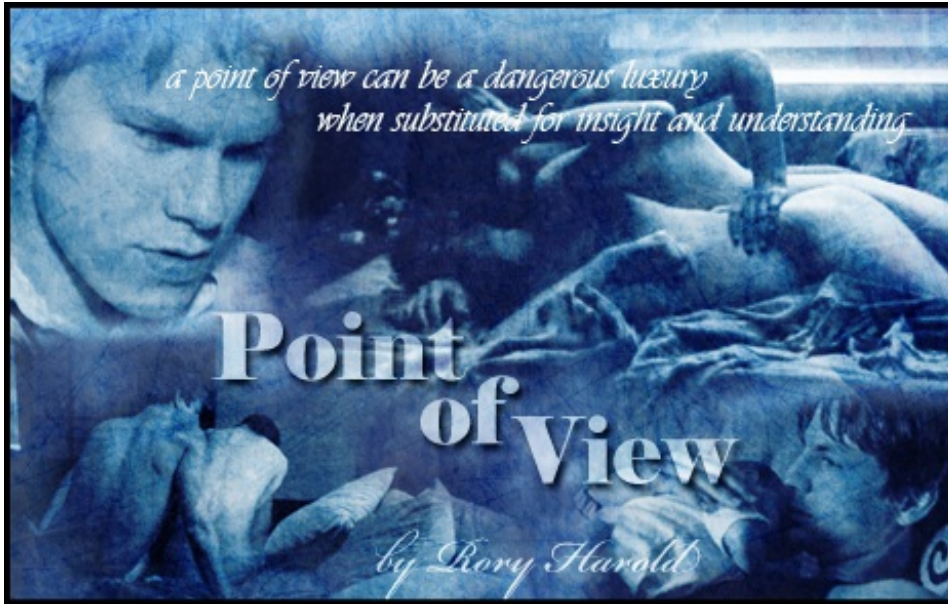
Justin ran into Brian's room. "Look Brian! I got my p.j.'s on! Now we match!"

Brian flinched away from Jennifer, looked at Justin's candy cane striped pajamas, and then down at his own. They were *just like Justin's*. "We match," he agreed.

Justin climbed up on the bed and bounced beside Brian. "This is the best Christmas ever!"

Brian smiled at Jennifer and Justin and declared, "It *is* the best Christmas ever!"

Chapter Two: "Cold Contagious"



Point Of View

Chapter Two: "Cold Contagious"

Brian's P.O.V.

Thursday, January 4th 2007

*Wherever you are, you will carry always
The truth of the scars
And the darkness of your faith,
Slowly move on,
How did we get to here,
It all went wrong,
Gravity claiming all your tears*

"Don't ever scare me like that again," I whisper to my husband.

He looks at me with a sad expression. "Brian... *don't* do this."

"Do what?" Yes. I know. Not only do I have a huge dick, but also I can be a huge dick too.

"They..." he moves the sleeping baby a little closer to his chest and looks down at her before he finishes his sentence. "Next time... it'll be for real."

I know how much saying those words took out of him. But, I don't want to hear this shit! I don't want him telling me that he's going to give up next time! I don't want a fucking next time! I don't want...

"I feel like I'm barely here Brian," he whispers, interrupting my thoughts with his small voice and pinning me down with his dimmed eyes. "I didn't want to die on the day she was born. I want you to celebrate that day."

"You're here," I tell him, taking his hand in mine. "You're here with me. It's going to be okay. You're going to celebrate that day with me next year and many years after that."

"Brian, please," his voice raises and his chest starts to move up and down rapidly. The baby wiggles around, not liking the way he's moving.

"Griffin?"

I turn and look at the man that just entered the hospital room. "What are you...?"

Griffin's hand squeezes my arm, as much as his strength will allow. "Come in," he tells the man. His tone is now a whisper and he's calmed down.

I glare as the man walks closer to the bed, his eyes scanning around the room. I can tell he's trying to put on a brave front, but that's too bad. This is the reality. Isn't it? That's what Griffin is telling me. This is it! He's giving up. He doesn't want a future with his family or me.

"Thank you for coming," Griffin tells him.

"Of course, Griff. I told you I'd be here," he says sweetly.

The asshole manages a smile and I want to rip it off his face. Who the fuck is he to smile at a time like this? Fuck him!

"Brian, why don't you go and get some coffee?"

"I'm fine," I lie.

"Then have a cigarette, or get some fresh air," Griffin suggests firmly.

I look at him as if he's lost his mind. "I'm not leaving you."

"I'll be here when you get back," his eyes promise me this, but his voice sounds so broken I'm not sure if I believe him. "I will," this time it's a stronger statement.

I look at the both of them and sigh before I get up from the hospital bed. I lean down and kiss Griffin with everything I have in me. One of his hands holds my cheek and his fingertips separate our lips.

I stare into his eyes and a million words pass between our glances before I turn my head away. I glare at the other man on my way to the door. My mind chants, *"He'll be here when you get back,"* and I close the room's door behind me.

November 1989
3rd Person P.O.V.

*Everything looks
So much better now*

Justin threw the blanket up over his chest. "Brian!"

Brian shut Justin's bedroom door behind him. "What?"

Justin tried to breathe evenly. "Can you go?"

"Why? I thought we were going to hang out." Brian walked toward Justin's bed but stopped in his footsteps when he noticed the sweat and flush of red on Justin's face.

"I'm busy, Brian."

Brian laughed and snickered, "I see that."

Justin rolled to his side and hid his face under his pillow. "Go away," he mumbled.

Brian sat down on the bed and removed the pillow. "You smell like sex," he teased in a raspy voice.

"Oh god," Justin groaned and covered his face. "Leave me alone."

Brian couldn't help but get hard himself. He shifted uncomfortably and turned Justin onto his back. "You don't have to be embarrassed. I'm hard too. I bet you get a boner just *thinking* about sex." He grabbed Justin's hand and pressed it onto his erection. "I do."

Justin snapped his hand away from Brian's groin. "Brian, that's gross. We're like brothers."

"We're *not* brothers," Brian whispered. He straddled Justin's legs and asked, "What were you thinking about when you were jacking off?"

Justin licked his lips and shivered against the feeling of Brian's hand sneaking under the covers and rubbing his stomach, millimeters away from his dick. "A guy," Justin spoke roughly.

Brian closed his hand around Justin's warm cock and tugged on it. "Duh," he laughed out. "Tell me about him."

Justin squeezed his eyes closed and arched into Brian's stroking. "He has the perfect body."

Brian leaned forward and put his face by Justin's ear. He whispered, "Take my cock out and stroke me too."

Justin opened his eyes and reached down to Brian's pants. He slowly opened the zipper of the brunet's jeans and reached his hand inside the black underwear. "Oh," he gasped aloud when he touched Brian's cock and pulled it out. "You have a really big dick," he said in awe.

Brian laughed, kissed Justin's cheek and squeezed the head of his dick between his fingers. "Yours isn't too bad either."

Thursday, January 4th 2007
Justin's P.O.V.

You will get yours
You have no right to ask me now
You were never that around
I have missed, reality day-trips and your
Suit me suit me ways

"Hey," I walk closer to Griffin once Brian closes the door behind us.

"Hi," he whispers to me, almost shyly. "I had a baby." His thin eyelashes bat as he looks down at his daughter and then back up at me.

"I see that," I chuckle. I look at the little baby and I think she looks just like Leighton and Evelyn. "She's definitely yours, Griffin," I tell him, smiling.

His expression darkens. "How are the kids?"

I let out a deep breath as my mind flashes to the scene I left at my mother's house. I have to lie to him, and it won't be the first time. "They're all fine. My mom bought them happy meals and they're watching Enchanted. You're sure you don't want me to bring them here?"

Griffin shakes his head. "No, they don't need to see me like this. They've seen enough sickness. Don't you think?"

I don't know what to say to that so I just shrug my shoulders.

"Did you tell them I was going to be okay?"

"No." Of course I didn't. I couldn't lie to them. I don't approve of the way Griffin's decided to go about all this, however. I'm angry with him for it, but how in the fuck can you go against a dying man's wishes?

"Did you tell them that I'm not coming home?"

That's what he wanted. But, I wasn't going to tell them that, because I have to believe that he still might. "They know you're still very sick and that you're worse than you were when you left for the hospital. But they also know they have a new little sister," I tell him softly as I move closer to him.

"I'm not going home ever again," he whispers.

I know what he's saying is true. I've known it for awhile, but until he spoke those words, I did have a little hope left in me. He shattered it, indefinitely. I try to hold back my emotions, but I feel a few rebellious tears escape my eyes and fall down my cheeks.

"You all right?" he asks.

"No." I wipe the tears away.

"You'll be okay though," he says so factually.

"I... I don't think so," I whisper.

"You will be, Justin. You're so strong, but I'm not sure about Brian." His eyes tear up but he blinks his eyelashes quickly, holding them at bay.

I gently lay my hand on his bony shoulder. "Brian's strong," I tell him in a nearly ironically weak voice.

"I know he is. He has been, but not now." Griffin shakes his head at me. "When the nurse handed her to him," both of his hands tighten on the baby bundled in his arms, "he wasn't even there."

"What do you mean?" I brush my fingertips along the little girl's beautiful face.

"He looked at her, but there wasn't any emotion in his eyes."

"He was probably just shocked." I'm not defending Brian; I just don't want Griffin to be worrying about this right now.

"No, he blames her," he whimpers out and takes a long deep breath. "He blames her for being born."

I can't believe what I'm hearing. "This isn't her fault, and he *has* to know that."

"He does, deep down. But in his heart, he thinks it's his fault. For now, he's blaming her because he doesn't know how to handle the situation."

"I don't think anyone would know what to do in his position." I sure as fuck don't have a clue as to what I'm supposed to do.

"He hasn't held her and he won't discuss names with me. Ever since we found out and I went off chemo, he hasn't been the same. Haven't you noticed that?"

I don't make a point to notice much about Brian anymore. "Maybe he's just scared," I say quietly.

"It's more," he stops and inhales a huge breath and gasps out, "than that. He really doesn't want anything to do with her, Justin. He's so terrified of her."

I've done my best not to see the sickness eating away at Griffin. I've had this image in my head of what he looked like and every time I've seen him, I put that image in the forefront of my brain to disguise the truth. But now, I suddenly see what has happened to him. My ex-husband, my ex-best friend and father of my child is wasting away. He's barely recognizable to the fake image I've perceived. Griffin is dying. He's *really* fucking dying!

"I've tried to talk to him about how he's going to go on after this. I'm going to die today," he grits out in a shaky breath.

"Please," I interrupt him. "Don't fucking say that, Griffin!"

"I have to tell someone," his voice raises in pitch again. "No one believes me. They don't think I can be so aware of what's going on inside of me. They don't think I know what has been eating me alive. I've connected with it, bargained with it, but I have nothing left to give it. It's stolen everything from me and I know that." He grabs the oxygen mask and puts it over his mouth for a few seconds to take rattling breaths of air. "Listen to me Justin," he speaks after setting the plastic beside him again.

I nod my head so he'll continue. I have nothing helpful to say. His desperation flows into my soul and I believe him. I don't want to believe him. But he is so certain and I will not make him feel like what he is saying is silly. He must know the truth of his fate. Because he looks like he's already dead. He has the knowledge one is said only to receive at the end of their life or in there after.

"I don't think Brian's going to be able to care for himself, let alone Evelyn and certainly not our baby. She'll be the last one he thinks about, if he can think." Again with oxygen.

"Brian wouldn't abandon her," I tell him, so sure of it myself. Then, there's the wise way he's looking at me that tells me he knows what the future will hold for his husband and child. It sends chills up and down my spine.

"She'll be the reason; the reminder of what he believes took me from him. I'm scared to leave him... because I don't know if he'll be okay."

"He will be. Brian would never do anything to harm her. He'll love her."

"I know he wouldn't mean to hurt her. But I don't think he's going to try to bond with her either. No one's noticed the way he's acted the entire pregnancy. Justin, the way he acted when she was placed in his arms, it was so different that it was when he held Evelyn for the first time."

"That's because this *is* different than Evvie's birth. But Griff, I'm sure that he'll be all right in time. You can't be worrying about this right now."

"Justin, when am I going to worry about it? When I die?" His hand reaches out to grab mine and he looks at me so sternly. "If I stopped worrying, I'd lay back and let it take me."

"Then you should worry forever," I say softly.

He smiles and takes another hit of false air. "I can't control this, not really. I've tried to hold on until today so that her birthday wouldn't be the same day as my death. She doesn't deserve that burden too. Justin, I'm worried that as soon as I go my baby won't have anyone. I'm so tired Justin but I can't leave her alone. I've kept it up this long and all I want to do is to go to sleep," he cries. "I can feel it swallowing me but I'm fighting so hard so that she won't be alone. You're the only one that can help her."

I swallow the lump forming in my throat and look at him with disbelief. I scan his face, his eyes, to see if maybe it's the drugs given to him, that is making him say these things, but all I see is truth. "God, Griff!" I back away from him. "What do you want me to do?"

"He's going to need someone Justin," he says pleading with me.

"No, don't do this Griffin. You know how much Brian and I don't get along. You know that I'll be taking Leighton back home with me so he can start back at his school when the semester starts. I can't..."

"You *promised* me Justin," he whispers.

I stop pacing and stare at him. "I've broken every promise I ever made to you."

"Except one Justin," his voice wobbles.

"What?" I start to wiggle my feet on the tile floor nervously. Honestly, I can't think of one fucking thing I ever promised him that I followed through with, not one.

"When you took Leighton to Chicago you promised me that'd you'd take care of him. You told me you'd never let anything get in the way of you being a good father. You promised to be a good father to him Justin."

"I will be. I will be a good father." What does that have to do with anything? "I'll give him everything he could ever..."

"You can't take him away from Brian and Evelyn," he interrupts.

"I'm not going to leave him here with Brian!" I say, appalled. "I can't just leave him here like you..." I stop, and run my hands down my face, wanting to claw my eyes out.

"Like I'm going to leave him you mean?"

I take my hands away from my face and look at him. I expect to see so much hurt and pain but there isn't any there, just regret. "I'm sorry I..."

"You were only telling the truth. And I want you to tell me **the truth** too," he whispers.

I walk back over to him and sit in the chair beside his bed. "What truth Griff?" Oh, god, please don't tell me he knows and is going to bring it up now!

He squeezes his eyes shut and then puts his sweaty, cold hand into mine. "You really don't know do you?" His eyes burn into mine and I shiver all the way down my spine.

"No..." I choke out. I'm a liar. I fucking huge piece of shit, fucking liar!

He looks back at me and nods as if I just confessed it all. "You want to make it all up to me don't you?"

What is this blackmail from his deathbed? That's sick! "Yes," I answer him quickly. I want forgiveness but I'm not sure what I am answering 'yes' too. There are so many things that I need to make up for. I'm so confused and I don't know which monumental fuck up he's referring too.

"I want you to hold her," he tells me, shifting the baby around in his arms.

Is this my penance? I take the baby into my arms and the weight of this act is almost too much. Oh god, she's so small, she's so fucking small and new. I feel like I barely have anything to hold onto in this whole fucking mess of a situation. I feel like I don't have a place, a right. But here it is. Here *she* is, cradled safely in my arms.

"Will you help him?"

I look at Griffin through my tears and sigh. "He... he isn't going to want my help Griff."

"He's going to have to take it Justin. I'll talk to him about it. He won't..."

"He won't deny you anything. He never has," I say softly.

"You were best friends once," Griffin whispers. "You were brothers and best friends before I came along and ruined it for you."

I rock the baby and shake my head at him. "That isn't true. If you wouldn't have come along then we wouldn't have Leighton or Evelyn or..." I look down at the baby. "What do *you* want to name her?"

"I want Brian to decide. I haven't really thought of any, because I thought that if he named her, he might... love her." He takes more air this time and his chest moves so quick, you'd think he just finished running a mile.

"He does love her; she's a part of you. I know more than anyone, how much Brian loves you, Griffin."

"I suppose you do," he concedes and smiles at me. Something about his expression though makes me see that he's in pain. I want to help him, but I know there isn't anything I can do for him, except what he asking of me now.

"Brian will probably be back in a few minutes," he says. "Why don't you set her in the crib, that way he's forced to pick her up and bring her to me when I ask to hold her?"

I know he's sort of joking, but at the same time, he isn't. That's incredibly sad. Fuck. I want to be angry with Brian, it isn't very hard for me to be angry with him, but at this time, I can't be. I can only partially imagine what it will be like for him when... No, I can't think about it yet. I have to be strong. I kiss the baby's cheek, take a deep breath, place the sleeping pink bundled child into the crib, and walk back over to Griffin.

He positions the mask so that it rests just over his mouth but allows him to talk. "Brian is going to be a colossal mess. I want you to know that it's

okay for you to fall apart too. We may not be married anymore, but you were my first love Justin."

I smile at him, but I can't say the same so I don't. "I'll take care of them Griff. I promise you I will."

"It's not going to be easy, Brian will probably fight you on so many things, but he's not stupid. He's going to need your help, and I know that he'll realize that."

"I don't know how we're going to tell the kids. I wish you'd at least say goodbye to them," I plead.

"You know I can't. I don't believe this is goodbye and you shouldn't either. It'll help you if you realize that."

No. It won't. I start to feel my body shake from the inside out. Why are we talking about this horrible tragedy so easily? What is wrong with us?

"Come here," Griffin holds his arms out to me.

I realize that I'm sobbing loudly as he embraces me. I bury my face into his chest and try to smell *his* smell, not the hospital or his sickness. I want to imagine that he's holding me as he used to so long ago.

"Shh... it'll be okay Justin. You're so brave. You know you are," he whispers and strokes my earlobe in a gesture I haven't felt in ages.

"I don't want you to go, Griff," I mumble.

"I know Justin," he pats my back and comforts *me*, when I know that I should be the one comforting him, he's the one that's... But I can't help but fall apart and take comfort from him. This is my time to do so. As soon as Brian walks back into this room, I have to buck up and be strong again. For now though, I just let my tears fall, and listen to his shuddery breathing.

Turn out the light switch
We've been awake for days
And no-one's coming round
Here no more
You will get yours
You have no right to calm me down
You were never that around

August 1986 3rd Person P.O.V.

"Can I play?" Brian asked and sat beside Justin on the couch.

Justin ignored Brian and continued to play the video game.

"What's with you?"

"Nothin'," Justin muttered.

"Why are you acting like a baby then?"

Justin turned to Brian and slapped his shoulder. "Don't call me a baby!" Justin punched Brian in the arm, harder this time.

"I said you were *acting* like one!" Brian yelled, "Don't hit me!" He stood up from the couch and ran from the room.

In the kitchen, Jennifer heard the boy's raised voices and then the sound of Brian stomping up the stairs and slamming his bedroom door. She walked into the living room and saw Justin had his hands over his face and was crying. "What's the matter Justin?"

Justin wiped his eyes. "Brian called me a baby," he explained.

Jennifer sat down beside Justin and gave him a stern look. "You haven't been very nice to him this week. Shut the game off."

Justin huffed and grumbled to himself as he turned the power off on the console. "He's being stupid."

Jennifer raised her eyebrows. "What makes you say that?"

"He is!" Justin shouted.

The woman took the little blond's hands in her own and stared at him. "You're upset that he's going to St. James Academy High, aren't you?"

"Yes," Justin whimpered.

"That isn't Brian's fault, Justin. He's older than you are and it's time for him to go to high school. I'm sure he's going to miss you too. But you'll still be able to see him every day. It'll just be a little different until you go to high school too."

Justin's bottom lips wobbled as he spoke, "I don't want him to go."

"You'll have Daphne to hang out with," Jennifer told her son. "It won't be so bad. But think of Brian, he doesn't have any friends at St. James."

"He'll make a new best friend," Justin grumbled. "He will."

"I'm positive that you'll always be Brian's best friend. After all, you two are like brothers and nothing could be better than that. But maybe Brian will meet other friends so he won't be lonely. You don't want him to be lonely and sad, do you?"

"No," Justin whimpered.

"You're going to be grounded from playing video games the rest of this week," Jennifer said firmly.

Justin sighed. "Mooooom."

"You know better than to hit anyone Justin. *Especially* Brian."

Justin's big blue eyes watered. "I'm sorry."

"Go upstairs and apologize to Brian and show him that in this house, he only gets love and kindness. Do you understand me?"

"Yes Mommy," Justin said softly. He quickly ran up the stairs and knocked on Brian's door.

"Go away," Brian called and drew his sheets over his head.

Justin came in the door anyway. "I'm sorry Brian."

Brian didn't turn to look at Justin. "You hit me, twice."

Justin crawled onto Brian's bed and hugged the older boy. "I shouldn't have. I'll never hit you again. I promise."

"Yeah, right," Brian huffed.

"I won't," Justin spoke firmly. "I'm sorry for being mean too. I'm just sad."

"Why?" Brian asked and turned to face Justin.

"Because you're going to go to High School and make a lot of new friends and you won't want to be my friend any more."

Brian held Justin's hand and squeezed it gently. "We'll always be best friends, no matter what."

"You promise?" Justin asked.

Brian kissed Justin's nose and nodded his head. "I promise. No matter what, you'll always be my best friend."

"Even if you make other friends your own age?" Justin asked.

Brian sat up and grabbed his backpack from the floor. He took off one of the safety pins that held a patch on the bag. "Watch." He stuck the pin into his left ring finger and then squeezed it.

"Eww..." Justin gasped. "Why did you do that?"

"Give me your hand," Brian ordered softly.

"No way," Justin gasped. "I don't want you to stick me."

"Well then we can't be blood brothers," Brian told him.

"Fine," Justin held his hand out and winced when Brian stuck the pin in his left ring finger. "That hurt."

Brian laughed softly and put the tip of his bleeding finger against Justin's and rubbed them together. He put Justin's finger in his mouth and put his finger against Justin's lips so the younger boy would do the same. When the bleeding stopped, Brian held Justin's hand again. "Now

nothing can separate us. We're blood brothers and best friends for life."

Justin smiled brightly and agreed, "For life."

Friday, January 5th 2007

Brian's P.O.V.

I have missed
Cold contagious
All the mighty mighty men
What you save is
What you lose out in the end
Cold contagious

The hospital room is completely quiet now. There isn't the sound of stifled sobs, babies crying or beeping machines. There's nothing but me and the sound of my grieving.

His hand is still warm but it's no longer sweating. I keep staring at him, wondering if this really is it. He looks just like he did when he fell asleep the last night we lay in our bed. His stomach still looks pregnant and his body looks just as beautiful and frail as it did when I held him for the last time in our bed.

However, today there is no baby inside him. Today there is suddenly no breath, no life in him. When only two days ago, there were two hearts beating, but one belonged to a life ready to begin and one to a heart that was dying.

It's just a body in a bed. I know that. I keep reminding myself of that, but I'm so afraid that if I leave him now, I won't ever see him again. My deepest fears will come true. I won't ever see him again. What am I doing here?

Griffin arranged everything a few months ago, well, what he could arrange. He wouldn't let me have any part of it and I don't think I would've been able to deal with it. But he told me some details. He wants his body cremated, no funeral, but a remembrance. I'm not sure what the fuck that means, because I can't even think about him like that. I don't want to think about him as *history*.

If I think too long on any of it, I think they might have to put me into the hospital. The psyche ward anyway, cause I feel like I'm going fucking crazy!

"Brian?"

I turn and look and Justin is standing, half inside half outside of the door to the room. His eyes are bloodshot, tear streaks still mar his cheeks and I envy him for being able to show his emotions so easily. Will I get to that point? I'm sure he's living in reality, whereas I'm not. I can't be. I go back and forth from the moments here to the moments passed.

"Come in," I whisper. I gently drop Griffin's hand and place it by his side.

I watch Justin walk closer and closer to me. His body is twitching and I see his hands shaking as they move to his face and push his messy, long bangs behind his ears. By the time he stands beside my chair, his entire body is shaking. I think my insides are doing the same, or maybe his unraveling is contagious because my vision is blurry now and suddenly I'm standing up and holding onto him for support, and not just because my entire body feels weak with battered emotional pain.

"God, Brian..." he whimpers into my ear.

Paint your perfect day
I don't mind this
I'm better off by the way
Deeply grounded
You will get yours
Cold contagious
All the mighty mighty men
What you save is
What you lose out in the end
Cold contagious

I can't believe it, I'm leaning on him and I can feel his strength, holding me up, holding onto me so I don't fall into the abyss of a fantasy reality that I know will only harm me and my children in the end. He grips onto me as he lowers me into my seat and backs away a couple of steps from me.

"The nurses," he pauses and runs his thumbs over my cheeks, wiping a few of the tears away. "And the doctors, asked me to come see you." He kneels in front of me and I try to focus on him and not the image beside me.

I nod my head. I know they want me out of here and now they've sent Justin in to do it. "They... they kept coming in here, they want me to leave him," I tell him... my voice shakes on every word. "I promised him I wouldn't leave him Justin."

"That isn't Griffin anymore, Brian," Justin tells me softly. The look on his face after he says it shows that he just now believed the words as he told them to me. His expression of shock recovers quickly to a slight smile. "Your little girl is in the nursery Brian. She needs you." His hands rest on my knees and squeeze them gently. "Your family needs you Brian."

He's wrong though, the baby doesn't need me. I don't think I'm good for her, no, I *know* I'm not. I can't look at her without feeling this horrible sense of regret and pain and if it's not that, then I don't feel anything at all. You aren't supposed to feel numb when you look at or hold your child. I know that. I know it's so fucking wrong of me. I don't want that for her, but I can't help it. Maybe this is what my parents felt when I was born?

"Brian, please go to her now," he begs.

"Did you go see her after they moved her to the nursery?" I ask. I didn't want her in the room when Griffin...

"Yeah, she's healthy and beautiful." Justin smiles for a second. "That's okay with you isn't it? Griffin told them I could be with her."

"She's needs someone," I tell him.

"She's needs you too, Brian," he whispers and stands up. "Come on. I'll go with you."

What would Justin say if I actually told him how I really felt? He'd think I was a horrible father probably. He'd never even let me near Leighton again if he knew. "I need... just give me another minute and I'll meet you in the hall."

He hugs me again, and it surprises me because again, I take comfort in it, and I know I shouldn't. I don't even like him. I pull away from him and he sighs before he turns and leaves the room.

After I hear him close the door, I turn my body to look beside me at my husband. Fuck, is he not my husband anymore? Am I... am I really a fucking widower? "God damn it Griffin!" I yell at the top of my lungs. He doesn't even startle.

What the fuck am I expecting? Justin is right. He isn't here, he's probably on his journey and starting that new life he believed he'd live. Why? Why? Why couldn't he stay in this one? Wasn't it enough for him?

"Justin said you aren't here, and I know that... but you still look like you are so it's really fucking with me. You think I'm going to be able to go on and be a good father, a good man. But... I wasn't ever a good man. I fucked you over and I'm not just talking about me getting you pregnant while you were fighting the fucking cancer. I wanted you and I stopped at nothing to get you. I never should have tried, if I hadn't, you probably would still be here. I'm going to try to be civil with Justin, for you. But our daughter, well I don't know what the fuck I'm going to do with her."

I stop my speech when I hear a voice yelling outside my door. "He's just saying goodbye! Fuck! Can't you give him a god damn minute? You people make me sick. I told you he'd be out in a few minutes. For fuck sake leave him alone!"

It's Justin, and he's out there, defending *me*.

"He's been in there for three hours since the man passed," a male voice, answers him without a trace of empathy.

"I don't fucking care! What if it were your husband, you son of a bitch!"

"Mr. Taylor," a woman's voice says condescendingly, "you need to calm down."

"I will not calm down until you fuckers show some decency!"

Fuck. He's going to get himself arrested. I'd better say my goodbyes before he does.

I look at my husband and memorize his face, and then I lean down and slowly kiss his breathless lips. "Goodbye Griffin," I whisper to him. I wipe the tears out of my eyes and don't look back before I open the door to the hall.

A doctor, a nurse and Justin all stare at me as I open the door. Justin has tears streaming down his face. He's an emotional wreck and the personnel are making it worse.

"Are you okay?" he asks me and rubs away his tears. "Fuck, you're not all right... I shouldn't have asked that."

I shake my head at Justin and turn my attention to the doctor. I point to the door and glare. "Well... I'm out of there!"

"I'm sorry Mr. Kinney, but we..."

"Don't you dare fucking apologize for having no tact," Justin interrupts him.

I actually laugh and they all look at me with wide eyes. I ignore them and brush past the doctor and nurse.

Justin falls into step beside me. "This way Brian."

I follow him as he directs us down the next hall toward the maternity ward. The nurses let us into the nursery and Justin takes my hand and leads us over to the little plastic crib holding my daughter.

"She looks just like you," Justin says in wonder.

July 9th 1997

Justin's P.O.V.

"He looks just like you," Brian tells me.

"You don't think he looks like me at all?" Griffin asks Brian, laughing through his words.

Brian peers down over us. "Nah, he's all Justin. But, surprisingly, he's still cute."

I laugh but then wince in pain when my insides scream out in protest. "Oh, don't make me laugh. That hurts."

"Sorry," Brian replies and gently touches my stomach.

"Do you want to hold him Uncle Brian?"

He smiles at me. "Hell, yeah. I've been waiting for months to hold my nephew."

I shift and hold my baby out for Brian. My little boy starts to fuss but as soon as he's cradled in Brian's arms, he calms down. "Sorry I had to miss some of the birth," he tells me and kisses the baby's tiny forehead.

"Well, you did get here right in time," Griffin says.

I smile, remembering how Brian rushed in the room yesterday afternoon. The doctors didn't know what to think, so they let him stay. He was there in time to hold onto one my legs, Griffin holding the other, just as I gave the last three pushes.

"Yeah, sorry for having to leave so soon afterwards though," Brian says sincerely. He had a meeting that he couldn't get out of and left the delivery room minutes after I had Leighton in my arms.

"I'm so thankful you went with Justin to all those Lamaze classes Brian," Griffin tells him. "I think it really helped him with the last of his labor. He was about to lose it before you got here. I didn't really know what to do. I just wish I could've gone and I would've been more help to him."

I wish he could've been there with me too, but thankfully, Brian filled in for him.

"Well, I told you to quit working for those fuckers and come to work for me. I would've given you the time off work," Brian says, not for the first time.

"Hey," I interrupt. "No talking about advertising today. I just had a baby," I remind them.

Brian smiles at me and hands me back the baby. "So, did you ever agree on a name?"

"No," Griffin answers. "We're still torn; maybe you can help us decide?"

"What are the choices again?" Brian asks. He has gotten a kick out of most of the names we've come up with throughout my pregnancy.

"Well, Griff wants to name him Liam and I want to name him Leighton," I tell him.

"Oh, after your favorite artist?" Brian questions, which I'm surprised he remembered.

Years ago, I dragged him to an exhibit of Lord Frederick Leighton's paintings. He grumbled the whole time, but I know he liked the art too. "Well, he's not my absolute favorite, but I wasn't going to name him Andy. That's my father's middle name and there's no way I'm naming my son after him."

"I completely agree," Brian nods. "So...I think you should use both names. Why not name him Leighton Liam?"

I look down at my little boy and test the name out on my lips. He does look like he could carry that name well. "Is that okay with you Griff?"

"You pushed him out," Griffin tells me. "I think we can compromise. But I get to choose the first name if I have the baby next time."

"Deal," I smile at him and purse my lips, asking for a kiss. He doesn't disappoint me and I open my mouth to receive his tongue.

"Oh guys, come on, you're going to smother the kid," Brian whines to us.

We break apart and I hold back from laughing this time.

"Oh shut up Brian. I'm sure you'd be the same way if you had Justin's lips to kiss whenever you wanted to," Griffin tells him.

I see Brian cringe for just a moment, but then his face goes back to his smile. "Well, I'm gonna head out."

Brian hugs Griffin tightly and kisses his lips quickly. He then comes over to me and kisses Leighton's head. "Be good for your dads," he tells the baby needlessly.

When he looks up at me, I feel my emotions start to act all funky and I start to cry. "Bye Brian."

"Hey," Brian whispers, "are you okay?"

"I am." I clutch my baby closer to me. "I just don't want you to go."

Trying to lighten my mood, he mocks, "Oh, no. I'm not gonna babysit this early."

"You're my best friend," I tell him. I'm not sure why all these weird feelings are coming out right now.

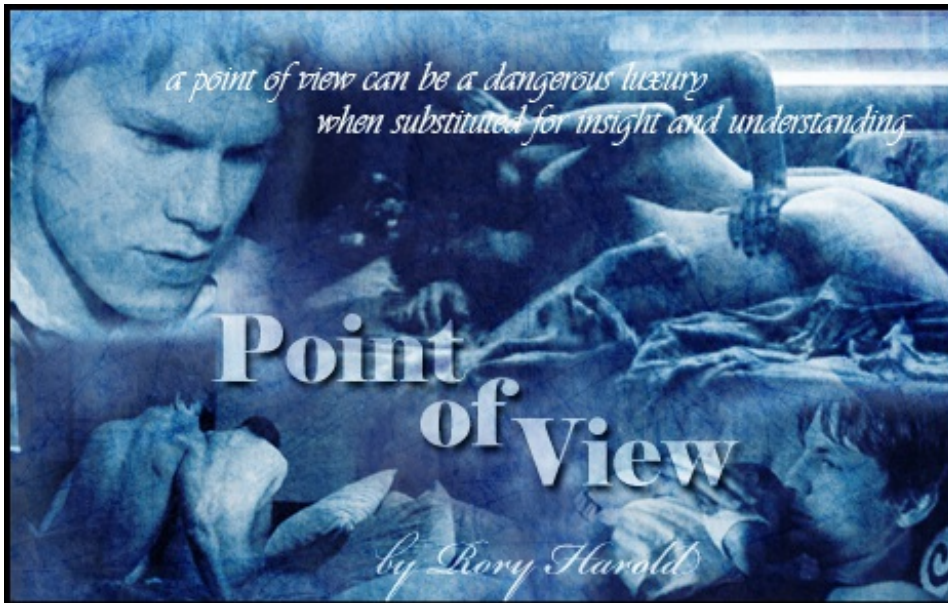
"I'll come by and help you home tomorrow, remember?"

"Fucking Gardener," Griffin grumbles. His boss refused to let him have off work tomorrow after he was here with me most of the day yesterday and today. Therefore, Brian is going to pick the baby and I up and take us home tomorrow.

It's nice that he has his own agency and he's doing so well that he can have off work whenever he wants. I wish that Griffin would've taken the risk with Brian and gone into a partnership with him, but Griffin let his pride get in the way, and now he is working for a huge asshole and is hardly ever home.

"I'll see you tomorrow," Brian tells me, "enjoy your new family." He wipes away my tears, kisses my lips gently, and walks out of the room. Now, Griffin and I are alone with Leighton, but I still wish Brian were here.

Chapter Three: "In A Lonely Place"



Point Of View

Chapter Three: "In a Lonely Place"

Saturday, January 6th 2007

Justin's P.O.V.

*Caressing the marble and stone,
Love that was special for one,
The waste in the fever I heat,
How I wish you were here with me now.*

I know my mother has done her best to prepare our children for what they will hear today. They've had a fun day with her today, but she's also had to answer questions about the baby all morning. When I called her from the hospital, she told me that both kids were so excited to have a little sister, they hadn't asked about Griffin, so she didn't want to spoil their moods. But we all have done as good as a job as we can to somehow prepare them the last nine months, for the outcome that Brian, my mother nor I, wanted to accept.

"Daddy!" Leighton runs toward me and Evelyn is hot on his heels as they stomp down the hallway toward us.

"Dada, you're home," Evelyn shouts happily at Brian, jumping up and down in front of him.

I think I've hung onto the kids' happiness this whole time. Now, Brian and I are going to shatter it. I only hope that I'm strong enough to hold onto good the memories of the past while I figure out how to tie our futures together so we don't all fall apart.

"Come meet your new sister," Brian speaks in a shaky voice. He bends

down and places the carrier on the floor inside the foyer.

"Wow!" Evvie speaks in wonder, placing her hands on her knees as she bends down to have a good look at her sleeping sibling.

Leighton looks up and smiles at me so bright that it makes me want to lie to them both so bad. I just want to give them today! Why can't they have one day to love their little sister and not worry about what happened to their Papa?

"Do you like her buddy?" Brian asks Leighton, who has yet to step close to the baby.

"I love her!" Evvie shouts, grabbing her sister's tiny hand.

"Be gentle with her," Brian chides Evelyn gently, though the baby has yet to stir from her sleep.

"She's so little, Daddy," Leighton whispers, hugging onto my leg and gazing down at his sister.

Mom comes down the hall toward us and I see that her eyes are bloodshot and she has dark circles under them, matching Brian's and my appearance. "You brought my granddaughter home," she whispers.

"Yeah," Brian croaks out.

"She's gorgeous," my mom speaks, her voice cracking too as she bends down to look closely at her.

"Can I hold my new sister?" Evelyn asks Brian.

"Me first," Leighton says, finally walking over and kneeling in front of the carrier.

"She's sleeping right now guys," Brian says in a forced, soft tone of voice.

"I won't wake her," Evvie tries to convince him, batting her eyelashes at her father.

I look over at Brian and I can see he's shaking a little, not enough so that the kids will notice, but I do. I can feel the vibrations of despair and confusion radiating from him. "Justin," he whispers, looking at me with a desperate expression.

"Dada's right," I say, stepping in. "The baby's sleeping right now and she's comfortable in her car seat. But when she wakes up, you both can hold her."

Leighton smiles at me but then his expression fades when his eyes settle behind Brian.

I know that even though Brian and I talked about how exactly we were going to tell them, it doesn't make what I know my child is about to ask, any easier on us.

"Where... where is my Papa?" Leighton asks worriedly.

"Brian, why don't I take the baby while you and Justin go talk to the kids in the living room?" My mother suggests what I worked out with her on the phone a few hours before.

"Did Papa have to stay in the hospital?" Evvie inquires innocently.

Brian hands his newborn child to my mother and takes his daughter's hand. "We need to talk to you about that Evvie," he whispers.

"But I wanna see him," Leighton huffs, his eyes watering.

"Come on baby boy." I usher Leighton into living room and sit beside him on the couch.

"Where is he?" Leighton asks in aggravation.

Brian picks up Evelyn and puts her on his lap beside Leighton and me. "Sonny boy..." he stops talking, unable to speak. He looks toward me; his glassy eyes begging for my help once again.

I clear my throat and take Leighton's hand in my own. "You both know that your Papa has been very sick..."

"Did something happen to him?" Leighton interrupts, his voice shaking. "Did the cancer hurt him more?"

I look over at Brian and he nods his head, urging me to go on. I feel a lump try to stop my airway in my throat but I swallow hard and answer my child. "Yes. Papa's cancer hurt his body. He...he passed away, Leighton. He died," I tell him in the gentlest tone I can muster.

"No!" Leighton yells and jumps off the couch, startling the rest of us. "You're lying!" he seethes while glaring at me. His hazel eyes push out rivers of tears down his face as he punches his fist at me. "You're lying, Daddy!"

"I'm not," I say, barely hearing my own voice over my loudly beating heart.

"Dada, Dada, No!" Evelyn burrows her face into Brian's chest. "See my Papa now," she sobs. "I want Papa now!"

"Me too!" Leighton growls. "You're a liar daddy!"

I reach forward and try to take Leighton in my arms. "I'm sorry baby boy, I am. But I'm not lying."

"He was getting better," Evvie cries, whipping her head to look at me with the most hated expression I've ever seen anyone give me. "You're lying! Papa is coming home!"

"Remember," Brian croaks out. "Papa told you goodbye because he was very sick. He was sick for a long time and..."

Brian looks at me and I know he can't say it. He can't confirm it again, so I do, even though it's the last thing I want. "He's with the angels. He's going to watch over you guys from Heaven now," I explain, feeling as though I'm dying over and over again with every word I speak.

Suddenly, Leighton lunges forward and pushes me back against the couch. "No! I don't believe you Daddy!" he shouts, punching my shoulder.

I've lied about a lot of things and I wish I were lying about this, but I'm not. Why? Why can't this be a farce too? "Leighton," I gasp and grab his hand as he lands the next hit. "Stop, please."

"Dada Brian!" he cries, clambering onto the couch. I helplessly watch as Leighton climbs on top of Brian's lap beside his sister. "Daddy's lying," he whimpers. "Tell Daddy not to lie," he begs.

I see Brian start to break down and cry and he hugs my son to his chest. "No Sonny-boy. He's not... I wish he was, but Daddy's not lying. Papa went to heaven. He's an angel now. He's really gone, he's not coming back. But he's an angel who'll watch over all of us."

I look at Brian and through my tears; I see his shocked expression. He didn't know what else to say and I know that there isn't any good way to tell a child their father has died. There's nothing that will make it easier, but it does seem like saying those words, even if Griffin didn't want us to tell them he was an angel, it makes this terrible reality a tiny bit easier to bear to imagine that it could be true.

"No, Dada," Evvie sobs. "No!"

"I'm sorry," Brian, sobs with conviction. "I'm sorry..." he repeats.

I realize my throat is heaving loud sobs myself. Brian reaches his arm out and stares at me, his bottom lip quivering as if he's about to say something but he can't through his own whimpering.

"Daddy," Leighton sobs. He looks at me and the anger he felt for me is gone.

I slide closer to the three and wrap my arms around them all. Our sobs and shakes mix together into one, loud cry of desperation.

July 10th 1997

3rd Person P.O.V.

"Look who I brought with me?" Brian says, walking into Justin's hospital room.

For a second, Justin thinks it might be Griffin, but then he sees who it is. "Mom!" He gasps. He smiles brightly at her as she walks in, behind Brian. "I thought you couldn't get a flight back home?"

"I couldn't," Jennifer agrees. "Brian drove out to New York last night, got

there early this morning and picked me up.”

“Jesus Brian!” Justin laughs. “You didn’t have to do that.”

Brian shrugs his shoulders and walks over to sit beside Justin. He kisses his friend’s cheek and then baby Leighton’s. This makes Justin feel a little more than awkward considering he’s in the middle of nursing but he doesn’t draw attention to it. After all, he and Brian are usually very comfortable around each other. They know nearly everything about the other and have seen one another at their best and worst.

Jennifer watches the two men, feeling something very odd crawling up her spine.

“How is Sonny-boy doing?” Brian asks.

“He’s great,” Justin, tells him. “He was pretty fussy last night. I don’t think Griffin got a wink of sleep in that chair thing. But, we made it through.”

“I’m so sorry I couldn’t get here sooner,” Jennifer says softly. She walks over and sits on the other side of the bed. She gives Justin a kiss on his cheek. “I shouldn’t have left when you were so close to your due date.”

“Well, Leighton wanted to come a few weeks early. You couldn’t have known he would. I certainly didn’t think he would,” Justin explains. “Besides, I wouldn’t have wanted you to miss seeing Molly off to Europe. You won’t see her for the rest of the summer and then she’ll be at the University.”

“I’m sure she would’ve understood. She told me to tell you congratulations and that she’ll call you once she gets to Paris. She’s been rushing around like crazy getting everything ready the last couple of days.”

“I bet,” Justin says with a tinge of jealousy. “A trip to Europe would definitely make you single minded.”

“Your Dad says congratulations too,” Jennifer spoke carefully.

“I don’t want to talk about him,” Justin tells her. He can feel his emotions going haywire again and has the urge to either laugh or cry but can’t decide which one. “Today’s a happy day,” he says firmly.

“Definitely,” Jennifer agrees. “He looks just like you Justin,” she praises and looks at Brian who hasn’t taken his eyes off Justin or the baby. “Don’t you think so Brian?”

“Definitely,” Brian says quickly looking up at Jennifer. He turns his attention back to Justin. “But his eyes look really dark. I don’t think they’ll be your blue, maybe a mixture of you and Griffin’s color?”

Justin smiled. “I don’t care what color they end up being. He’s the most beautiful baby in the whole world.”

“I’ll second that,” Brian told him.

Jennifer laughed. "You'll probably think differently when you have your own child Brian."

"Maybe," Brian told her. "So, are you ready for me to spring you?"

"Oh, yeah," Justin declares. "Mom, do you want to hold him while I get dressed?"

"Oh, yes... I didn't want to ask while he was feeding. You're doing a really good job with him, Justin."

"Leighton's a natural," Brian comments.

"He's done eating, for now," Justin laughs. He moves the baby and hands him to Jennifer. "Here you go Grandma."

Jennifer handed Brian her camera from her purse. "Could you take a picture of us?"

"Sure. Do you want me to take one with your camera too Justin?"

"Yeah, thanks Brian. Griffin could barely work that thing and I haven't gotten as many as I'd like."

Brian took a multitude of pictures, posing with Leighton and the baby for a few too. After the photo op, he helped Justin get out of the bed and dress. After that, a nurse and doctor came in to check on Justin and the baby one last time and cleared them to go home.

Brian drove Jennifer, Justin and Leighton to Justin and Griffin's apartment. He was extra careful to go the speed limit because of the precious cargo he had in the car. Once they reached the apartment, Brian had once shared with the men, he helped Justin walk up the four flights of stairs, while Jennifer carried the fussy baby in the car seat into the home.

"Do you want me to make you some lunch sweetheart?" Jennifer asked and handed Justin his wiggling son.

Once he was back in the blond man's arms, Leighton calmed down and started to close his eyes as Justin rocked him in his arms. "Sure, but I don't think there's much food in the fridge. We've been on a tight budget lately," Justin said in an apologetic tone.

"I'm sure I'll find something sweetheart," Jennifer replied.

"I think I'm going to take Leighton to see his room, even though it isn't finished yet," Justin told her.

"Did Griffin get the crib set up?" Brian asked as Justin walked down the hall to the nursery.

"No," Justin called over his shoulder softly. "But I got the glider together, so I'm just going to sit and rock him in that for awhile."

Once Justin closed the nursery door behind him, Brian went into the small kitchen where Jennifer was staring into the practically barren refrigerator.

"He should've said something," Jennifer said softly. "I don't like to think that he wasn't eating well the last month of his pregnancy."

"I've been taking him out to lunch practically every day," Brian told her. "I made sure he had leftovers to take home too."

"Thank you Brian. If I'd been here, I would've done the same."

"Griff didn't set up the crib," Brian grumbled.

Jennifer sighed. "I heard. But I'll make sure he does that before I go home tonight."

"He's not very handy," Brian commented. "I told Justin I'd do it for him last week but he told me there was plenty of time before the baby got here."

"Well, maybe you can do that for him before you go if you're not too tired?" Jennifer asked. "I know Justin said Griff couldn't get that damn glider together after six hours and that thing only had five pieces." Jen grabbed four of the seven items in the fridge and placed them on the counter.

Brian grumbled, "That's Griff though. He's too proud to admit defeat."

"I really wish Griffin had taken you up on the job offer," Jen told him. "I know Justin doesn't want to talk about it, but maybe you can try and convince Griffin again? Justin hates living in this apartment. There are noisy college kids above, below and on both sides of him. It's not family friendly at all. Not mention, I worry about him carrying Leighton up and down those steep steps."

"I will talk to him," Brian told her. "Maybe Griff will think differently about it now that the baby is more *real*."

"Maybe," Jennifer agreed. "I hate that he had to miss his first day coming home with Leighton. Justin is trying not to think about that, but I know it hurts him."

"At least he's got you," Brian told her. "He wasn't sure he'd even have that."

"And he's got you," Jen said. "I can't tell you how much I appreciate you coming to get me Brian. I would have rented a car myself but I didn't have any of my credit cards on hand and Craig..."

"Is an asshole," Brian interrupted, laughing. "But don't worry about it. I was happy to make you and Justin happy today. He needed you here, so I had to do what I could to make that happen. He would have done the same for me."

"You're a good friend to him, Brian," Jennifer admired. "You always have

been."

"I'll always take care of him Jennifer. I owe that to you and Craig, for everything you did for me."

"You don't owe us, Brian," Jennifer reminds the young man. "I'm just glad that you're a successful, good person and you're a good son."

"Craig doesn't think so. He wishes I'd disappear from all your lives. He still tells Justin I'm white trash, even though my business makes three times the amount his does a year," Brian told her.

"Yeah... well, Craig's an asshole," Jennifer laughed. "Why don't you go check on Justin and Leighton? I'm just going to make some peanut butter and jelly sandwiches."

Brian laughed. "We're not kids Mom."

"Please Brian." Jennifer rolled her eyes and slapped his arm. "I know you still eat peanut butter and jelly from time to time. And, it's all Justin seems to have in the fridge that isn't leftovers."

"Yeah, well just make sure you use..."

"Strawberry jelly, I know. I've only made you a thousand of them over the years." Jennifer teased, "Of course I might forget and put grape on it."

"Don't you dare," Brian warned. "I'll go check on Justin," he said through his laughter. He walked out of the kitchen and down the hall.

Brian knocked on the door of the nursery and heard Justin quietly tell him to enter. When he walked in, he saw that the nursery wasn't a nursery at all. He could have sworn Griff had told him they'd put together all the furniture but the crib, however, everything but the glider still sat in boxes. Justin had painted the room, but everything else was undone.

Brian turned his attention to Justin and saw streams of tears pouring down his face. "Hey," he spoke softly.

"Hey," Justin whispered back but didn't meet Brian's eyes.

Brian walked over to Justin and sat on his knees in front of the glider. "What's going on?"

"I...I... don't know," Justin whispered, slightly rocking the chair.

"Is it Leighton?" Brian asked.

"No... I... I don't know Brian. I mean, he's fine. He's sleeping, he's wonderful, but I feel so weird," he said in a choked cry.

"What kind of weird? Are you in pain?"

"Just a little, but that's from the labor. I feel... empty."

Brian raised an eyebrow at Justin. "Is it because you aren't pregnant anymore or are you hungry?"

"No," Justin laughed a little. "I can't explain it. I think my hormones are still going nuts."

Brian had no idea what to say or how he might be able to help Justin with that. "Your mom wanted me to come get you to eat lunch. Or do you want to be alone with the baby a little more?"

"No," Justin said quickly. "I'll come in there and eat with you."

"Okay," Brian agreed and helped Justin stand with the baby.

"Where do I put him while we eat? I don't have the swing together, and the bouncy seat is in its box in Griffin's car. He was supposed to leave it here before he went to work but I guess he forgot. And that stupid high-tech swing he insisted on getting, I couldn't figure out how to put it together," Justin told Brian as they walked down the hall.

Brian sighed. "Don't worry about it. We'll just put him in the car seat for now and after lunch I'll put some things together for you and Leighton."

Justin looked up at Brian and hugged the man around the waist with his free arm. "Thanks, Brian. I'm so glad you're here."

"Me too," Brian told him. "Who else are you going to get to eat PB&J with," he laughed.

Justin smiled back at him as they entered the living room, but Brian could tell it wasn't his real, full wattage smile. That worried him.

Sunday January 21st 2007
3rd Person P.O.V.

*Body that curls in and dies,
and shares that awful daylight,
Warm like a dog round your feet,
how I wish you were here with me now.*

"Leighton and Evelyn are asleep," Justin told Brian and sat beside him on the couch. "But, the baby is due for a bottle soon. So she'll probably be up in a few minutes."

Brian nodded, not actually comprehending anything Justin spoke to him. His eyes were fixed in a daze on the television screen.

"Brian did you hear me?" Justin asked, irritated but still he spoke in a gentle tone.

Just then, the baby, who still had gone unnamed, began to cry. Her wails transmitted loudly from the nursery through the baby monitor into the

living room, but Brian didn't seem to notice the noise.

"Brian, do you want to get her?" Justin asked. He received no response and touched the man's leg and he asked in a louder voice, "Brian, do you want to go get your daughter?"

Brian turned and glared at Justin as though the blond had asked him a ridiculous request.

"Fine," Justin sighed. He pushed his tired body up off the couch and walked toward the stairs. "Can you at least make her a bottle?" he called over his shoulder.

Justin retrieved the crying infant from her crib, changed her diaper and headed downstairs. He patted the baby's back to soothe her as he walked into the kitchen, relieved to see Brian making her bottle.

"The baby okay?" Brian implored, but did not look at his daughter.

"The *baby* is hungry," Justin replied.

"What's your problem?" Brian growled.

Justin rolled his eyes and counted to five before he tried to piece together his words to discuss the current problem. "Brian, I'm going to name the *baby* if you aren't. It isn't right for her to go unnamed as though she doesn't exist. Besides, the hospital paperwork needs to go back tomorrow to be filed," Justin, told him. "It's been over two weeks since she was born."

Brian thrust the warmed bottle into Justin's waiting hand. "She's not your daughter. She's mine and I'll fucking name her when I'm good and ready to," he growled.

"Then act like she is yours," Justin whispered and did his best to reel in his anger.

Brian turned and glared through teary eyes at Justin. "Go ahead and name her. I'll fill out the fucking paper work tonight and you can bring it in tomorrow."

Justin felt like he was about to cry. He wanted to talk to Brian; he wanted to try to get the man to understand that they couldn't go on this way. It had been two weeks since Griffin had died and Brian barely talked to him or the kids. He rarely moved from the couch in the living room and refused to go into his bedroom. The only reason he'd showered this morning was because Leighton had told him that he stunk.

Brian didn't go into his room to change his clothes. He changed into sweats and a t-shirt from the pile of laundry Justin folded. Justin was sure the items of clothing belonged to Griffin. They hung off Brian's body, large and loosely. They swallowed his form in a make-shift cocoon and Justin realized that the brunet probably liked the clothes because of that sort of comfort. Justin had done his best to care for all three

children and keep them happy whenever possible. But, Leighton and Evelyn weren't babies, they saw how Brian remained nearly lifeless each day and it frightened them.

Brian rarely held his new daughter, and his reluctance to name her, to acknowledge her existence was wearing on Justin's patience. The children had started to call the child "Baby" and they constantly asked Justin about why Brian couldn't think of a name.

Justin followed Brian back into the living room and sat in the leather rocker as he fed the little girl. "How about Laura?" Justin asked the baby. "No, you don't look like a Laura. Hmm... maybe a Constance? Nah... Hmm... how about Lilly?"

The baby screwed her nose up around the bottle and let out a whine.

Justin laughed. "You don't like that one? Okay... let's see. Do you like Marie? No, that doesn't sound right for you. Maybe, Suzanne? No... hmm... Bernice? Nah, you are definitely not a Bernice. How about... Grace, Dottie, Frida, Isabel?"

The little girl whined again and squirmed unpleasantly in Justin's arms.

"Well, you really don't like those names. Hmm... okay... how about Jessie, Minnie or Alexandra?"

The baby once again screwed up her nose around the nipple, coughed and whined. Her big hazel eyes stared into Justin's blues, much in the same glare her father had given him.

"Okay," Justin said. "You're tough to please. How about, Audrey or Hannah?"

"Fuck," Brian yelled, startling Justin. "Quit going through your mental historical encyclopedia of 'Women in Art', already! I like Audrey Hannah okay? Audrey Flack's art is the best out of all of them and Hannah Höch's work is okay too, so that's fine with me."

"Okay," Justin whispered. He smiled to himself, happy that Brian had been listening and had stopped him when he'd gotten to the names he'd liked.

"Do you want me to burp Audrey when you're done?" Brian asked in a whisper.

Justin took the nearly empty bottle out of the baby's mouth, walked over to Brian and handed him his little girl. "I'll go get you a burp rag."

"Okay." Brian held his daughter and looked down at her as he fed her the last of the bottle. He started to cry once again as he looked at her adorable, innocent face. "I'm sorry," he whispered.

Justin paused in the hall as he heard Brian's whispered words. He waited a moment to see if the man had anything else to say. He didn't want to interrupt what was honestly, one of the first moments of bonding between them.

"Justin?" Brian called. "Did you find one?"

Justin took a second and entered the room. "Here you go. I'm going to go take a shower, okay? If you need anything just come and get me."

"Yeah," Brian replied. He moved the rag to his shoulder and then placed the baby on it to burp her. "I'll be all right."

"I know," Justin, told him. "You're a great father."

Brian flinched and looked into Justin's eyes, trying to see if the blond really meant what he'd said. He knew he hadn't been acting like a father. Justin had been right about that. He wanted to be okay, he wanted to love Audrey, but he still felt the numbness taking over his body when he looked at her.

Justin took his shower and when he came out, he found Brian lying on his back, and Audrey nestled in a pink blanket, asleep on his chest. Justin noticed that Brian was also in a deep sleep. It was perhaps the first time he'd seen Brian sleep for longer than five minutes.

Justin couldn't sleep though; instead, he sat in the rocking chair and half-watched the late night programs on the television while also watching over Brian and Audrey.

Thursday, September 16th 1993 **Justin's P.O.V.**

I open our bedroom door and yell at Brian, "Get up! Griffin's going to be here any minute."

Brian pops his head up and looks from side to side. "What? Who? Why?"

I laugh and walk into the room and sit on my bed across from Brian's. "Our possible new roommate. Griffin Eaton, the kid from my Graphic Design class who is coming over in like three minutes to look at the apartment."

Brian groans and sits up in his bed. He looks so cute with his hair sticking in all directions and his face soft from sleep.

"What?"

I giggle and throw a pillow at him. "You really need to stop spending your day off smoking pot all day."

"I heard you," he grumbles and throws my pillow back at me. "Fucking Julian!"

"Well, at least he gave us a *whole* week notice before moving out," I say sarcastically.

"Had to go chasing after rich, High School sweetheart pussy," Brian

laughs.

"Well, if some rich guy wanted me to shack up with him, I just might do it if I got to live the sort of life he's going to after marrying Brenda. He wouldn't even have to be my high school sweetheart."

"You don't *have* a high school sweetheart, unless you're counting Daphne."

"Fuck off, you know I'm not."

"Well, I hope you're joking about shaking up with some Sugar Daddy. Even *I* have morals and that goes against their grain," Brian says smartly. He throws back the covers in snapping blur to emphasize his point.

I had something to say back to that but I have to look away from him when I see the tip of his hard on peaking out of the slit in his boxer shorts. "Put some clothes on," I request, my voice sounding choked up.

Brian starts laughing as he rises from the bed and slips on his jeans. "Justin, you realize that if we keep rooming together, you're going to see my dick more often than you already do. Maybe you'll get to see another guy's ass spread around it. You'd like that experiment wouldn't you," he snickers.

I shiver at the thought, but I'm not sure if it's because I think it's gross, or because the idea turns me on a little. Damn him!

"Fuck, that's him," I shout when I hear a knock at the front door. I stare into Brian's eyes as he buttons his shirt. "Put some visine in your eyes. I don't want him to think you're strung out. He assured me that he has this month's rent and that he isn't a psycho, so I'd like it if he actually did live here. Or we'll both be living back at my mom's house."

Brian rolls his eyes at me. "I thought you said this kid was cool," he huffs.

"He is, but I don't know how he feels about partying and fucking around, so clear your eyes up and for God's sake Brian, think of something nasty that'll make your boner go away," I tell him and walk out our room.

I open the front door and see Griffin smiling at me. "Hey, sorry if I made you wait. My last class ran later than it was supposed to and I wanted to pick up a bit," I explain.

Griffin shrugs, "No problem."

"Well, come in." I hold open the door and let Griffin walk into the living room.

"This is nice," Griffin says excitedly. "I love your furniture."

"It's all Brian's," I tell him. "Everything but the easel and the desk and chair beside it."

"He has good taste," Griffin admirers.

"So does Justin," Brian lustily speaks, walking around the corner of the hall to join us.

I punch him a little harder than what would normally be a love tap, right in his stomach. "Stop assing around Brian," I warn.

"Assing around?" He raises one eyebrow and opens his mouth.

I quickly cover his lips with my hand and glare at him. "Brian, nicely introduce yourself to Griffin," I demand in a high-pitched, overly nice tone.

Brian pushes me away, sighs as though I've just put the weight of the world on his shoulders, and holds out his hand toward Griffin. "Griff, I'm Brian. I smoke a lot of pot, fuck a lot of guys...safely of course, and I still manage to hold down a kick ass internship, a shitty part-time job, and I'll be graduating with honors next spring. So, you wanna move in?"

I can't fucking believe Brian! I turn toward him and I'm about to open my mouth to grill him, but I stop, too shocked to speak. Griffin is shaking Brian's hand, agreeing to move in this week... and he's laughing! I thought Griff had a good head on his shoulders. Well, I guess you can't really know someone in only a few weeks. He's... he's trading barbs with Brian! Jesus Shit! I'm totally fucked.

Monday, February 5th 2007 **Brian's P.O.V.**

*Hangman looks round as he waits,
Cord stretches tight then it breaks,
Someday we will die in your dreams,
How I wish we were here with you now.*

Things were sort of going well this morning. Leighton and Evelyn didn't cry when they left with Justin and headed for school. I have hope for them. I thought that maybe their grief and fears of abandonment had lessened. I hoped that it was one step forward, back into their semi-normal lives.

I can't say the same for myself. I'm sure that there is an invisible tattoo on my forehead that says something like 'Abandon all hope, ye who surrounds me'... or something along those lines. After they left, I did what I always do. I went back to sleep and lost myself in dreams of happy memories of my life. It seems like when I'm awake, I can't think of Griffin and smile, not that I don't have nightmares too, but at least 3 times out of the week I get the good memories and I ache to sleep for them while I'm awake.

Audrey had her one month check-up today. She always goes with Justin

when he takes the kids to school. He says she loves car rides. I wouldn't know. I haven't been out of our house since Griffin's memorial service at the community center a few days after he died. I opted out of going to it. So, I don't think Justin ever bothered to ask me to go with him to Audrey's appointment. I wouldn't have gone if he had, so I don't blame him. He returned in an irritatingly happy mood and gave me too many details of my daughter's magnificent health. I know he expected me to get excited. I'm glad she's healthy, of course. But I think I've forgotten what it feels like to feel... *anything*.

That is, until now. You see, a few minutes after Justin and Audrey got home, Terence Cole showed up on my doorstep. He's Griffin's lawyer. I'd nearly forgotten all those letters I saw him writing, until I had three plastic bags, filled with the envelopes containing them, handed to me.

There are enough letters to give each one to the kids on every birthday until they are twenty-one, and letters for a bunch of silly occasions, holidays, 'just because dates' and one letter, that is specifically supposed to be read to my youngest child, today. But I've been informed that there are going to be other letters and packages delivered to us too. Griffin has an envelope for me, Justin and Jennifer too. We only get one for now, which is a good thing, because I can barely handle the thought of opening one of them, let alone a multitude of others.

I don't know how Griffin expects me to remember his letters for the kids, each and every date. He's got a few pages typed up to remind me of the dates, but that really pisses me off. I don't want to forget him, but ... what does he want? Does he want me to actually check his little chart every fucking morning for the rest of my life to see if it's a 'letter day'?"

Terence left before the kids had to be picked up from school. We changed Evvie's plan from a full day to half, for now, it's all she can handle. She cuddled against me and we watched cartoons while Justin strapped Audrey to him in her sling and busied himself doing... whatever it is that he does until its time to pick up Leighton.

For some reason, the knowledge that I'd survived a month without Griffin made me feel infinite despair. I had to push myself more than usual to do any 'normal' thing. My arm felt like it weighed a ton when I brushed my teeth. All I could think about was that I was doing *one more* mundane task without Griffin, things he'd never do again.

I continued to count the things all day, until I lost count of them shortly before dinner. It was a good thing I did because I'd started to wonder how many footsteps I'd taken since he died how many tears I shed and how many breaths I took. I didn't want to start courting those too, so I was relieved when Justin called me to the table to eat.

I almost smelled the meatloaf Justin cooked for dinner; I barely tasted it, but managed to finish half a plate. Justin took care of the kitchen clean-up, fed Audrey and put her down for a nap while I gave the older two a bath and helped them pick up their rooms. All the while, 'today's letter' burned a hole in the pocket of my sweat pants.

Finally, a little after nine, Audrey was due for her late night change and

bottle. I left the older kids to Justin and walked into her nursery, carrying her nourishment in one hand and what felt like *my* punishment, in my pocket.

I rocked her in the rocking chair I used for Evvie and kept my thoughts to a hum as I fed Audrey her meal. When she finished, I changed her diaper, put her in her pajamas and placed her back in her crib.

Slowly, I opened the white envelope and took out the stationary. Attached to the first page was a post-it that Griffin had written in his scratchy cancerous penmanship, 'Read this aloud Brian'. I stared at the note for a moment, growing angry because something as simple as the way he elegantly wrote the alphabet was changed by the disease. The doctor's thought it was a miracle that he could function as well as he did considering the knowledge that the tumors pressed against so much of his brain.

Audrey makes a small noise and I can see she's peaceful, just staring up at me in the dark. The only light is her faux fish tank attached to her bed rail, but it provides enough light for me to read. I take a deep breath and let it out slowly before I start. "Before you were conceived, I wanted you. Before you were born, I loved you. Before you were a minute old, I would have died for you. --Maureen Hawkins. I want you to always remember that. It sums up so much of what I felt when I found out I was pregnant with you.

Sweet Pea, if Dada is reading this to you, then I am not with you. I hope when you get older and think about me, about what happened that caused me to leave you, that you'll see it wasn't your fault. I worry that you may think that it was. Please know that it wasn't anyone's fault. I wouldn't change a thing and when you have your own children, you'll realize that you would have made the same choices. You are meant to be on the earth, and my energy was meant to move on.

The doctor's weren't sure that I would live as long as I did to give you life. That was apparent before you even existed. I love you. I love you so much there's no way that I'd ever be able to tell you enough. You were the reason I lived. I knew that I needed to stay with you until you'd grown as much as you could within me. When I'm writing this, I'm weeks away from the time that I'll even consider letting them take you from my body. I will hold on, I promise, until I know you'll be safe. I must have kept my promise because this letter would never be delivered to Dada if I didn't.

I'm sure that Dada will love you just as much as I do now. He's very sad and angry with himself, but I hope one day he'll open up again and show you just how fun and loving he is. I hope you know he'll always be there for you. Your father is a loyal man that deserves more than I could ever give him. I am so happy that your father is there, loving you and looking out for you. There's no one I know that's any better at it. I love you my Sweet Pea, Papa."

I lean against Audrey's crib because my entire body is shaking. That's all I feel. It's shallow and constant and I yearn for something more powerful. I put the letter back into the envelope and stare down at my daughter. I

try to imagine that I am the man Griffin thought that I was that I could be. However, I know I'm not that man and I don't think it's possible to be him.

"Brian?" I turn and see Justin peeking into the nursery. He looks tired and worn out, but he still looks so young.

I have to stop all the envy I have for him and his life. I must. Because I truly hate him. Well, only sometimes. Other times, like when I see him taking care of the kids, rocking Audrey or laying in between Leighton and Evvie in their beds, telling them stories about Griff, those times, I don't hate him. Those times, I hate myself.

I glance at Audrey one last time; to make sure she's asleep. Then I turn the switch on for the baby monitor that's partner spends nights in the spare room Justin is bunking in. That really shows how great of a father I am, doesn't it?

Audrey is a great baby and nearly sleeps through the entire night as long as one of us gives her a bottle and change before bed. I know that it's extremely rare for a child as young as she is to sleep from ten to five. However, I only know she does this because Justin tells me this information. I could get the spare set and keep another monitor with me in the guest room beside his. But let's be honest, I can hear her when she wakes up crying in the morning on the monitor through our adjoining wall. But my first instinct isn't to get up and see to her, to make sure she's okay. No, my first instinct is to hide from her.

Sometimes I listen as Justin talks to her when he forgets to turn off the monitor. I lay there under the covers and sing songs in my head to block out the noise of the new day starting. It will be one more day that will begin and will end without Griffin. Unlike today, I usually go back to sleep once Justin leaves. At lunch, I wake for the rest of day.

Evelyn, Justin and I have lunch together. He talks and keeps me updated about our lives, news and current events. The way he speaks about it all makes me feel like I've been away on vacation or something.

The kids coming home from school makes me slowly evolve into a different state for the next painfully lived hours. I never get to the point where I feel anything like the man I was. Then, it's time for bed where I'll have a horrible time getting to sleep. The fact that this is my routine should make me sick, should make me want to change it, but I don't. I just let the days pass into the next. Now, apparently I'll have to check some dumb ass calendar of 'Griffin Events' the rest of my life. What an incentive to see the next day!

"Brian? Are you all right?"

I pocket the envelope and roll my eyes as I walk toward him. He backs out of the nursery looking like a little lost lamb. I shut Audrey's door behind me and meet him in the dark hallway. "I'm fine. Did you *need* something?" I ask quietly.

He stares up at me for a second and I watch as his neutral expression

changes in the light of the hallway's orangey light. His eyes fill with tears; he bites his bottom lip and looks at the floor. "I need a hug," I hear him whisper.

I'm not sure he actually said what I think I heard. The shock of the possibility that I'd heard correctly left me speechless and immobile. I don't want to touch him, not anyone really. He's forced all the contact I've had physically from the kids and Jennifer. Even they've sensed that I don't want to be touched. But leave it Justin to push contact. He thinks the kids will heal my broken heart. He thinks they'll ease my guilt, and my anger, but he's fucking wrong.

Justin lets out a long sigh, quickly turns and runs down the hall. His bare feet slap against the wood with the tandem of my broken heartbeat. That scares me. I watch his door close and I shake my head at both of our behavior. I have no idea what I want, but I feel like I need something too. And, I have no idea what he wants either.

I walk my exhausted body down the hall and pass his bedroom door. I nearly stop and do...well the thought of what I'd do never fully formed in my head. So for just a second, I listen to him crying. At least I'm not the only one that will be going to bed like that tonight.

Wednesday, November 10th 2004

Justin's P.O.V.

"What?" I gasp and feel the room spinning around me. My hand shakes the phone against my ear. "Mom?" I squeak out. "Mom!"

"I'm here," she whispers on her end of the line.

"Are you sure?"

"I wouldn't joke about something like this."

"I wasn't saying you were joking," Justin speaks in a whisper. "It's just so hard to believe. This doesn't happen. It just doesn't!"

"But it is," Jennifer replied in a teary voice. "Justin... I think... I think you should come home. At least for Thanksgiving break."

"I can't Mom. I'm taking my two week vacation in December," I remind her. "We're having a period show the day after Thanksgiving."

"Brian is your best friend, you're like brothers," she gasps out. "How could you *not* come home and be here for him? I swear, you have a better relationship with Griffin and he's the one you should be angry with."

"Now, is not the time to get into this Mom," I whimper and guilt claws at me. "I do have a better relationship with Griffin. He's the father of my child, for one thing. For another, Brian isn't my brother and we haven't been best friends for years. Daphne is my best friend. You know that."

"Whatever it is that is stopping you from forgiving yourself for what

happened between the three of you, you need to get over. Right now!" she demands.

I want to yell back at her, explain every little fucking detail of what *they* did to me. Most of all, I want to tell her exactly what her 'son' did to me. How it is far worse a betrayal in so many ways than Griffin's. Maybe not worse than mine, but... it is the reason that I cannot just forgive him for something he's never apologized for and probably never will.

He doesn't care how he hurt...no...That's not the right word for what he did. Brian Kinney didn't and doesn't care that he absolutely destroyed me. What's worse? He engaged his plan of attack when I was at a point in my life where I felt so minuscule and depressed. I'd told my therapist, before **it** happened, that I felt like I was worthless and that everyone would be better off without me. I honestly believed it at that point.

Brian's betrayal solidified that I was almost right. But during all the pain, I had Leighton. It was as though their betrayal wiped my slate clean where my baby was concerned. I lived for him. I still do. This is why I will have to bite my tongue and not protest to my Mom.

Griffin is my little boy's Papa and I don't know what I can do to help him or Brian through what will surely be a living hell. The only thing I can do is make it so they can be together. If I go home this Christmas won't be about anyone except Leighton and his father.

"If you want to drive here and get Leighton the Monday before Thanksgiving you can Mom," I offer. "But he'll need to be back on the following Monday. They're doing testing at his school and I don't want him to miss it."

"Okay, I'll call you tomorrow after I plan the trip," she agrees. "You need to call Brian," she pushes.

"And say what? That I'm sorry that Griffin was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor? That's ridiculous!"

"Shame on you," she snaps. "You should call and talk to them both. Tell them that you'll be there for them if they need you."

"I can't," I hiss. "Besides, they won't want to hear a word from *me* right now. I'm the last person Brian will want to hear from."

"I shouldn't have to convince you to do what is right, Justin," she speaks in a hoity-toity voice. "You were raised better than this."

I let out a deep sigh and relent. "Fine. I'll have Leighton call and whoever answers I'll tell them that. Okay?"

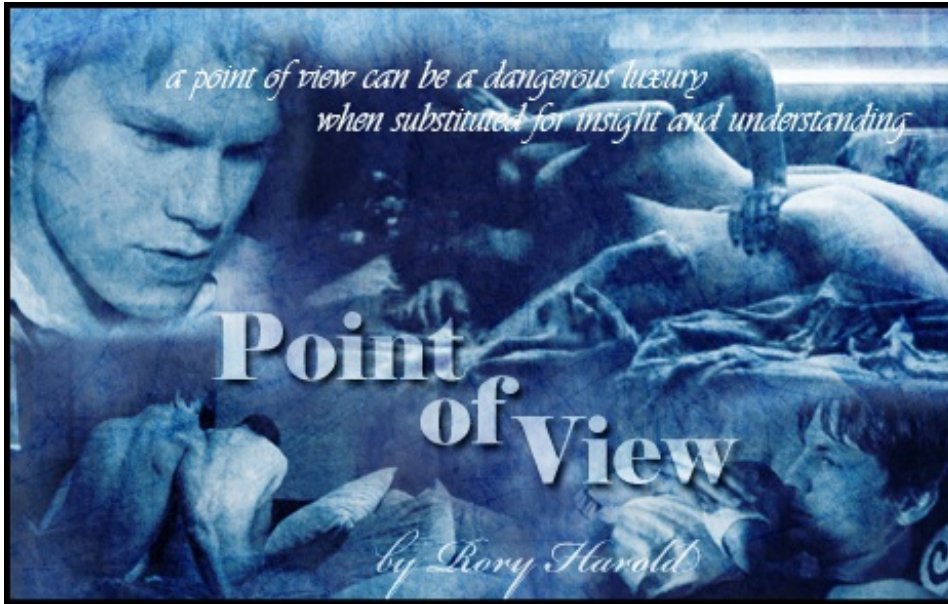
She blows out a loud breath of air into the receiver, and then speaks in a quiet, maudlin tone. "One day, you're going to regret the way you're behaving."

"I love you too Mom," I utter and hang up the phone.

Will there ever be a day *they* regret how they've behaved? Yeah... I won't

hold my breath.

Chapter Four: "Little Things"



Point Of View

Chapter Four: "Little Things"

Friday, April 6th 2007

Justin's P.O.V.

I bleach the sky, every night
Loaded on wrong and further from right
Spinning around, two howling moons
Cause they're always there,
Whatever I do

"Mom, do you think you can take the kids tonight?" I ask, hoping that she'll agree without asking too many questions.

"Is something wrong, honey?" Of course, I couldn't be so lucky.

When isn't there something wrong? Lately, *everything* I do is wrong.

"Leighton and I are going back to Chicago during Easter break," I tell her firmly. "After that, the new quarter at school starts."

"What?"

I know she heard me and I'm not going to repeat myself. "I need to talk to Brian about it tonight."

"Justin, I don't think this is good idea. Shouldn't we talk about this first?"

"Leighton is *my* child. If I want to take him home with me, I will. Talking to *anyone* about it first, is *my* choice," I tell her in a cool voice, all the while I'm trying to keep my anger under control.

"I know that, Justin. But, don't you think this decision is sudden?"

"Sudden?" I laugh sarcastically at her assessing. "I picked up my life and moved from Chicago back to the Pitts for Griffin. We were supposed to go back home after the Christmas break, no matter what happened to him. I stayed here because Griffin asked me to. He wanted me to help Brian, and I have. I agreed with him and I didn't want to take Leighton away from his sisters so soon after their Papa died."

"Don't you think you'll be doing that no matter when you leave?"

"What?" What the fuck does she want from me? I can't continue giving up my son's life and mine for Brian!

"No matter how long you stay, if you go back to Chicago, Leighton will be leaving his sisters and Brian," my mother explains this slowly, as though I'm still a child.

I can't contain my anger any longer. "Don't you think I've given up enough of my life for Brian and *his* children? Leighton isn't his child, so what the fuck does it matter if we leave? Evvie will get over it, and Audrey isn't old enough to be attached to Leighton!"

"But she's attached to you, Justin. What's going to happen to her when you leave?"

I start to pace the floor of the bedroom. "Don't you dare put that on me! Audrey's not my responsibility. She's Brian's child and the longer I stay here, the longer Brian is going to be irresponsible when it comes to her."

"What are you talking about Justin?"

"You don't see it because you don't live here, Mom! You don't know what it's been like since Audrey's been born. You don't know what it's like to live with Brian after everything that happened between us in the past! Now all that, coupled with Griffin's death, it's unbearable. I feel like I'm going crazy! He's so cold to everyone, but mostly to me. He hates me, I know he does I can see it in the way he looks at me or how he speaks to me, and I can't live like that anymore!"

"Justin," she gasps and from her tone, I can tell she doesn't believe me. "Brian does *not* hate you."

"He does, but it's more than that. The more days I stay, the more I'm going to love Audrey and Evvie. There will come a day that I have to leave and abandon them, you're right about that. No matter what, I'll love Audrey and Evelyn and in the end, Brian will kick me out of their lives. I'm not going to wait for that. I won't do that to Evelyn and especially not Audrey! She needs to have a chance at having a father. And none of the kids need to be around the hatred that radiates from Brian when I'm around."

"I just don't understand what happened between you two. I never would've imagined that you would actually *think* Brian hates you! It's

impossible. Just because he fell in love with Griffin, doesn't mean he hates you. You can't help who you love."

"Oh, don't I know that. But you don't get it Mom. This hate he has for me, it's real. I *know* it is. Please stop saying otherwise," I beg. Feeling my knees weaken, I sit down on my bed and wipe the tears from my cheeks. All me being in Pittsburgh does is make me a depressed mess and I'm tired of it. "Brian doesn't want me here and he doesn't need me here anymore. I need to go home. I've talked to Catherine at the gallery, and she said I can start back as soon as I can get home."

I hear my mom let out a long breath and then we both sit in silence for a few minutes. I can't explain Brian's behavior to her. It's unimaginable to her because when she is around, she's so busy helping me to tend to the kids, or tend to Brian, that she doesn't see anything wrong with our situation. She'll never understand the way it really is.

"Okay," Mom finally speaks in a soft voice. "I may not agree with you going back to Chicago, but I do understand why you feel it's necessary. You're my son too, Justin. I love you and Brian both. I just wish that you would be friends again, if not family, the way you two used to be."

"I know," I tell her. "But nothing is ever going to be the way it used to be, Mom. I don't even think I would ever want it to be." However, I have to admit, ever since things fell apart with Griffin and me, I haven't exactly felt the love of a mother from her the way I had before. I wish that were the same.

"Justin, you have to have hope," she whispers.

Hope? I'm not sure the meaning of that word means what it did ten years ago. "Mom, I've got dinner in the oven, so how about you come and eat with us around six and take them back to your place afterward?"

"Sure, but I'm going to have to bring them home early tomorrow. I have some houses to show a client tomorrow afternoon. Will that be enough time to get everything worked out between you two?"

"Yeah, it should be," I tell her this, but I know that nothing will be 'worked out'.

"Okay, I'll see you in a little while," she responds warily.

"Bye Mom," I reply and close the cell phone, ending the connection.

I should feel better, knowing that I've finally made my decision to leave, but I'm dreading telling Brian. He likes to be in control, he always has. This will force him to get all his shit together, and I'm sure he'll be pissed about that. I'd be inhuman to say that I don't feel guilty about leaving Audrey and Evelyn, but I have no choice. It's for the best for all of us concerned. I'm sure once we leave, he'll be happy to have me out of his every day life.

Better yet. Maybe if I leave, he'll have no choice but to begin to move on.

I had an inkling of hope for him, that he was realizing that he had to live for his children, if not for himself. This afternoon, I heard the shower in the master bathroom upstairs turn on. I thought that maybe he was finally going to move into the unused space. I understood why he didn't want to sleep in the bedroom he and Griffin used downstairs, but he and Griffin had never used the master suite upstairs.

When Griffin moved in with Brian, Brian was in the middle of renovating the upstairs. Their bedroom downstairs had previously been the Den, and it was supposed to be a temporary bedroom. The renovations finished a few weeks after Evelyn was born. But by that time, Griffin made the room beside theirs into a nursery for Evelyn.

I guess they planned to move upstairs once Evelyn got older and they didn't have to worry about her going up and down the stairs. But, around that time, Griffin was diagnosed with cancer and the chemo made him so weak, he felt disoriented when he tried to climb stairs.

They moved Evelyn to the second story with Leighton and turned the nursery into a second playroom so the kids could be close to Griffin when he was stuck in bed. All that time, the master bedroom went untouched.

I was so excited to know that Brian might move out of the guest bedroom and give life to the luxuriously decorated master bedroom. I know it sounds like such a little thing, but it would've been a big step. Would've been, because it wasn't.

Turns out, the only reason Brian was using that shower was because he decided to renovate the other bathrooms in this house and was having a contractor come over. He didn't want the bathrooms to be 'a wreck' as he called it. As if, he actually has cleaned them? Yeah... right! I cleaned them and they looked perfectly fine before he doused them in bleach, smelling up the entire house. He went on to instruct me not to use the bathrooms anywhere else for any reason.

Apparently, Brian is dealing with his pain and loss of control, by redecorating. When he was little and had to see the therapists, after a session with them, he'd rearrange every room in our house. But now, none of need this extra upheaval in our lives.

Yes, I was disappointed he wasn't moving on. But, it was more than that. Brian completely disregarded the kids' comfort and mine. He didn't bother telling me that a stranger would be showing up at the house in advance. He didn't care that the kids and I would have to go out of our way to walk all the way upstairs just to take a piss.

Poor Evelyn had an accident as she tried to make it up there and take her overalls off. She was so upset with herself. It took her an hour to calm down; even though I tried to make her understand that it wasn't her fault. And the whole time Brian was showing the contractor and his team the bathrooms. Not once did he come in the playroom to check on Evelyn. He was too busy dealing with his own selfish, preposterous needs.

I know Brian is a caring, loving, attentive father. But, he isn't going to be that sort of man as long as I'm around to pick up his slack and to be used as his personal punching bag.

Friday, October 11th 1996
Brian's P.O.V.

The river is loaded
I've been there today
Took it some questions
She does me again
I'd die in your arms
If you were dead too
Here comes a lie
We will always be true

Going up
When coming down
Scratch away
It's the little things that kill
Tearing at my brains again
The little things that kill
The little things that kill

"Come on Griff, tell me who it is," I say softly. My heart hammers in my chest and I take his hands in my own.

"I don't want you to be all weird about it," he says and stands up from the sofa. He begins pacing back and forth in front of me. I've never seen him so nervous.

I gulp in a deep breath and speak, "You've been telling me for two years that you like someone but you won't tell me who. I think I have had a pretty good idea who it is, and I promise you I won't act weird. Just tell me who it is."

"But I know... I don't want to hurt you," he says.

I want to scream at him. I want to tell him to just fucking spit it out so that he can stop the fucking torture he's created inside me. And it's all because of him, you know. I would not be fucked up like this because of anyone else. How in the fuck I got from wanting his ass to wanting his heart, is a mystery. But damn do I want him!

"I don't want it to change our friendship." He sits back down beside me and looks down at the floor.

He just spoke my greatest fear too, that's what I haven't said anything to him. Not to mention the fact I'm scared shitless to admit my feelings. "It won't change, not in a bad way. I promise you Griffin." I tilt his chin up to look at me. "Tell me."

He takes my hands and presses his lips together before nodding and

staring into my eyes. This is it. Things are going to change. However, it will be a good change. I will make sure of it.

"I see how you two are together. I always thought at some point you guys would get together but... I can't deny my feelings anymore. It's been too hard and if you don't want me to go after him I won't."

Okay. Stop. I'm completely fucking confused. Who the fuck is *him* if *him* isn't **me**! "What? Who are you..."

"I know you and Justin were childhood sweethearts Brian," he says, giving me a small smile. "And I never wanted to come between you two."

"You aren't going to come between me and Justin. We're best friends Griffin, that's all we are," I tell him adamantly. Yes, we may have had a sexual relationship but that was never anything but sex and experimentation. Justin would never choose me to love. He's made that clear. I know that if we ever tried a real relationship, it would ruin everything. That's how I know that Griffin is the one. All the things I feel for Justin, I feel for him, too, only it's different.

Justin has always told me that the only way I'd know I was in love, is if I wasn't only in love with the sex I have with my partner. Well, I've never fucked Griffin. I want to, God do I want to! But my feelings aren't only derived from sex, not anymore, not with Griffin.

"Justin and I *aren't* sweethearts. We're brothers," I say, trying to assure him that his feelings are okay. He's worried about telling Justin about us. He didn't want to get in between us. But, he doesn't have to worry. Justin doesn't want him and he doesn't want me.

Shit, he looks so sad. He *has* to believe me! I love Justin more than anyone in the world, and I think he's the most beautiful and talented person I know. But... Griffin, he got to me. All Griffin's talk about him liking someone made me examine my feelings for him. But I never had the guts to say anything. My fears have gotten in the way of most of my relationships all my life. I don't want that to happen with Griffin. "You don't have to be afraid to tell me what you feel, Griffin."

He launches into my arms, kissing my cheek as he does. "Oh thank god Brian! I've been so worried."

"There's no reason to be worried," I say softly.

He smiles. "So what do you think Justin will say?"

"I don't know," I laugh. Justin should be thrilled. He's always bitching at me about finding my 'one true love' and I didn't believe it'd be possible until I realized my feelings for Griffin.

"I guess I'll just have to come right out and say it," Griffin exclaims, bouncing in his seat.

"That'd probably be best," I snicker.

"I'll just look him right in the eye and say, 'I love you. I have been in love

with you for a long time and I want to be with you, Justin."

"What?" I ask, my throat goes tight and dry and I think my heart is about to collapse. He didn't just say... he wants to be with Justin. Did he?

"Oh, should I just simply tell him I love him?" he goes on.

"You... love... Justin?" I gasp. Oh no. No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. Justin? Why Justin? Justin doesn't want anything to do with him!

"I really do Brian," he hugs me again. "God, I'm so happy you're not mad."

I shake my head. "No... I'm not mad... but..." I stop talking when I hear our apartment door locks start to jingle.

Griffin's face pales. "Don't tell him anything until I tell him, okay?"

I have cottonmouth and I feel like I need to crawl in a hole and die but I manage to squeak out, "I won't."

Justin comes inside the door and looks at Griffin and I. He smiles brightly at the both of us. "Hey what's up with you two?"

"Nothing," I tell him morosely.

He raises his eyebrow at me and looks at Griffin. I watch as Griffin smiles at him, all doe eyed and lovesick. He's always looked that way; only I was too busy falling in love with the idea of us, to ever notice that it had nothing to do with me. Fuck me.

"Are you guys excited about the Julian's party?" Justin asks, oblivious to Griffin's expression. Fuck.

Griffin sighs. "I can't go. My boss asked me to come in this weekend."

"I thought you put in for the weekend off?" I grumble. Though, I'm not sure I could handle him telling Justin and them being a lovey dovey couple at Julian and Brenda's party. So I guess I'm glad he's not going.

"I did, but a couple people already called in and I really need the money," he replies sadly.

"We're still going, right Brian?" Justin asks me.

I nod my head. Fuck yeah; I need this weekend away. "My bags are packed. I'm ready to party," I tell him. I'm ready to lose myself completely.

Friday, April 6th 2007

Justin's P.O.V.

It's the little things that kill
Tearing at my brains again

Oh, the little things that kill
The little things that kill

Bigger you give
Bigger you get
We're boss at denial
But best at forget
The cupboard is empty
We really need food
Summer is winter
And you always knew

Mom arrived for dinner a little before six. She brought with her two bottles of wine and the makings for whiskey sours. I suppose she figured it might relax Brian and me, or make the conversation Brian and I would have once she left, a little easier. However, I'm sure she didn't count on us nearly finishing the bottle of whiskey half-way through dinner and popping the cork on the wine seconds later.

The tension between Brian and me built through out our dinner. But as expected, Brian was much kinder to me with my mother in the room. She squeezed me a little tighter than normal when she hugged me goodbye. Brian held himself together through the dinner but I could tell she noticed the amount we drank and the glares he constantly sent my way as we all tried to make neutral conversation.

Brian definitely thought it was weird when I told him the kids were staying with my mom tonight only minutes before she arrived. Also, it was only about an hour before their bedtime so I'm sure that set off some warning bells in his head. He never said a word about it. However, I know that a silent Brian is a boiling, pissed off Brian.

That's why I'm making a quick retreat to the kitchen to clean up the dinner dishes while Brian walks my mother and the kids out to her car.

Once there, I pick up the bottle of wine and take a few deep gulps. I put the dirty dishes in the dishwasher, cover the leftovers, and put them in the fridge. I grab the wine, keep it in hand, as I take a towel, and clean up the counter tops. I'm almost finished, when I hear the door slam and the sound of Brian's heavy footsteps on the hardwood floor.

I brace myself and turn away from the kitchen's entrance as he gets closer and continue to clean the granite.

Fuck. I don't know how I'm going to start this conversation.

"What the fuck are you doing?" he growls at me the moment he enters the kitchen.

I guess I won't have to be the one to start this. "Cleaning the kitchen," I tell him needlessly. We both know that I know that wasn't what he was asking but the alcohol has me feeling whirly and snarky.

He runs up behind me in a split second. His body presses against my back, enfolding me. One of his hands covers the one of mine that grips

the towel and his other hand is squeezing my hip. "Don't fucking play with me," he whispers into my ear. His breath is hot and smelling of whiskey, wine and *him*.

My heartbeat is racing. My mind feels muddled as I try to figure out what the fuck I was going to say. Asshole. "I'm not..."

Before I can finish my sentence, he flips me around to face him and pushes me backwards. My head hits the cabinet behind me, knocking my senses back to me. "What the fuck are *you* doing?" I ask, turning it around on him.

"Tell me the *real* reason you sent my kids off with Mom." His voice is almost soft and monotone. But his face is contorted with anger and his eyes blaze with what looks like a mixture of fear and something else I'm afraid to decipher.

"We need to talk," I tell him, with an air of obviousness to my words.

He steps closer to me again, hands on his hips and towers over me. "Talk," he barks.

I close my eyes for a second and take a deep breath before I raise my gaze to meet his. "I'm taking Leighton back to Chicago."

"The fuck you are," he hisses at me.

The force of his breath pushes my bangs around on my forehead. "I'm an adult Brian. I can leave when I want to," I say slowly.

"Why don't you start acting like an adult if you really think you are one," he growls. Then he moves back from me and paces the kitchen like a lion in a cage. "You always run away from everything like a scared little boy!"

That's it. I'm done being civil with him. "Who in the fuck are you to talk? Ever since Griffin died, you've been acting like a lovesick, brokenhearted teenager. You throw innuendos and insults at me all fucking day and night. You want everything the way you want it and if anyone gets too close to your personal space or asks you for a damn thing, you throw a fit and hide in your room! *That is totally fucked!*"

He stops his pacing and then pounces on me. "You son-of-a-bitch!"

Brian's lunge pushes me back against the counter, making me hit my head again. "Get away from me!"

"You're heartless Justin!" he spits in my face.

"You are!" I push him back but it only serves to make his torso push against me harder.

"What do you expect from me? He was my husband and he died and you think I shouldn't be angry or sad?"

"I never said that! I loved him too Brian!" I yell.

He pushes away from me again and starts to laugh menacingly. "You never loved him. You acted like a whore when you had him."

"Fuck you!" It's my turn to pounce and I raise my hand and slap his cheek. "You turned me into one. You!"

"There you go again. Always blaming other people for your malfunctions. I'm not sure why he ever loved you."

"And I don't know how he could have ever loved you! You're a monster Brian! You don't care about anyone else's comfort. Not to mention that you put me down in front of the kids constantly. They get so confused and they don't know what to think of you," I cry.

"What are you talking about?"

"You don't even know when you're doing it. Today you brought that contractor in out of no where and you ordered all of us to bend to your will."

"It's my fucking home. Not yours," he spits back.

"Right, and they're your kids so you should give a shit about them!"

"You know I love them," he whispers, almost sounding hurt. "You could've said something."

I ignore that, because maybe he's right. Maybe I could've spoken up. But all this is more than just today. "Last night when I went to go make us popcorn and I burnt it, what did you say?"

He shakes his head. "How the fuck am I supposed to remember?"

"You told me, and I quote, 'You really are a dumb blond, aren't you. There's a fucking idiot proof button for popcorn on the fucking microwave.' Then you laughed at me and Evvie and Leighton laughed at me too." I turn away from him and wipe my teary eyes. I'm so pissed that I'm crying and letting him see my hurt.

"You're too sensitive," he growls.

I spin back around and face him. "Last week when I did a load of whites and Evvie's red sock got in it and made everything pink you told me that it might be okay if I died my own underwear pink, but not everyone wants to be a pansy. Do you remember saying that Brian?"

He shakes his head at me again. "I was joking with you."

"I was doing *your* fucking underwear because you're too lazy to do your own laundry," I yell. "Nothing would get done in this house if I didn't constantly ask you to help!"

"I never asked you to do anything," he retorts. "You're leaving because you can't deal with a little teasing?"

"That's not the only reason why I'm leaving Brian. I'm leaving because

the longer I stay, the worse you get! It isn't just because of the way you ignore me or treat me, Brian. If that were all it is, I'd stay. Because I can deal with that. I'm leaving because I can't keep doing everything for *your* children. *Everything!* Only to have you put me down in front of them and show me no respect. I won't let you disrespect me in front of my child ever again!"

"You're delusional," he seethes.

"No," I shake my head. "I'm not Brian. I see exactly what is going on here. Every day that passes, I sit and hope for just a little bit of acknowledgment from you! Is it too much to ask for a little, tiny word of thanks or a hug when I've had a bad day?"

"This is because I don't hug you? I'm not your fucking parent or your partner."

"No, you're not. I thought that you were at least, even after everything we've done and said to each other. I thought you were my friend. But, I know you don't want that. You don't want me here. So, I can't imagine why you have a problem with me leaving. If it's because you need a maid or a babysitter until you can get through... whatever it is that you're feeling. I'm sure you can find someone like that in the yellow pages. But I'm done. I'm taking Leighton home with me. You're going to have to be on your own and live your life."

Sunday, November 18th 2001

Justin's P.O.V.

It's the little things that kill

Tearing at my brains again

Oh, the little, little little little little little little little!

"I'm moving to Chicago," I keep my voice firm as I speak to Brian and Griffin. I'm not surprised when I see both of their eyes narrow on me.

"What?" Griffin gasps and straightens his posture.

"I got a job offer to help manage a gallery there, and I've taken it," I say firmly.

"You've already taken it?" Brian asks me, obviously angry with my news.

"I have. I've also accepted an offer on our apartment here. I close January second and I'll be starting in Chicago a few days later."

"Don't you think you should have discussed this with us?" Griffin asks me.

"How long have you been planning this?" Brian asks snidely.

"It's an offer of a lifetime," I explain. "I've been thinking about moving for the last few months." I've been thinking about moving for a since September, when Brian and Griffin told Leighton that he'd be a big

brother.

Brian laughs sarcastically. "A few months? It never occurred to you to talk to us?"

"I wanted to have everything set so that you couldn't talk us out of leaving."

"Us?" Griffin sits up on the couch and leans forward. "You're taking Leighton?"

"That's out of the question," Brian tells me firmly. He looks right into my eyes and puts his arm around Griffin's waist, his hand meets Griffin's on his belly.

"You have no say in Leighton's future," I tell him and look at Griffin. "Griff, I think you know that this is for the best for all of us."

He blinks a few times and clears his throat. "I... I don't know that Justin."

"You do," I say softly, and knot my hands together as my nerves betray me.

"He's my son," Griffin says this as though that should change my mind.

It doesn't. "He'll always be yours. But, he's mine too and I want him with me. You and Brian... you'll have your baby. I won't have anyone."

"Well that's your fucking problem," Brian snorts. "You're the one that wants to move thousands of miles away."

I roll my eyes. "I've already looked into schools and there's a really great pre-school he can go to that's just a block from the gallery and a few blocks from our house."

"You bought a house?" Griffin gasps.

"I always wanted a house for Leighton and me," I tell him. "Now, we'll finally get to have one. It's part of the relocation expenses. They've bought it for me as a bonus. It's not much, just a three bedroom brownstone, but it's beautiful."

"You've seen it?" Griffin asks. I watch as Brian sits back and glares at me.

"Last week, on my business trip. That's where I went," I confess.

"I thought that you were there to talk to an artist who has a showing at the Bloom gallery? You lied to us," Griffin sighs and leans back against Brian.

"I didn't lie to you. I did go there for that, but it was a good opportunity to check the place out," I explain. "You can come visit us whenever you want and I've already worked it out so that I can have off the school holidays. We'll fly back here and we'll stay with my mom or Leighton can stay with you. Whatever you want."

"Whatever we want?" Brian scoffs. "We don't want you taking him there in first place. Did you talk to Mom about this?"

"No, not yet," I tell him. Sometimes I wish my mother would hate him. Unfortunately, she sees Brian as her son the same way I am. And, for all she knows, I'm the one to blame for everything that happened.

"Well she'll never agree to this," he spits out at me.

"Brian," Griffin looks at Brian and for a moment, we're all silent. I wait and watch them as they have a wordless conversation I'll never understand.

Finally, Brian nods at him and lets out a long sigh, his face looks defeated. "We'll have to have some papers drawn up for a custody agreement."

"Of course," I nod at them and stand up. "I've got to get going and pick Leighton up from my Mom's."

"I'll walk you out," Brian says in a voice that is seemingly cordial, but I know it's not. He extracts himself from Griffin and stands up.

"I'll call my lawyer tomorrow and give you a ring after work," I tell Griffin.

"Okay," he says softly, sounding confused. I resist the urge to hug him as he settles himself further into the large couch.

I turn away and walk out of the family room and down the hall of their house. When I get to the front door, Brian nearly smacks into me from behind. "What?" I ask, turning around to face him.

He leans down; his hazel eyes have changed to a blazing dark brown. "This is so like you."

"What?"

"You don't get what you want, so you leave," his hand is on my forearm, fingers digging into my skin. He knows nothing about what *I* really want. He only cares what *he* wants, and I'm going to give it to him.

I extract myself from him and push him away from me. "Fuck you," I whisper harshly to him, open the front door, and slam it behind me. He wants me gone and for once, I suppose we want the same thing.

Friday, April 6th 2007
Justin's P.O.V.

I touch your mouth
My willy is food
Addicted to love
I'm addicted to fools, shit
I kill you once

I kill you again
We're starving and crude
Welcome my friends to the little things that kill
Tearing at my brains again
Oh, the little things that kill
Tearing at my brains again
Oh, the little, little.....

"I told you already," Brian growls and pins his body against me once again. "You aren't going anywhere!"

"I am!" I scream and push him off me with all my strength. "I can't stay here Brian! Please. I know you don't me here. Why are you fighting for me to stay? I'm not stupid Brian. I know you wish it were me that died and not Griffin. I know every time you look at me and realize that I'm not him, you hate me. I see it in your eyes. Why can't you just let me go?" I'm screaming all this hysterically at him, my voice booms through the kitchen and I struggle bodily with him. I don't know when he captured me in his arms again. "I can't fall in love with Audrey and Evelyn anymore than I have. Every day that I'm with her, I have to remind myself that she isn't mine. But you don't act like she's yours. The longer I stay, the more I'll want her to be ours, and then even more you'll think she's only mine. I can't bring Griffin back. But I swear to you that I loved him. I did. I want him back because..." I sob out all this and close my eyes.

I feel his grip loosen on my waist but then his fingers skim up my back and along my neck and he presses my head into his shaking shoulder. I think he's crying now too. "After everything," I whisper. "I still loved you both so much." I look up and I see that his tears are about to fall from his eyes. "It's okay if you wish it were me that died, Brian. But that's why I have to leave."

He shouts in a shuddered breath, "I don't!"

"I know you do." I try to get out of his embrace again but his hands claw again at my back.

"I wish it were me!"

Then suddenly his mouth is on my mouth and I try my hardest to push out of this kiss, but one of his hands tangles into my hair, holding me onto his mouth. He tastes of wine and cigarettes, forbidden tastes that still make me swoon. I feel his fingers tightening against my scalp. I shout in pain but my scream only opens my mouth for his tongue. I fight against him, biting his tongue with my teeth as his grip tightens on me.

"Shut up!" he yells, shaking me.

"You're hurting me!" I try to wiggle away as his mouth nips down my neck. But I can't get away from his powerful arms that press my entire body against him.

"Stop... fighting me. You're always... fighting me... Justin. Why... do you fight me?" he growls between bites.

"I don't want you," I whisper. But fuck me. God dammit! I do. My cock is hard and straining against my cargos. I reach back on the counter, hoping to find some kind of leverage to push him off me, but my hands can't find purchase on anything.

His lips come back up to my jaw and then he attacks my mouth again. He's groaning and looking right into my eyes. His green eyes blaze with passion and suddenly he turns us around and lifts me up onto the island. He grinds his hard cock against mine, and I find myself wrapping my legs around his waist and grinding against him in tandem. The entire time, our mouths are still, fused together, tongues and lips exchanging spit and dominance.

He breaks the kiss and shoves me onto my back, *hard*. The salad dressing bottles clank around and some hit the floor. He stares at me for just a second, then reaches forward and yanks the Velcro clasp on my cargos apart. Only an instant later, my pants and underwear are thrown over his shoulder. My cock bounces out, hard and dripping pre-come all over my t-shirt. Oh no. This can't happen. This isn't right. I sit up but he pushes me back down with one hand while his other unfastens his pants.

"Brian!" I finally find my voice again, to protest, but then I feel his bare thighs spreading mine apart. His torso leans over mine and our eyes meet. I beg him, silently, to put me out of our misery, not to go any further. But his eyes tell me that he has a different idea of how to do such a thing.

His tongue pokes out of his mouth and then touches my lips, coaxing them open, softly. In complete contrast to the other part of my body, his finger is opening. I groan from the pain and he takes his finger out of my hole, still kissing me softly and breathing harshly against me.

His hand raises and comes up beside my head, and I think he's going to bury his hand in my hair again but he doesn't. I see him coating his fingers in the olive oil, spilled beside my head. I try to diffuse my mouth from his again and now he becomes more aggressive and needy. His tongue demands entrance back into my mouth and I have no choice but to allow it.

All of my nerves seem to be on high alert, emitting sparks with each caress of his tongue and this time when his finger enters me, I moan into his mouth. And I can't hold back anymore. I drag my hands up from his waist and scratch my nails up his back as I lift his shirt above his head.

He growls as our mouths separate and then he yanks his fingers out of me to tear my own shirt off my body, lifting my torso up roughly and it slams back down, but his hands are suddenly behind my head, protecting it. We pause again and his cock is brushing at my entrance. I can't help but wrap my legs around him and moan sluttily as I feel the spongy, wet head of his dick press into me.

"Take me inside you," he pleads with me and I push my muscles down to abide with his request.

"Ohhhhhh!" I breathe in, gasping from the pain of him stretching me, sliding inside me.

His hands slide from behind my head and crawl down my spine, then down my hips and to my calves. He lifts my legs and puts them on his shoulders, more stretching and pain but then pleasure tingles up my spine as in a split second he pushes all the way inside of me, rubbing the head of his cock against my prostate. I'm gone.

My knees press nearly to my ears as he bends me in half and our mouths fuse together. I grip his hair as he fucks me, deeply, hard, fast, so fucking fast that I swear he's tearing me open but it feels so fucking good that I don't even think about anything but the pleasure he is providing me.

I close my eyes from the intensity of our passions, trying to hold off my orgasm as long as I can, fighting to breathe, and catching his breath in my mouth as we remain in one long messy kiss.

I don't know when I lose complete control, but it's sudden and *there* and there's no stopping it. I come, and come and come and I feel him push my legs down from his shoulders as I climax. He comes, groaning obscenities into my ear and I don't have time to think of what just happened because he's lifting me up off the island.

My legs wrap around his waist and I bury my face in his neck and start to bite into his flesh as he carries me, stumbling up the stairs and into my room. For only a second, our connection parts as his cock slides out of me, still hard. He throws me onto the bed. But then he's back on top of me, whispering things my muddled mind will never remember and kissing and licking the tears from my cheeks.

June 16th 1998 **Brian's P.O.V.**

Here come the little
Here come the little, ah
Little things that kill
You

"I think Justin is cheating on me," Griffin whispers.

"What?" I can't believe that for a second. "He wouldn't..."

"He is." Griffin's tone is absolute.

"What makes you think that?" I haven't had much time to talk to Justin the last couple of weeks, but I doubt he's cheating on you Griffin. I think I would know."

"I doubt he'd tell you, Brian. He knows that you'd tell me. Well, wouldn't you?"

"Of course I would." The second I say this, I feel like I've betrayed Justin.

Especially because I can't image that this is true. "But he's not cheating on you."

"We haven't had sex since before Leighton was born."

"What?" That sounds completely impossible.

"We haven't had sex since before Leighton was born."

"He's almost a year old!"

"The first couple of months after Leighton were born, he told me he was too sore and sensitive," he explains. "He said the same thing after we were ever married."

"Was... was there some kind of problem?" I can't believe they didn't have sex all this time!

"No, if it were that, then he wouldn't have bought the new dildo that I haven't gotten to see him use."

"How do you know he bought one?"

"I found the receipt in his jeans pocket while I was doing the laundry."

"Maybe he's going to surprise you with it," I suggest. Talking about Griffin and Justin's sex life makes me feel extremely uncomfortable.

"That was two months ago," Griff pouts. "I searched through all the usual places he hides..."

"You went through his shit?" Man, if I were Justin I'd be pissed.

"He's *my* husband," Griffin wipes the tears from his eyes. "I had to know if he was cheating on me."

"So did you find it then?"

"Yes. He had it in a shoe box with a butt plug and some beads I've never seen too," Griff replies. "There was a half a bottle of lube in there... he's using them on himself but he doesn't want me."

"Maybe he's just trying to prepare himself for the sensation Griffin. Maybe it hurts and he's too embarrassed to tell you."

"Or maybe, he's using them with someone else."

"Griffin, I think you're getting ahead of yourself. Do you really think that Justin would bring some guy into your apartment?"

"He's had plenty of chances with the way you've had me flying all over the world for Kinnetik lately. He doesn't care when I tell him I have to go away, he just goes on doing whatever he's doing and ignores me. He doesn't kiss me hello or goodbye anymore. I *always* have to be the one to initiate any kind of touch."

I'm starting to feel irritated and annoyed with Justin. I don't like thinking that he's treating my... I don't like Griffin being hurt. "How about I talk to him?"

"And say what? Griff thinks you're cheating, are you?"

I give him a sarcastic laugh. "Yes."

"Maybe you could just talk to him?" Griffin pleads. "But, don't mention anything about him cheating. He's so closed off lately Brian. I know he's hiding something but maybe he'll tell you because he barely speaks to me."

"What are you going to do if he is cheating on you?"

"Leave him," Griffin's barks. "I'm not going to stay with someone that treats me like that. No matter how much I love him."

I give Griffin hug. "No one should treat you like that. You deserve better."

Griffin snuggles into my chest. "I think you were right Brian."

"About what?"

"You told me, you told me not to marry Justin just because he was pregnant and I told you that wasn't why I was marrying him. I loved him and that's why I asked him to marry me."

"You don't... you don't love him anymore?" I wonder. Shame fills my mind as my emotions perk up at the thought.

"I still love him," he says softly. "But I don't think he ever loved me as more than a friend."

"Then it's his problem," I tell him, anger starts to pulse through my body at the thought.

Justin promised me that he wanted to marry Griffin for all the right reasons. He swore up and down that it wasn't because Griff knocked him up. He promised me that he wouldn't hurt Griffin.

I'm going to have to go talk some sense into him. I don't want Griffin hurt, so I don't want him to be right about Justin. Looking back on the last six months and the way Justin has acted each time we've all been in the same room though, as though he was afraid of something... I'm beginning to think he was afraid of being caught.

If he's fucking someone else, I will make him tell Griffin the truth. I never would think that Justin would cheat on his husband. But I'm beginning to think that I don't know him at all.

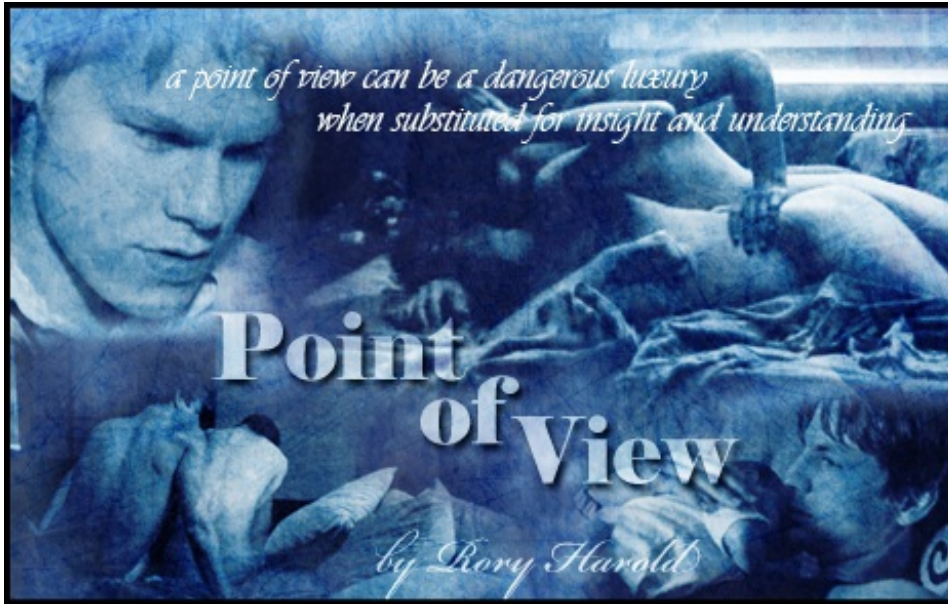
I rub up and down Griffin's back with my hand. "No matter what happens, Griffin. I'll be here for you."

"I know you will Brian," Griffin cries softly into my chest. "You always

have been.”

What the fuck is wrong with Justin? I have to find out.

Chapter Five: "Body"



Point of View Chapter Five: "Body"

Saturday, April 7th 2007
Justin's P.O.V.

Hush child
Lay your sweet lips on me
This greed
Is bigger than you and me
Will ya come again?
Body
Tongue tied
And a visceral third degree
Feel warm
Center of gravity
Wash us all away
Body never lies
Will ya come again?
Will we stay friends?
Oh, you paralyze
Oh, you paralyze

I wake to a sudden invasion inside my body and my eyes snap open. "Uh Fuck!"

"Shh," I hear Brian whisper into my ear.

Oh God no! His body is spooned behind me. Shit! Shit! Shit! "No," I gasp as I try to wiggle away from him. This isn't right. This can't be

happening. I try to pull away from him but he's gripping my waist and pulling me back against him. "Stop Brian!"

"Fine, fuck..." he growls into my ear, roughly pulls out of me and flops onto his back.

I gasp in pain while clutching my cramping stomach and I sit up. I start gathering the blanket around my naked body as I try and process what the fuck Brian is doing in my bed. I stare at him, my entire body shaking as my mind tries to piece together last night's events, but everything seems so confusing... like a dream. Or maybe it's a nightmare.

"What the fuck is your problem?" Brian spits, sitting up beside me, uncaring of his nakedness.

"You just... we fucked Brian." Speaking the words make it seem even worse. I put my head in my hands. "Oh god... no, no, no, this can't be happening."

"It was just a fuck," Brian says evenly. "We were drunk..."

"You were drunk Brian! That's always your excuse! Fuck!" I start to get up from the bed but he grabs my arm, pulling me back down.

"Are you going to go schoolgirl on me now?" he asks disbelievingly. "You were drunk too!"

I glare back at him. "You have no idea what we've just done do you?"

"We fucked," Brian shrugs. "It's not like I haven't fucked you before."

"Yes... I know you've fucked me, it was always just fucking me!" I narrow my eyes at him and explain what he is not accepting, "Except, this time, you were about to fuck me again and I know that you aren't drunk right now."

"I like to fuck in the morning," he explains, rolling his eyes, "even if I am a little worn out from last night."

"Any body... any hole..." I say. "You're back to being who you were before Griffin and you were together. Only took one whore right?" I get up from the bed again.

Brian quickly launches himself off the bed and grabs me in his arms. "Come on Justin."

"Let me go!" I try to twist away from him, but I feel so fucking weak.

He grabs me from behind and loops me around to face him. "Running away again?"

"I'm not running Brian. I'm making a choice before you say something else to hurt me because you feel like you've betrayed Griffin!"

"I didn't betray him by fucking a slut," Brian spits out. He pushes on my shoulders, making me fall back on the bed and then falls on top of me

with his hands on each side of my face. He hisses, "Whore..."

"Stop calling me that. I'm not a whore Brian!"

"You are for me," he whispers, his lips against my ear. "You used to love being called that, remember? You even told me you were my whore last night."

"That's not what I said," I tell him, struggling against him, but not hard enough. The feel of his body against mine, makes my insides quiver and my brain always malfunctions when I'm so close to him.

"You're hard for me again." His hand skims down my stomach as he repositions himself so that our cocks rub together.

"Stop," I whisper and feel tears prick into my eyes. He has to stop. I can't keep being tortured like this. I can't be his whore, his meaningless experimental ass. That's not who I want to be to him. It's not.

"You want me." His eyes hold my gaze as his hand slides down behind my balls, and a finger traces down to my hole and against my tender skin.

"That hurts," I tell him; my voice begs him to stop but I know my body is begging for more. My hips actually jut up and I feel my empty insides twitch in anticipation. I want him to fill me, stretch me, but I shouldn't want it. I can't want it! "You're hurting me." The words come out of my mouth as if I just told him I loved what he's doing. That son-of-a-bitch. I do.

"I don't care," he tells me harshly. "I don't care if I hurt you Justin." His eyes soften as he speaks to me. Now his body tells the truths his words cannot say. "You were right," he says softly. "I don't care about you," he gasps each word, forced from the depths of his lies.

I don't believe him. "Yes you do," I say adamantly. "You care about me Brian."

He shoves his finger inside me then, making my back arch and I instinctively circulate my pelvis to grind down against his probing. I scream from the pleasurable pain.

He leans over me. "Fuck you."

His finger starts to move around faster inside me, making me sweat. He's not touching my prostate, and all I can do is grip my hands on his forearms and claw my fingers into him as my eyes close.

"I do care about you Justin," he yells at me.

My eyes slam open and meet his. I whimper his name, "Brian."

"Shh..." He leans down and kisses the bridge of my nose as he whispers to me. I close my eyelids and feel his tongue sweep out over them and then more feathery kisses fall along the side of my jaw.

I stop the painful grip I have on his forearms and slide my hands around to his back. Even though I feel so sensual and my sex drive is nearly controlling my brain, I still want something more.

"I hate that I've always wanted you," Brian groans as his lips and teeth nuzzle at my neck. "I love..."

I pull my arms around his back and take him into a fierce hug. He falls down on me, his finger awkwardly pulls out of me and he huffs out a deep breath against my throat. I squeeze him tightly and hide my face in his hair. "Brian we can't do this again." This pisses him off and he struggles to look up at me but I keep my hold squeezing his face against my neck, feeling his breath and spit pooling in the indentation where it meets my shoulder. "Brian I don't want this. I can't want it." I keep my eyes tightly closed as I feel his heartbeat increase against mine.

"You love it," he growls. His hands find their way underneath my back, he lifts me up against him, my ass sitting in his lap, and my legs spread on each side of his own.

I open my eyes reluctantly. "I don't... love..."

"You love me fucking you and begging me to come inside you," his hands drag up and down my back and settle on my waist where his fingers press into my skin. "Don't you remember begging me to come inside you last night?"

Icy cold fear slices into my conscious, an instant result of his words. My whole body shivers in his arms and I try to push away again. "No Brian! Let go of me!"

"Justin," he holds me tighter, moving his hands from my hips so his arms span from the top of my back to my bottom, keeping our chests tightly pressed together. His eyes narrow onto mine and I know he feels it when I shiver from his gaze, he moves his hands just a little to rub on my back, calmly.

It won't work though. I can't be calm. I push my hands against his chest and look him in the eyes. "Let me go. Now!"

I see his eyes get soft and then change to dark and fearful as he releases me and I slide away from him. I wiggle backwards, looking at him through my tear-filled eyes. I feel like I can't breathe.

He slowly crawls toward me. "What... Justin. Fuck... I was only playing with you."

I shake my head and hold out my hand to stop him from coming any closer to me. "You... were playing with me?"

"Yeah, fuck, Justin. I wasn't going to..." Brian's voice is soft and trying to be soothing but I hear the trembles in his words. "I wouldn't have done anything to you that I wasn't sure you wanted."

"I know that," I whisper and pull my legs up to my chest. "But, you were

playing about... about coming inside me, right? You put a condom on before you fucked me, each time, right?"

"Justin," he gets closer to me and puts a hand on my shoulder. "Did you see me put one on?"

"You always used to say that you were so damn careful, Brian," I whisper. "You told me you could put one on in five seconds flat and tie one off in three."

"I didn't. I don't even have any in the house. I wasn't thinking. All I wanted was you," Brian gasps. "You begged me to come inside you, Justin."

I shake my head at that. "I... I couldn't have drunk that much to not realize that....that you fucked me without a condom."

"You helped me drink half that bottle of whiskey and downed half a bottle while I was bringing the kids out to your Mom's car," he says evenly. "You should have stopped me!"

"I should've stopped you?" I ask. "I trusted you..."

"I don't have anything. I haven't been with anyone but Griffin in..."

I cut him off. "What about me?"

"What? You have something?" he asks, angered.

"No! I don't... not yet... but seeing that I'm not on fucking birth control, odds are I'm going to have a fucking baby," I start to sob as the words coming out of my mouth work their way deeper into my head. "Fuck... fuck...fuck...!"

"Son-of-a-bitch," Brian whispers, backing away from me now. "I thought you were on birth control and I trusted *you* Justin."

"Fuck you Brian," I growl. "What were you thinking?" I can't remember what happened last night. It's all one big huge drunken blur and I'm sure it's not the same for Brian if he remembers me begging for his come.

Brian runs his hands over his face but crawls closer to me again. He puts his hand on top of the one I've got laying on top of my stomach. "I wasn't thinking. I can't think when you're around Justin. I've rarely been able to."

I wipe my tears with my free hand and stare at him. I don't know how long we stare at each other. It seems like forever but it also seems like only seconds have passed when a knock on the door sounds from downstairs.

"I think that's Mom with the kids." Brian pulls his hand away from mine.

"Fuck," I say again. My entire life seems to be crashing down around me and I can't think of anything to say. I start to get up from the bed, but he

grabs my hand. I fall on my butt beside him on the bed.

"I'll go. I'll go get them. Lay back down. I'll tell her you're sleeping in."

"I can't go back to bed," I seethe. I can't imagine sleeping right now when... when I've obviously gone and fucked up my entire life with a huge mistake.

"Do *you* want to go down there? Really? You know she will be able to tell you are upset and she'll ask why. Do you want to tell her that we just fucked?"

"Brian..." I start to chastise him for even suggesting such a thing.

Brian interrupts me with a growl. "And considering how many times we probably fucked in the last twelve hours, *without* protection, you gonna tell her that you are fucking upset because I most likely just knocked you up?"

I sigh. "No. Fuck... I just..."

"Then stay up here until I get the kids settled. I'll be back and then... we'll talk some more," he says, his voice nervous. "Fuck."

He starts to get up but sits back down when I start to sob again. "I'm so stupid."

Brian crawls closer and takes me into his arms. "We're both stupid Justin." He kisses my cheek, gets up and I watch as he pulls on a pair of *my* sweats that were lying in the clean clothesbasket beside my bed. It's the first clothing he has put on that aren't Griffin's.

Friday, February 20th 1981
3rd Person P.O.V.

Will we stay friends?

"I really wish we wouldn't have bought all this food," Craig grumbled as he covered the pizza with foil.

Jennifer nodded her head in agreement. "I guess Brian was right," she assessed.

"What do you mean?" Craig put the two pizza pies in the fridge.

"He told me that when Justin handed out all the invitations that the kids made fun of him and said they didn't want to come."

"Why on Earth did you not tell me about this before?"

Jennifer shrugged. "Justin's such a good boy. I really thought that Brian was mistaken."

"It was those damn Sesame Street invitations," Craig assessed. "No wonder they didn't want to come. They probably thought it was a baby's party."

Jennifer put her hands on her hips and glared at her husband. "They're kindergarteners. Justin is only six years old. He loves Sesame Street. I wasn't going to tell him he couldn't have the party he wanted. I don't think he cared anyway. He's happy to have Brian and Daphne here."

"Look, Mommy!" Justin giggled as he came into the kitchen.

Jennifer laughed at her son. "What's under your shirt?"

Justin reached under his yellow, Big Bird t-shirt and grabbed the boy cabbage patch doll out. "I had a baby, Mommy."

"Oh God," Craig groaned and walked out of the room.

Jennifer snickered. "You're a silly boy, Justin. Make sure you tell Brian thank you again, for giving you that doll. It cost him all the allowance he earned."

"Okay!" Justin giggled and ran back into the living room to Brian.

Brian handed Justin the fake baby bottle as the boy knelt beside him on the rug. "I think it's time to feed him."

"Thanks for gettin' Toby for my birthday," Justin spoke sincerely and put the bottle to the doll's mouth. "I'm gonna be a good Daddy when I grow up because I got practice now."

"I'm never having kids," Brian told the little boy.

Justin rocked the doll in his arms and looked at Brian curiously. "Why not?"

"They're too much trouble," Brian replied. "Besides, I wouldn't be no good at it."

Justin held Toby out to Brian and the older boy quickly took him in his arms and pretended to feed it. "You'll be a good Daddy, Brian," Justin said in his innocent all-knowing voice.

Saturday, April 7th 2007
Brian's P.O.V.

There are times
When I wish that I was you
Thick skinned
Cities you drive me through
Better than me

7 days

And my system is free again
We rise
Lose it on oblivion
Falling away
I'm sorry for the way
The way
The way
Your child is on fire
Your child is on fire
Will ya come again?
Will we stay friends?
Oh, you paralyze
Oh, you paralyze

"Do you want to get one of those morning-after pills?"

Justin looks at me in shock and his entire expression turns painfully sad. "I guess that's my only choice." He bows his head into his crossed arms and I hear him whimper. His shoulders start to shake.

I'm completely confused. I scoot closer to him and lay my hand on his back. "You don't have to," I tell him softly. "I mean... we don't even know if you're pregnant, Justin."

Slowly he turns his head toward me, tears are sliding down his face and his eyes are glassy and puffy-red. "It's that easy for you to toss a child of yours away. Isn't it?"

I know because of the way I've been acting about Audrey that this is the reason why he thinks that. He believes that it's *easy* for me? He couldn't be more wrong. Knowing that I once wished that she didn't exist... it fucking kills me. It hurts to look at her. It kills me to touch her, to love her. I tried to exterminate her very existence! But it certainly wasn't easy an easy thing to beg for. It was even harder to do what I finally did for her. "Justin, I made the decision to keep Audrey, knowing that I would kill my husband," I tell him. I fight back my own tears that the memories of that day immediately cause me.

"What? Griffin said that you..."

"I did," I interrupt him.

"What do you mean?"

"He was about a week from the time that aborting the fetus would no longer be an option when he got pneumonia. The doctors didn't believe he was of sound mind to make the decision to keep the baby."

"Brian," he whispers my name sadly. "Griffin told me that you didn't want her."

"I fought his decision to keep the baby, he was right. I did, I fought him really hard, at first. But Griffin wanted it. He wanted Audrey so fucking bad Justin. He wouldn't take 'no' for an answer. His doctors weren't sure he'd be able to make it anywhere close to full term with her. They told

me straight out, that if he continued with the pregnancy that it could kill them both. He was weak and barely lucid, refusing any medical treatment. He barely remembered those two weeks and Griff never knew that I made the decision."

"But why? Why didn't you tell Griffin?"

"Because I was sure he would hate me... in the end. When it was time for us to go to the hospital for him to give birth." I have to wipe my eyes and try to calm my breathing before I continue. "The sicker he got from the cancer, the more Audrey lived. She was literally sucking the life right out of him. I thought that when he realized that he was *really* going to die, I thought he would damn me or at the very least, hate me. I'd protested so much about him keeping her, at first. I didn't want him to have the baby because I didn't want to lose him. I didn't want our children to be without him. I hurt him so much when I begged him to abort her. But when it was time to make that decision I knew for certain that he wanted her, and... I... by then... I wanted her too. But, I'd already wished that her life be extinguished so many times! When she was born and I lost Griffin in return for her life... fuck... what kind of man does that make me Justin?"

He sits up straighter puts his arm around my waist and rests his head on my shoulder. "I didn't want Leighton Brian... at first... and it wasn't because of life and death. I was selfish. It was because I was afraid he'd ruin my life. After he was born, I was so fucking depressed. I had post-partum depression and I didn't want to tell you or Griffin about it. I was so afraid that you guys would think I was a horrible father to Leighton. I felt horrible that I'd given birth to my baby and that I'd actually thought of harming him before he could have a chance at life. I was afraid that you both would hate me if I told you. What kind of man did that make *me*?"

For fuck sakes, he was depressed and we didn't even know. How blind were we? How blind I was to a man's pain that had always taken my own on his shoulders or done his best to resolve it? "You never said a word," I say, not able to speak my thoughts.

"I was scared." He snuggles his face into my chest, the way he used to when we were best friends.

"You should've said something to us," I admonish him. I can't believe he went through depression alone. Or was he? Was that why he acted so distant? Was that why he was always acting so weird around us?

"You were both so busy," he tells me. "You started working together and I was sure there was something more going on. I never missed the way you two looked at each other or touched each other. Griffin never touched me. He'd be home late and you..."

"Justin, stop," I plead. I can't hear anymore. Christ! What did I do to him? What the fuck did I do to his... to *our* family?

"You were in love with Griffin. I... was starting to realize that he would be better off with you. I knew you'd make him happy. I loved you both

so much and I wanted you to be happy. I loved you, Brian."

I push his head off me and turn his face to look at me. "Who were you seeing when you went out at night and told Griff you were with Daphne? Tell me the fucking truth, Justin!"

He shakes his head and wipes at his eyes. "I can't tell you."

"Yes! You can!" I counter. He had fucking better be honest with me for once!

"I was with my therapist," he whispers and starts to sob again. "I didn't want you to think I was crazy and take my baby from me. If you knew what I'd thought... before Griffin asked me to marry him. I was sure that if you knew... you'd take him."

I grab him and wrap my arms around him. "I wouldn't have, Justin," I swear to him. "I would have tried to help you."

"You loved Griffin," he gasps out through his cries. "I knew you did. I knew that Griffin wasn't happy with me. He never *really* wanted to marry me, Brian. He just thought he did, and when I turned up pregnant it was a good excuse for him to try to be happy."

I pull him back, take his face in my hands, and stare into his eyes. "That's bullshit, Justin. He *did* love you. He loved you so fucking much. It was so hard for me to get him to stop thinking about you first. I was so jealous of you. It's no excuse, but I was so angry when I saw how much you hurt him, but it wasn't Griffin who was hurt the most, it was *you*! I can't believe what I did to you, Justin."

"I wanted you to be happy Brian," he tells me this again, his tone firm. "I wanted you to be happy and in love...even if..."

"Even if it hurt you? Even if it tore you apart? Why did you tell me that you were cheating on him? Why did you tell me you were when you weren't?"

"Because I knew he would leave me if he thought that. I wouldn't be a pity case to him. He wouldn't feel like he was leaving an impotent psycho and stay with me."

"But... what about us? Why did you fuck *me* that night?"

"I wanted to be happy Brian, even if it was just for a little while. I knew what you were doing. I knew why you were doing it. But I didn't care. I figured that if I was going to give up everything.... For you to be happy..." he hiccups and laughs sarcastically. "I wanted you and Griffin to have everything you wanted."

"What does that have to do with us? Why did you let me..." fuck the shit out of you? Use you? Blame you? Blackmail you?

"Because I was in love with you and I knew you'd never love me in return. Not once you Griffin and I divorced."

"I wouldn't have gone to him or you if I didn't think that you were fucking cheating on him. That's what it all seemed like. He was always telling me things he suspected about you, Justin. The way he made it sound to me was like you hated him! Fuck! I wouldn't have..."

"He would have gone to you Brian," Justin interrupts me. "Don't you get it? I was the easily attainable one... but I wasn't who *he* really loved. I never was. It was always you. The difference between Griffin and me was that *you* actually loved *him*."

I stare at his beautifully sad face. Everything he's saying... it seems like. It seems as though I've betrayed my best friend and I wonder how in the fucking Hell it took me this long to realize how absolutely wrong I am for doing what I've done to him. I wasn't there for him when he needed me the most. I ruined his fucking life! He was in love with *me*! He sacrificed everything for Griffin and my happiness. For our love... a love that *we* denied to him and didn't see because he had post-partum depression. What the fuck is wrong with me?

Thursday, July 23rd 1998
Brian's P.O.V.

Will we stay friends?
Oh, will ya come again?
Will we stay
Will we stay
Will we stay, hey?
Ah!

Lick these
My ruby lips
Drop your
Protein pills
And from your fingers
Fuck this
Better just to lose yourself
We kiss we kiss we kiss

For over a month, I've listened to Griffin talk more and more about reasons why he believes Justin is cheating on him. I had to find out if this was true and tonight I did. I offered to watch Leighton while Justin was 'out with Daphne' for a late dinner. While he was gone, I 'accidentally' dialed her number and it was no big surprise when she asked me how Justin was doing because she hadn't heard from him.

This week, was the perfect time to catch Justin and find out what the fuck is going on in his silly blond head. Griffin left yesterday and will be gone until Tuesday. He's relaxing himself in Oahu, Hawaii, going over our new campaign with Julian for one of his hotels.

"So, you're seeing someone," I say, trying to keep my tone neutral.

Justin's eyes get big and he shoves the bottle of tequila into my chest.

"What are you talking about?"

"Griff knows Justin," I tell him.

"What?"

He backs away from me, sliding toward the far end of the couch.

"Brian..."

"Don't!" I stop his protests and pull him close to me. "You can lie to Griffin but don't pretend like you can lie to me, Justin. He knows that you weren't out with Daphne last Thursday or the one before. He hasn't believed that story for awhile. And tonight, I happened to talk to Daphne. Apparently, she was worried about you because you haven't talked to her for quite awhile."

His eyes start to fill with tears and he protests, "Brian that isn't..."

"You know," I interrupt him. "If you were going to cheat on him, you should've at least called Daphne and told her to cover for you." I smooth my hand down his back. "You didn't ever love Griffin did you?"

"Brian..."

"Why did you marry him? I told you not to marry him if you didn't love him!"

"I was pregnant Brian..."

I won't let him blame this on that. His mother and I would've helped him. He **knows** that! I told him as much. He didn't have to do this to Griffin. Or to me. "We would've helped you Justin. You know we would've helped you and Leighton."

He leans his face closer to me. "What?"

"We would've still been there for you and Leighton. You fucked us all over though. You've been seeing someone else."

"You're right. I don't love Griffin," he whispers in a cry.

I grab him to me and kiss him, take the bottle from his hand and place it on the rug. "I'm going to fuck you." Over.

"No," he growls the word into my mouth.

I don't stop though, because he doesn't. He wants it and the more I kiss him, the more he gives in to me.

"Yes," Justin moans like a wanton slut.

I shove my hand into his pants and grasp his hard cock.

"Fuck me Brian," he begs.

I do as he requests.

After it's over, he's lays on his side, wrapped in a throw blanket, quietly crying. I can't believe that it's come to this. But he has to stop fucking with Griffin, with **me**. I run my hand down his sticky-sweaty back. "You're going to tell Griffin you've been cheating on him."

He turns his head, his eyes filled with pitiful tears. "Okay."

"When he gets home from Hawaii Tuesday night, tell him then." I get up and start to dress as I talk. "Tell him. Or I'll tell him **we** fucked and then... how do you think he's going to feel Justin? You want him to lose everyone he loves?"

He sits up quickly and gasps, "Why did you do this?"

"Because... you never would have told him the truth if I didn't make you."

He doesn't say anything, just nods his head at me, lying back down on the couch and continues to cry. He's my best friend, but somewhere along the line, he deceived me. He became a man I don't even know, or recognize. I tried; I really tried to be happy for him and Griffin. But, I can't stand to see Griffin hurt and betrayed any longer. This way, Justin will tell him, leave him, whatever, it's all the same in the end.

Whether or not Griffin wants to be with me is a moot point. Justin made his bed. Now he has to lie in it. I don't want him hurt, but... there's nothing more I can do. It's over now. For the first years of my life I grew up in a household with two parents that didn't love each other and took their frustrations out on me. I can't let Leighton go through that.

Saturday, April 7th 2007 **Justin's Point Of View**

Pretty words could never say
Pretty words could never say
Pretty words could never say
Yeah, pretty words could never say
it's all the way
it's all the way
away
will ya come again
will we stay friends?
will ya come again?

"You'll never forgive me, will you?"

"You've never apologized, Brian," I reply. His eyes grow wide and I brush away his tears. "I'd forgive you, but I don't know that Griffin will ever forgive us."

He takes my hands and squeezes them; staring into my eyes. "I'm more than sorry Justin."

"It's going to take some time," I say. The truth is, I've never heard him

apologize to anyone in the tone of voice he spoke to me and I forgave him the second the words crossed his lips because I know that he really is sorry.

"I'm sure it will," he answers. "I'll wait."

"Brian, what are we going to do?"

"I don't know," he whispers. "But I don't want you to go back to Chicago. I want you to stay here, you and Leighton."

"Do you want me to stay because I might be pregnant?" I ask him, wanting him to clarify the blurry future any way he can.

"I want you to stay because I want my best friend back. If you're pregnant than... I'll do whatever you want. But, whatever you decide, I want you to know that I want you here, with me. I want to make this *our* home. We're family."

Our home? I don't know about that. "Would you want our baby Brian?"

"Yes," he answers fast.

"What about *us*? We can't just keep fucking and..." I trail off. This isn't the time for that. Brian is still grieving the loss of his husband, fuck... I'm a fucking whore. He was right!

He surprises me as he leans toward me and kisses my lips, softly dragging his tongue across them and then pulling back. "I think we need to get our friendship back before we even think about anything else happening."

"You think... you think something else may happen between us?"

"I think I've always known, but I didn't understand it. One of the reasons I fell in love with Griffin was because I felt the same things for him that I felt for you all the time we'd known one another. But my feelings for both of you were different."

Thursday, November 30th 2006
Justin's P.O.V.

Will we stay friends?

Oh, will ya come again?

Will we stay?

Will we stay?

Will we stay?

Will we stay?

"You need to come back home, now," my mother's voice is only a whisper.

Immediately dread coils up my spine. "Griffin?"

"Yes," I hear her pause and she starts to sob.

I hear more commotion in the background, fuck! "Mom. Mom... hello... are you there?"

The phone jostles around and then a gruff sounding voice speaks. "Justin?"

"Brian, is my mom okay what's going on?"

"Your mom just needs a few minutes. I sent her upstairs to get herself together."

"Okay..." silence spreads between the phone lines as I wait.

"When can you and Leighton come home?"

I try not to cry; as I know those words only mean that the worse has now happened. "I'll talk to my boss tomorrow. We planned to come in two weeks, so it shouldn't be a problem to come in a day or so. I'll let you know tomorrow okay?"

"Yeah. Listen, you'll be staying with your mom. Leighton's going to stay here at the house with us."

"Brian..."

"Don't try to fucking argue with me on this!" he barks.

I sigh. "I wasn't. I just... please tell me what's happened."

"What do you think? He's... he's dying Justin."

Oh God. We were just there last week for Thanksgiving and he actually looked healthier than he did a few months before. I don't know what to say so I ask, "How is the baby?"

"Who?"

"Your baby, Brian..." Christ, Griffin told me that Brian was really distant concerning the baby and his decision to keep it, but shit!

"The baby is healthy," he says, finally. His words sound completely uncaring. That must kill Griffin if he notices the extent.

"Good," I say. "Where is Griffin now?"

"He's at the hospital but we're moving him home again, tomorrow and he'll be mostly on bed rest until...."

"The baby's born," I finish for him. I won't allow him to say anything else right now.

"Can I... talk to Leighton?"

"Wait Brian. Griffin told me not to say anything to him yet, so I haven't..."

"I just want to say hi," he cuts me off.

"Okay. Let me go get him."

I set the receiver down on the kitchen island and walk into the living room. I clear my throat and speak in a forced cheerful tone, "Hey Leighton, someone's on the phone for you."

He looks away from the cartoon he's watching and smiles at me. "Who?"

"It's your Dada Brian. He wants to say hi," I tell him.

Leighton gets up, faster than I've ever seen him when Super Friends is involved. He runs past me into the kitchen. Before I can turn around my little whirlwind has grabbed the phone.

He shouts into it with excitement. "Dada Brian?"

I try not to be hurt. I have to remind myself that it was Leighton who chose to call the man "Dada Brian". I couldn't deny him that. He didn't understand why he couldn't call a man that had always been in his life, Dada. Leighton never knew, or never understood that there was...is a difference between his sister's relationship with Brian and his own.

"Daddy!" I hear him whine at me.

"I'll be in the living room," I tell him and roll my eyes. I sit down heavily on the couch. He and Brian have always had a secret connection I could never understand. I'd be lying if I said it didn't make me jealous. More times than not I'm thankful, that Leighton has Brian. Rationally I know that it's wonderful that my son has someone else besides his two biological fathers that love and care about him so much. But there are times that my jealousy rears its ugly head.

I love that Griffin and Brian have always made Leighton feel like he is just as much a member of their family as Evvie is. But it hurts so much to know that they don't think of me that way. Hell, my mother acts as if she's their mother. Sure, she's still mine too, and she loves me so much. But to her, to everyone... I'm the one that broke up our family, our friendships. So if I'm the one that gets cut out, the one who feels uncomfortable, I have no one but myself to blame.

My mistakes in my love life will follow me around until the day that I

"Dada, Daddy Brian wants to talk to you now..."

I get up from the couch and walk into the kitchen. I wait until Leighton tells Brian he loves him and says goodbye. I give his hair a ruffle as he runs past me. Super Friends once again his top priority.

"Hello?"

"What time are you going to call tomorrow?"

"I... I'll find out the exact date of the end of Leighton's semester of school in the morning and then I'll talk to my boss as soon as I get into

the gallery. So I guess I'll call you around ten?"

"Okay," he sighs. "I guess that will have to work."

"Well what time do you want me to call?" It's so hard to be annoyed with his overbearing micromanaging attitude when I *know* how much pain he's in.

"Can you make it by nine thirty? I'm supposed to be at the hospital by ten. And... call my cell phone because I may have left here already."

"You're staying at my mom's house?"

"You have a problem with that?"

"No Brian... of course not... it was just the first I heard."

"Evvie's been here with your mom off and on. I didn't want to uproot her when I've got to leave early anyway. Your mom's got to show some houses in the afternoon in my neighborhood so she's going to drop Evvie off at home after I get Griffin settled. Is that okay with you?"

"Of course Brian... I just..." Fuck the man is so frustrating. Times like these, I wonder when, how and if we were ever really best friends. Did he ever really love me? Love having me in his life? When did he stop confiding in me? When did he start to condemn all of my words and actions? Fuck!

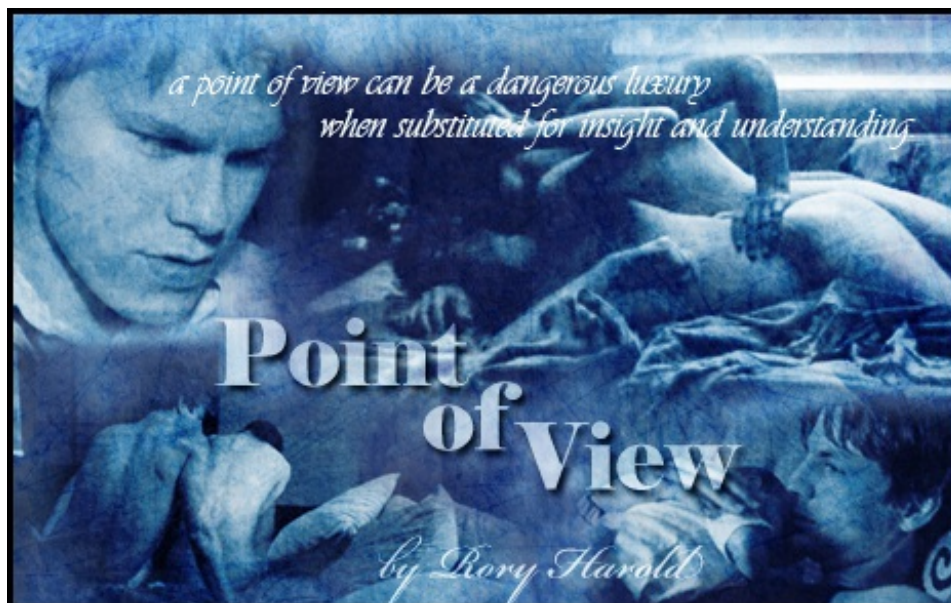
"Your Mom wants to talk to you. Just try not to upset her."

"She's *my* mother for fuck sakes Brian!" I won't allow him to tell me how to treat my own fucking mother.

"Right..." he sounds surprised at my outburst. It doesn't make me feel bad. "Okay I'll speak with you tomorrow. Later."

"Later Brian," I grumble and clear my voice, waiting for him to hand the phone to my mom. Tell *me* not to upset her. Who the fuck does he think I am? Oh, yeah... that's right. I know the answer to that one.

Chapter Six: "Float"



Point Of View Chapter Six: "Float"

Thursday, April 30th 2007

Justin's P.O.V.

*It's a beautiful world
But everyone's insane
Either you swim or either you fade
It's a revolution time
We're sleeping at the wheel
Apocalypse child in a nuclear field
We want to change the world
But not what holds us back
I want to be for you what I've never had*

"Are you sure we can tell this early?" Brian asks me for the millionth time.

I roll my eyes at him in the mirror. "It says so on the box."

Brian nods his head and looks back down at the two sticks sitting on the side of the bathroom sink. "We should've gotten a third box. Didn't I buy a third kit?"

"You did," I say. "But, I used it last week. It said it could tell last week but I peed on the wrong end and made it unreadable."

Brian laughs and I feel his warm breath graze my neck, sending shivers to spread upon my skin. "You cold?" he asks, obviously noticing the raised bumps along my naked back, arms and chest.

I don't know what happened, but Brian has been crazy accommodating. If I told him I was cold, I'd have no doubt in my mind that he'd probably shoot off into my bedroom and grab me a sweater. I'm almost tempted to say that I am just to get him to stop hovering over me. But, no, I'm not cold. I've been getting weird hot flashes all week and I've realized that obviously my hormones must be changing for a reason. I hope that the test will pick up on the change now. Or, not. This may be better for everyone. And, I may just be imagining them. Yeah, yeah, no such luck, I'm sure.

"Did you hear me?" he asks, breaking into my thoughts.

I feel the outbreak receding. "I'm fine. Still a little hot."

"Okay," he says unsure. "If you want, I'll get you a..."

"I'm fine." I interrupt because my body is reacting again to his breath ghosting across my neck as he leans closer to me and looks over my shoulder.

"I never saw Griffin do this," he speaks quietly in my ear. "With Audrey they knew because of the blood work."

I look into his eyes and I'm surprised not to see the depressed stare he usually gets when he speaks about Griff. The last couple of weeks, Brian's behavior changed so much, he's continuously throwing me. "Why not with Evelyn?"

"He was in Hawaii landing an account for one of Julian's new resorts when he took the test."

"Oh." I close my eyes for a moment, fighting the thoughts about the crawling jealousy and pain that time caused me

Brian smooths his cool hands along my arms and presses the front of his body against my back intimately. "I remember when you told me you were pregnant with Leighton, I was so happy."

I snap my eyes open and look at him in shock. "What?"

"I thought it'd be fun to be an Uncle," he says in a soft voice.

"But you're Dada Brian to him," I say. "You always have been."

"I always will be, Justin. Our kids, even if we don't have another one on the way, they'll always have two parents who can take care of them and love them."

"They will," I agree. But that still doesn't mean I'll be staying in Pittsburgh. The test beeps and I look at the screen. PREGNANT, it reads. "Holy shit," I gasp.

"Finding out I'm going to be a father again on my daughter's fifth birthday is pretty strange," Brian comments, his voice sounding a little awed.

"Yeah, strange. But not as strange as me being pregnant with *yourchild*," I remark. Fuck, I knew this was a damn good possibility but it's still terrifying.

"You loved me," Brian speaks in a sad voice. "When you did... Didn't you think we'd have a family together?"

"No," I answer fast. "You never liked kids. You never wanted them." I don't want to talk about this. I wish he'd drop it.

"But, you did."

I turn around, face him and speak strongly, "I never really thought about *us* ever really being an *us*, further than getting you in bed." I know I'm lying. I've dreamt of having Brian's child since I knew where babies came from. Now, that has happened and it's no dream come true. I've lived a nightmare for too long and this is just more false hope that I'll get out of it.

He rolls his eyes and bites his lips before replying, "Bullshit."

I shrug and grab the tests and throw them in the trash. "Think what you want Brian. You always do," I say, brushing past him and heading for the bathroom door.

"Stop," he requests and grabs my arm.

"Brian, I've got to check on dinner and my Mom is going to be here any minute."

"Don't you want to say anything about it?"

Uh. No. I want to get out of this small room. I want to get away from him. "No, I have nothing to say."

"We're going to have a baby," his words wobble a little and I notice that his eyes are misty.

"Yeah, I *know*." What the fuck does he want? I'm not going to be jumping up and down in excitement about this. I don't feel any different now than I felt a half hour ago. Except, now I know why my body temperature is funky and why I've got heartburn.

"You're not," Brian sighs and pushes his tongue in his cheek.

"I'm not what?" I ask.

"You're not happy."

"No," I huff out. Is he crazy? How in the fuck does he think I could be happy?

"Well," he pauses and gives me a nervous smile, "I am. I don't want you to have to go through what I put Griffin through. It wasn't right. He said that when he was gone, I should find something to be happy about."

Griffin and his positive thinking bullshit. "Maybe, you should focus on being happy to have the children you already have," I snap at him. I barely stick around long enough to see his face drop and run out of the bathroom.

I know what I said was mean. I know it was cruel. But, I'm so sick of having to live by Brian's whims and moods. I want to have control over my own life, but now I never will. I'll be tied to Brian, in some way, for the rest of our fucking lives. It's not my child's fault and I'd never take it out on my baby. But I can't help but feel trapped, once again.

Friday, December 13th 1996
Justin's P.O.V.

And all of this time i was just trying to reach you
Through the rain traffic
As you float into space

"Griffin asked me to marry him."

Brian sighs and shrugs his shoulders as he points to the ring on my finger. "You said yes."

"Yes." Why do I feel like I should've talked to Brian about this before I gave Griffin an answer? It's just that, I was afraid to say no.

"Why?"

"I...I love him Brian," I say, trying to convince myself.

"Are you sure you don't just love him as a friend?"

"Yes I'm sure," I whisper my lie and drag my hands through my hair. Why the fuck does my life, have to be so complicated?

"The way you love him isn't the same love you have for me?"

"No, Brian," I tell him honestly. "I don't love Griffin in the same way I love you."

"It's not just because you're pregnant? If you're marrying him because of that, you know that you don't have to. I'll help you with the baby. I know Mom will too."

I doubt that. "That's not why I agreed to marry him."

"Okay. Then I guess congratulations are in order." I feel relieved.

He gives me a quick hug and stands up. "I guess I should go see those places your mom has lined up for me, sooner rather than later."

I hadn't thought of that. Of course, he wouldn't want to live with us now.

Fuck! "I guess so," I say, tears filling my voice, as my emotions seem to fall upon me in tidal waves.

"Hey." He sits back down on the couch and takes me into his arms. "It's okay you know. You can still back out Justin. I swear to you, I'll help you raise the baby. I know Griffin will still support the baby too. He wouldn't just abandon you if you said no."

"I can't," I cry. "I want my baby to have his father in his life."

"Griff wouldn't leave you stranded. You *know* that. Neither would I."

I quickly pull out of his arms and wipe my tears. "I know that Brian. But, I love Griffin and he loves me. I just don't want you to go."

Brian laughs and kisses my cheek. "Well, how about you come with me? Your Mom has this really great property for me to look at on the outskirts of Pittsburgh. She said it's practically a mansion but the owner is going into foreclosure so I can get it for a steal. Come on, it'll take your mind off of things."

"Okay," I agree.

You know, I envy Brian. He's always known what he's wanted. Ever since we were kids, he knew that he wanted to have his own Ad Agency, live in a big house and drive nice cars. He's going to have it all. Brian always gets what he wants.

Saturday, June 16th 2007

Justin's P.O.V.

Your white eyes hide your face
As you float in between
I am with you
If you leave
Fragile to the waves
Vicissitudes of days

"My mother is going to freak out," I mumble.

"We've waited a long time. She suspects something is going on," Brian reminds me. "She thinks you're depressed and over-eating and keeps bugging me to convince you to see a psychiatrist."

"I know. But, she's going to flip out. I want to wait a little while longer. Until I can't hide it anymore."

"I can't say I'm looking forward to telling her," Brian agrees as he rubs a comforting hand up and down my back. "So we'll do it, when you're ready."

"How are we going to explain this to the kids?" I ask him.

"Jesus," he hops up and sits beside me on the exam table. "We've

definitely made a mess that's going to be hard to get out of."

I frown. "It's still early Brian..."

"No!" he interrupts, his voice resonating around the small room. "I didn't mean it like that. I don't... I don't ever want you or our baby to think that I don't want the baby," he explains and lays his hand on top of my stomach.

I place my hand over his and I realize that the second I touch him, it stops shaking. "It's been a long time since I was pregnant. I don't remember feeling the baby this early."

"Maybe it's because you know what to expect?" His fingers make little circles over the gown, tickling my stomach. I can't help but laugh. "You're still ticklish there?"

"Yeah." I gently push his hand away and look up at him. I'm surprised to see a huge smile on his face. "Are you really happy, Brian?"

His smile fades a little as he shrugs. "I think so. I told you, I want to be happy about our child."

Brian has been doing great with the kids, especially with Audrey. He goes into Kinnetik three days a week and takes her with him. She stays with his assistant, Cynthia if he's in an important meeting, but usually he keeps her entertained in his office. He even set up a baby swing and playpen for her in there. When he's not at work, he's home, doing stuff around the house and playing with Evvie, she only goes to pre-k for half a day.

On the three days that Brian takes Audrey with him to Kinnetik I take Evvie with me after school to the Bloom Gallery where I got a part time job doing scheduling and promotional work in the afternoons.

At first, I'd applied for a daytime position, but Mr. Bloom wanted someone to be there in the afternoons while he was there. He knew a little bit about why I'd left Chicago and suggested me bringing Evvie along to work. The suggestion threw me at first. But, Sydney Bloom apparently loves kids and misses his granddaughter who recently moved to Florida. He set up a little desk beside mine for Evelyn. She colors, reads books or plays with her Leap pad while I do my work.

Evvie and I pick up Leighton from school on our way home those days and I usually grab take-out on the way. Most of the other days Brian or I make dinner, or my mom has us over at her house. Yesterday was the last day of school. So now, things are going to be different.

Daphne is a little over six months pregnant with her first child. Her husband, Loren is a surgeon too, and because their schedules are so busy and because they could afford it, she quit her job and offered to watch the kids in the afternoons. The kids love Daphne, but Evelyn has begged to come to work with me.

So why am I even in Pittsburgh? Well, I quit my job in Chicago, sold my

house and now Leighton and I are permanently living here. I didn't think I'd do it. I was determined to have my own life. But a couple of days after we found out I was pregnant, something changed, drastically.

"Justin. Earth to Justin?"

I snap out of my thoughts and turn toward Brian again. "What?"

He laughs. "Geez, already with the pregnant daydreams huh?"

"What?"

"I remember when you were pregnant with Leighton you'd daydream constantly. We'd go out for lunch and I'd be talking to you and you'd go off into another place."

"I can't believe you remember that."

"I remember everything about that time. Christ you were emotional. Oh, and those Lamaze classes..." he trails off laughing.

"I thought you didn't mind going to those." I poke him in the ribs playfully.

"Ow!"

"Shh..." I tell him, hearing a knock on the door. "Get up."

Brian hops off the exam table and calls out, "Come in."

Doctor Landon quickly enters the room and shuts the door behind him. He turns toward us with a smile on his face and holds out his hand to Brian. "Hi, I'm Jacob Landon."

Brian shakes the man's hand. "Brian Kinney."

The doctor then turns his attention to me and we shake hands. "You must be Justin Taylor?"

"Yes," I tell him, surprised with the enthusiasm I hear in his voice.

After what happened at the hospital and the rude way the doctors treated Brian after Griffin died, we were determined to go somewhere else. We called around looking for a doctor that could take on new patients and thankfully, Dr. Landon agreed to see us today. He's one of six OBGYN's at this birthing center and they have a web site where prior patients talked about their experience and all the reviews said he was a wonderful Doctor. But I didn't expect him to be this 'sunny'.

Dr. Landon sets the chart down after flipping through it for a few moments. "I'd like you to elaborate on some of the questions you answered in the paper work if you don't mind?"

"Okay," I say worriedly and look up at Brian for support.

Brian smiles reassuringly at me but then narrows his eyes at the doctor

and takes back his seat beside me on the exam table.

"Justin, Brian is the father correct?"

"Yes," I tell him, feeling a warm sensation pass through my body and a heavy feeling in my heart. It's as if answering that one question suddenly allowed everything to change.

"May I speak freely about your medical needs with him?"

"Of course," I tell the doctor. I take Brian's hand. "We've been through this before." I'm referring to the fact that Brian was primarily by my side during my pregnancy with Leighton.

"This is your second child?"

"Fourth," Brian cuts in. Then, he starts to stutter. "I mean... we have three other children at home...they live with us... they're mine...and..."

I can't believe how nervous Brian is suddenly acting. I've never seen him this way before. I squeeze his hand and interrupt his ramblings. "My oldest is Leighton; he'll be ten in July. Brian has Evvie who just turned five and Audrey is five months old."

Dr. Landon's expression is clearly amused. "So it has been quite awhile since you were pregnant Justin?"

"Yes," I tell him. It seems like just yesterday that Brian and I brought Leighton home, but so much has happened in between now and then that it seems like so many lifetimes ago too.

"Have you decided what birthing plan you'd like?" Dr. Landon asks us.

"We want to go over the papers full of options before we decide anything. That's okay isn't it?" I answer.

"Of course Justin, we'd just like to have a plan on board by your seventh month. Take all the time you need. You can also visit our web site and there is more information there too."

"Thank you," Brian says, sounding much more together.

"You wrote down that you are positive about the date of conception?"

"Yes," I tell him softly, hoping he won't ask how we're sure of this. I really don't want to explain it. "We're positive of the date; it just took us some time to decide on a physician."

"That's understandable," Dr. Landon speaks nodding his head.

"Choosing a doctor who will care for you and your child is very important. So, do I pass the test?"

"Yes," I reply, pleased with his demeanor already.

"Okay then, anything else we can discuss after the pelvic exam. Also, I'd like to bring in our ultra-sound technician afterwards if you're not

opposed to it.”

They actually ask your permission for that? “Sure.” I can’t get over how nice and caring the people at this place are.

“Brian, would you mind hopping down? I’m going to get my equipment set up and then I’ll be starting Justin’s exam.”

Brian gets off the table and then turns toward me. He whispers, “Do you want me to leave for this part?”

“I’m having *your* baby this time Brian,” I whisper back at him. “You can stay if you want.”

“What do *you* want?”

I lay back on the table and then motion for him to come over to my side. He walks over sheepishly. Shit...he’s been acting so...so...*different* since the doctor walked in. “I want you to stay with me Brian.”

“I want to stay too.”

Friday, November 2nd 2001

Brian’s Point of View

When i am with you i feel a little brave

The madness and the wars

The circles that we run

Confusion we import look what we have become

“Do you ever think about what you and Justin’s life would be like if you hadn’t met me?”

“What?” I laugh. “Why are you asking me this, **now**?” I go back to swirling my tongue around Griffin’s navel.

“We’re getting married tomorrow, Brian.”

I look up at him and sigh, “I want to fuck you **today**.” I spread his legs and he hooks them around my waist.

“You really don’t ever think about it?”

I lean over and kiss him, hoping that my tongue in his mouth will make him shut up. I don’t want to talk about that shit...what ifs and regrets are **not** my thing. I was sure they weren’t Griff’s either.

He pushes my head back and laughs. “You really have a one track mind Brian.”

I sit up and grab the lube from the nightstand as I do. “Yes. I do.” I squirt out the sticky substance and put it all over my cock and then shoot some up his hole, making his entire body break out in goose bumps and causing him to gasp my name. “You’re the only one I’ll ever

love.”

His back arches off the bed as I enter him and slowly lower myself so our chests are against one another’s. I smile at him and wait for him to accommodate my cock. “The only one Griffin.”

He frowns. “Don’t say that.”

I chuckle, and move out of his body a little. “Why not? We’re getting married tomorrow.”

“I know,” he gasps as I drive back into him. He grasps my arms. “Wait.”

“Fuck Griffin, just let me fuck you **please!**” Yeah, I’m not above begging at this point. We had so many things to do for the wedding today and I haven’t gotten laid since last night!

“Promise me that if anything ever happens to me you’ll let yourself love again.”

“That’s fucking stupid,” I scoff and make a quick thrust in and out of him again.

“Brian!” he angrily shouts my name. His eyes are blazing. “Promise me or I’m not going to marry you. You know what I believe and...”

“Fine,” I interrupt his new wave crap. “I promise I’ll let myself love again.”

“Good,” he sighs in double satisfaction. I’m moving my dick in a circle and it keeps lightly pressing onto his prostate.

I grin. “Same goes for me right?”

“I promise,” he groans out as he grinds himself up onto my cock.

Saturday, June 30th 2007
Brian’s P.O.V.

*And all of this time i was just trying to reach you
Through the rain traffic
As you float into space
Your white eyes hide your face
As you float in between
I die with you
If you leave
I die with you
I die with you*

I’m sitting on the couch, bouncing Audrey on my lap, which she absolutely loves. She’s laughing so hard, it’s really adorable. I actually see a lot of me in her features, and she’s practically a spitting image of

Evelyn when she was a baby. She's getting so big and she's passed all her tests and met every milestone.

It's amazing how much time has gone by since Griffin died. It's amazing that I can be happy without him. I didn't think I'd ever smile or have fun without him on this Earth. I stopped counting all the things I'm doing without him and I've taken the advice from his letters to me and I'm focusing on 'the now'.

I've also taken Justin's advice. I'm involved with the kids as much as possible and they've made me feel so alive. I've done my best to give Justin space when he seems to need it, to appreciate what he does and cater to him whenever I can.

Things between us have changed a lot. But, physically he's very distant toward me. I guess I'm not really ready to move us forward and I know he's either not ready, or he's giving me time I need too. In truth, I feel like I'm being pulled to Justin and the idea of a future with him. But I'm not sure it's right to explore the feelings I'm developing for Justin when I still feel so much love and want for Griffin.

"Dada?" Leighton's voice breaks me from my thoughts. I spy Leighton cautiously coming around the corner into the living room, looking completely morose.

He's had some really bad dreams about Griffin the last few weeks, waking up crying in the middle of the night. We'd made progress with him, but it seems like somewhere, he's hit a setback. "What's up buddy?" I motion for him to come and sit beside me on the couch and place Audrey down on her blanket to play with her toys.

He glances at Evvie who is sitting at the small table coloring, lost in her magical world. Justin has had a huge influence on her artistically, though for now she mostly draws pictures of ballerinas and princesses. Still, she draws extremely well for a child her age.

Leighton climbs onto my lap and hugs me. I hold him tightly and rub his back and whisper. "What's the matter?"

He puts his mouth against my ear. "Is Daddy gonna die?"

My blood runs cold and I feel my stomach churn. "What?" My mouth is so dry I can barely speak. "No. Did you have a bad dream about him last night?"

Leighton pulls away from me and I see tears glistening in his hazel eyes. He leans in and whispers to me again. "No... but he's upstairs and I can hear him getting sick in the bathroom. He was crying too... just like Papa."

Oh God. "No sonny-boy," I whisper, my voice choked. I curl my fingers through his dusty blond hair and say in the strongest, surest voice I can manage. "Daddy is *not* going to die. He's only a little sick right now, but he'll be better. I promise you Leighton."

He pulls back from me again and kisses my cheek as he does. "Not you either Dada?"

I shake my head and use the pad of my thumb to wipe his tears away. "No Leighton, not me either. We're all a family and that's how it's going to be for a very, very, very long time."

He nods his head at me and hugs me again. "I was trying to ask Daddy something when I saw him up there in the bathroom."

"Ask him what?"

"Can I play with my Leapster now? I cleaned my room up."

"Sure, but wait until I get up there to unplug it from the charger okay?"

"Okay Dada!" He's excited and smiling now as he jumps off me and runs as fast as he can up the stairs. Normally, I might reprimand him for running in the house, but I don't want to do anything to take away his smile.

He's taken Griffin's death much harder than Evelyn has. Almost every time Justin and I think his spells of nightmares have ended, they return. The last two weeks they've been coming on every night. We've been holding off on sending the kids to a therapist, but I think that we may not have any other choice in the matter. I'd better get up there and get his leapy thing for him and I'll need to check on and talk to Justin about this.

I stand and pick up Audrey from where she's scooted under the coffee table and put her into her playpen. She gets easier the older she is and is content to just sit and play with whatever toys you give her, as long as she's not hungry and doesn't need her diaper changed. That's why I can take her into the office with me. The only time she cries is in the middle of the night, or first thing in the morning when she wants to get up.

I walk over and look at Evvie's picture. "That's gorgeous baby." I squat down beside her and kiss her cheek.

"Thanks Dada, I'm gonna have Daddy hang it up," she tells me matter-of-factly.

"He'd like that Evvie," I assure her.

This is something else that is new in our lives. Evvie has dropped the 'Justin' from Daddy Justin. I don't know how to feel about that, but actually, come to think of it, Leighton has done the same thing with me. I'm not, 'Dada Brian' any longer, I'm just Daddy. I suppose Justin and I should talk about *that* with the therapist too, I don't know if that's just a part of grieving, adaption or what.

Audrey, her first word was clearly Daddy. Justin and I sort of queened-out after it happened. Then, she started calling me Da and has progressed to Dada. We show her pictures of Griffin and point to him and have been trying to teach her to say 'Papa' when she sees them, but

still we have no luck.

I thought I knew how hard it would be, I thought I'd semi-prepared myself for what would happen once Griff was gone, but I hadn't. Not one fucking bit. I still ache for him, for his presence every single day. This is why I'm so confused about my relationship with Justin.

There are still days that I resent Justin, I know it's wrong but I do. There are days that I honestly want to just kill myself, because let's face it, I killed *him* didn't I? It feels like every day I let longer and longer time lapse without thinking about him and I hate myself for it. But at the same time, I also am happy about it. I probably need to see a therapist too.

Now, with Justin pregnant, there is so much more going on that I'm going to have to face. I don't even know where to start with fixing things with him. I don't know if it's his emotions that make him turn on me at times, or if it's because he remembers what I did to him and hates me for it. I used to be all about no regrets. Nevertheless, I'm here to tell you for certain. I regret. I regret. I regret. I fucking damn well regret more than any man should be allowed to.

"Are you thinkin' bout what it means?" Evvie asks me, bringing me out of my thoughts.

I laugh when I realize what she's asking. Justin *definitely* taught her this. I look at her picture of colorful ballerinas lined up on a stage. "I think it means the artist is happy and can't wait for her dance class tomorrow."

She looks at me, her face alight with a huge grin, and bright wide eyes. "You're right Dada!"

"I know *my* little girl," I tell her. "Evvie can you do me a favor and keep an eye on your sister for a little bit? I'm going to go upstairs and talk to Justin."

"Sure," she says, puffing her chest out, proud that I asked for her help.

"Okay, if you need anything or she starts crying just come up stairs and get me okay?"

"Okay," she agrees and goes back to coloring the ballerinas' shoes.

I take another look at Audrey and make sure she's happy playing with her plastic keys before heading upstairs. I grab Leighton's Leapster off the shelf in the playroom and make sure he's all set up and then head toward the master bathroom.

A few days after Justin and I found out he was pregnant; I finally decided that I needed to clear the whole house out. I left some things of Griffin's around the house, but for the most part, I boxed up Griffin's keepsakes and put them in the attic. The bedroom we used downstairs is now a library. It looks nothing like it did before. I needed the change. I needed to make it mine again and Justin also had a lot of input on the changes in the house.

I also, finally moved into the upstairs master bedroom and out of the guest room. I'd designed it to my tastes so long ago. Griffin never liked it and he never slept in it. It's surprising how well I actually sleep in there.

Justin showers or bathes in the mornings in the master bathroom. I didn't have the other bathrooms redesigned. But I knew that Justin would love to take advantage of the huge sunk-in bathtub and gorgeous shower.

He's pregnant and I want to do everything I can to make sure he's comfortable. We've got so much stress to deal with every day; I'd be lying if I said I wasn't terrified for him. He's healthy and medically everything is fine, but I'm still so fucking scared that I'm going to lose him too.

"Justin, can I come in?" I ask, knocking on the bathroom door.

"Yeah," he gasps out, his voice hoarse.

I step inside the bathroom, then close and lock the door behind me. Justin is crouched on his hands and knees and spitting into the toilet. "You okay?" I kneel down behind his wet naked body. It looks like he was in the process of taking a shower when he got sick, there's a trail of puddles from the glass shower to here, now soaking my jeans.

He wipes his mouth with the back of his hand and leans against me. "Where are the kids?"

"Evvie's coloring while keeping an eye on Audrey. Leighton finished cleaning his room so he's playing with the Leapster. Are you all right?" I run my hands up and down his cold arms. "You're freezing."

He nods his head and sighs. "I haven't even thrown up at this point I wish I could, but it's just been queasiness and dry heaves."

"Griffin hardly ever had morning..."

"Brian, don't," he interrupts me.

"What?"

He turns his head and looks into my eyes. "I'm not Griffin. I know you miss him. *I* miss him. But, you have got to stop comparing my pregnancy with his, okay? This is *my* pregnancy and *our* baby."

"Okay," I reply.

He moves around and sits his plump ass on the bath mat and draws his legs up to his chest and rests his head against my torso. As I look down at his body in this position I can see more clearly the evidence that Justin is pregnant. His stomach is round and already there are small stretch marks running lengthwise down from his belly button. A few of them are from his pregnancy with Leighton.

I'm just about to tell him about what Leighton said when I hear him sniffle and see his eyes are closed and tears are falling from the corners.

"Why are crying Justin?"

"Don't worry," is all he says in a quiet whisper. He keeps his eyes closed tightly and he's biting on his lip almost hard enough to make it bleed.

"Open your eyes and look at me Justin."

He complies and tilts his head back so he's looking up at me. "Please just go okay?"

"What the fuck is the matter Justin?" I say this in soft tone of voice, letting him hear the worry I have for him, hanging on the edge of each word I speak.

He brings his hands up and catches mine, stopping their movement on his shoulders. "I'm sorry."

"What are you sorry for?"

"I'm sorry because I want you to hold me. I want you to touch me. Brian I..." he trails off, and he doesn't have to say it, I can see it in his glassy dark blue eyes.

I thread my fingers through one of his hands as my body starts to shake from the inside. I take his other hand in mine and move it so that his fingertips rest against my cheek. "You don't have to be sorry," I whisper. I'll never forget the way I treated Griffin at the end. I know he felt my distance even when I had him wrapped in my arms. "It's okay Justin." I won't let Justin feel like that. I know that Justin felt so vulnerable when he was pregnant with Leighton and Griff always wanted to be touched, to be made love to when he was pregnant. Griffin needed the reassurance that Justin, sadly never got with his first pregnancy and I won't let that happen to him again. He deserved better from me, from *us* then, and he deserves better now.

"I swear it is," my words confuse him and make his hands go rigid in mine. "Sunshine, it's okay if you want that," I murmur reassuringly. I kiss his fingers and then I start to lick them, holding his hand and directing all movement as his eyelids flutter.

"Brian," he whimpers.

I lean back against the bathroom wall and spread my legs so he's sitting in between me. "I know that you need it." I move our hands down to his chest and manipulate him to start to pinch one of his nipples while I play with his other one, making him gasp and squeeze my other hand tightly. "I want to be here for you Justin."

I move our other hands down to his erection; his head falls forward as I start to nibble on his neck at the same time as I wrap our hands around his cock. He's so responsive right away, his pre-come is enough to lube our fists as we play with his dick, stroking it in fast movements.

"Brian..." he moans my name in a whisper that prompts me to whisper his name into his ear as I lick and bite at it.

His body wiggles in my lap, his ass grinding back and forth against my jeans. My dick is hard but this isn't about me, it's about *him*. Justin's mouth hangs open and he starts to pant in short quick gasps, little whines escaping every now and then, his head now back on my shoulder, rolling back and forth against me as we work to bring him to orgasm.

I've moved my mouth to his cheek, continuing to pinch his nipple and watching through my own, heavy-lidded gaze as he twists his other one between his thumb and forefinger. He's fucking beautiful. I've never seen Justin like this... no... that's not right. *I have* seen him like this. Years ago, when Justin lost his virginity, he was this beautiful, this lost but encompassed by *me*. "Come on," I urge him. "Let yourself go Sunshine. Come for me," I whisper harshly, craning my neck so that I can capture his lips into my kiss. I taste the insides of his mouth with my tongue, his want for me, transfers into my body from our kiss.

I feel his body shake, seize and tremble and he groans his excitement into my mouth, his eyes snapping open as his dick pulses and starts to shoot out the first jets of come from his penis, coating our rapidly moving hands. I twirl my tongue along his as he jerks with pleasure, so much so that I realize, as our mouths separate and our breathing starts to normalize, I've come in my pants. Fuck! I guess I needed it as much as he did.

Tuesday, April 20th 1982

3rd Person P.O.V.

"The Ferry boat ride was really cool!" Brian shouted and hopped up onto the platform.

"It was!" Justin agreed, in excitement.

"This is the bestest birthday I ever had Mrs. Taylor," Brian told Jennifer.

Jennifer smiled at Brian as she strapped Molly into her stroller. "You haven't even seen the Magic Kingdom yet," she replied and laughed.

"You can call us Craig and Jennifer," Craig said to the boy.

Brian nodded. Sometimes, he told the kids at school that Jennifer was his Mom and Justin and Molly were his brother and sister. They'd never seen his 'real' parents and Brian liked that Jennifer and Craig always came to all the events at his school. The other kids had started to treat Brian better now that he had clothes that fit him, he didn't smell and wasn't too sore to play at recess. They were also, very jealous and envious when Brian told his class that he was going on vacation to Disney World for his 10th birthday.

Brian held Justin's hand as the family walked into the Magic Kingdom. "Wow!"

Justin jumped up and down. "I wanna ride on Dumbo!"

"It's Brian's birthday," Craig told his son. "I think he gets to pick the first ride."

"I do?" Brian asked.

"Of course Brian," Jennifer answered. "But first we have to buy some Mickey Mouse club hats." She pointed over to a vendor and pushed the stroller toward it.

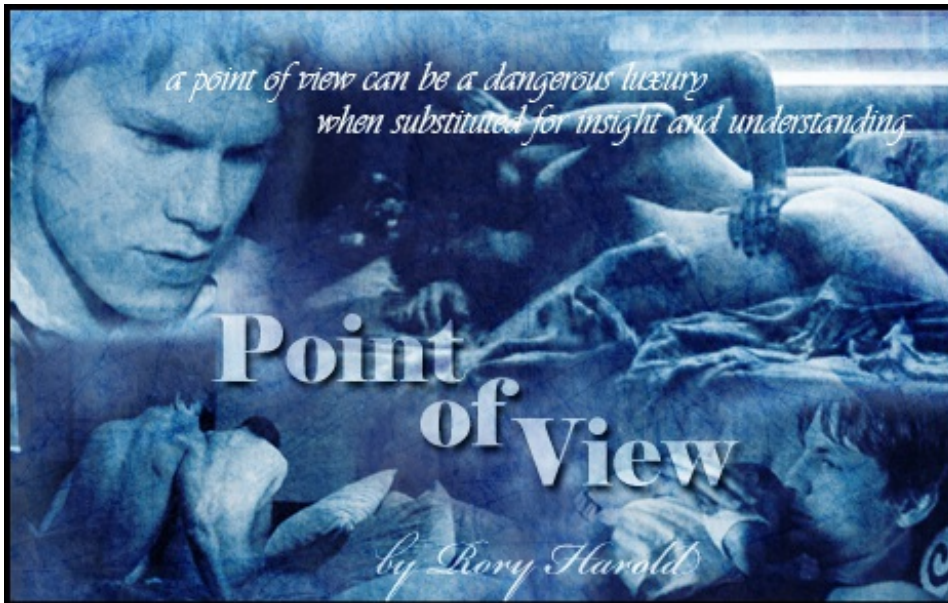
"So what ride are you gonna pick?" Justin asked, pouting.

"I think I wanna ride Dumbo too," Brian said. The Dumbo ride was all Justin had talked about when they'd found out they were going on vacation to Disney World. Brian didn't like to see Justin pouting.

"You're a good boy, Brian," Craig said, ruffling the boy's hair.

Brian had still not gotten used to hearing that, especially from a man. But Jennifer had promised him that good little boys and girls were the only ones that got to go to Disney World. As he looked down Main Street at the large, beautiful castle, and the magical world around him, he smiled and for the first time realized that maybe his real parents had been wrong. He was a good little boy.

Chapter Seven: "English Fire"



Point of View

Chapter Seven: "English Fire"

Monday, July 2nd 2007

Justin's P.O.V.

World news
World news
World news
Well you said
Let's be free
Well you said
I'll be me
I'll be me
Death row hearts

Are hard to mend
Why shoot myself
For your sins
For your sins.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck!

"Justin? Is something wrong?" Cynthia asks me as I breeze past her.

I stop for a moment. "No, uhm.. I don't know. Is Brian in his office?" I ask quickly.

"Yes, but he's expecting a call from..."

"Okay," I reply and continue walking toward his office. I don't care whom he's expecting a call from. I need to see him **now**!

"Brian!" I shout, storming into his office, slamming and locking the door behind me.

"What's wrong?" he gasps, standing up from his desk. "Where are the kids?" he says, practically running over to me.

"The kids are fine," I assure him. Shit. Maybe I should've thought my entrance through a little better.

"What is it?" He looks into my eyes and puts his hands on my waist. "Is something wrong with the baby?"

I step away from him and practically collapse on his couch. "Where's Audrey?" I wonder aloud, looking over at the empty playpen in the corner.

"She's with Daphne today, remember? She was taking the kids to the zoo?"

"Fuck! I can't believe I forgot that," I mutter, wiping the sweat from my forehead and throwing the folder onto the table in front of us.

"Tell me what the fuck is going on," he growls, sitting beside me. He grabs my hand and speaks in a soft voice, "You're scaring me, Justin."

"I'm sorry," I say leaning forward. I grab the folder and hand it to him.

"You went to the doctor?" he asks after opening the item. "I thought you didn't have to go back until..." His eyes widen as he grabs the picture out of the pocket. "Holy shit!"

"I thought there was something wrong with me. I gained four inches and six pounds in two weeks. I didn't want to worry you if it was nothing," I explain.

He nods his head, staring at the picture, his hands shaking while he holds it. "Baby A and Baby B," he reads aloud.

"Yeah," I groan. "Two, we're having twins."

"Are they healthy?" he asks, turning toward me, his eyes glowing with tears.

"Dr. Landon said they're perfect."

"Why didn't we see them before? Why did *he* miss it?"

"One of the reasons is because they are identical and even share the same sac. And their hearts beat at exactly the same rhythm. Look at the other picture in there from our first ultrasound and compare it."

He holds both side by side and I can tell by his expression that he immediately understands. "It was hiding behind the baby," he states, seeing the slight blur behind the first baby.

"Yeah," I agree. "There's no way he could've seen it or heard it. His machine isn't 3D so we only saw what the babies wanted us to see."

"I guess not," Brian says, sounding much more relaxed. He puts the pictures back in the folder and places it onto the table and then turns back to face me. "How do you feel?"

"I'm tired, but the babies are okay," I assure him.

He takes my hand and slides closer to me. "No, that's not what I meant," he says quietly. "How do you feel emotionally?"

I try not to laugh and must bite my lip. I never expected those words to come out of *his* mouth! "I feel like I'm never going to have another kid, after this. I'll probably never get my body back and I'll be raising kids until I'm fifty," I say honestly. "That's why I'm going to have them make it so I can't have anymore after them. I'm getting too old."

"You're only thirty-two," he laughs. "But if you want to do that, it's up to you. I'm fine with whatever you think is best for your future."

"Brian, I was never meant to be a father. No matter how much I love Leighton and these babies," I pause and put our hands on my stomach, "they're accidents."

He blinks rapidly and a few tears fall from his eyes when he holds them shut. "Don't ever say that again," he whispers. "They're wanted."

"Yes, they are now." I move the hand I'm not holding against my stomach up to his face and touch his cheek. "But it's true. I was never meant to have children."

"You were meant to be a dad, Justin. I clearly remember how good you were with Molly when she was a kid."

"Yeah, look out she turned out," I complain. "She's a self-absorbed bitch. She's seen Leighton a handful of times, never calls mom and does whatever my Dad tells her to do."

"Stop with the self-pity," he jokes and brushes my hand off his face. "I was talking about how good you were with her when she was little. And do you remember that baby doll I gave you?"

"Toby," I groan in embarrassment and put my hands over my face. "I can't believe you remember that doll."

"Didn't you give it to Leighton?" he asks.

"Yeah, I didn't think you recognized him. Leighton calls him To-To because when he was little he couldn't say his b's," I explain.

"I remember that. He called me 'Myan.'"

"I think he was saying 'my Brian' and put the words together," I suggest.

"And now, he calls me Dad," Brian says in a pleased voice.

"How did we even get on this subject?" I ask. I don't like thinking about those days when Brian and I were still so close. It hurts too much.

"Because I was trying to tell you how I knew you'd make a great Dad."

"Oh, well, never mind," I groan.

"Shut up and listen to me, Justin. You carried that doll around for years. You gave it three meals a day, burped it, rocked it, changed it, and tucked him in at night. It was really cute. You were so devoted to him. And that was your personality, always taking care of people. And you told me all the time that you were going to have a lot of kids. So, who cares if they weren't planned, Justin. It doesn't make you love them any less, does it?"

"No, of course not," I swear.

"And I'm sure that Evelyn and Audrey were far from any plans in your life. But I don't think it was an accident that you are a father to them, too. I think it was chance. Or fate, something like that... but surely it was no accident, Justin."

"Chance? Fate?" I lean forward and look into Brian's eyes. "Who are you?"

Brian grins at me and leans his face closer to mine. Our lips brush as he speaks, "I'm the father of your children, Justin. I love you."

I jump away from him the moment my mind registers his words. "Don't say that to me, Brian. You don't... you don't love me."

"I do," he responds. "I've always loved you, Justin. I just don't know if I'm ready to move on after..."

"Now isn't the time to talk about *us* having a future together," I interrupt him. I don't want to hear him talk about a maybe that may never happen. I'm staying here, with Brian because of the children. They are my first priority and whatever I feel for Brian can't interfere with my decisions.

"Even if we were, just friends, I'd still love you," he reiterates, coming closer to me again. "We're going to have to talk about the future, even if we're scared to. We need to talk about what happened on Saturday."

"We're not going to discuss that. It was a mistake." I put my hand on his chest to push him backward on the couch but I feel his heart beating exceedingly fast under my palm. "I'm not scared."

"You're more terrified about it than I am," he remarks, sitting back on his side of the sofa. "But we have to think of the kids."

"They have nothing to do with you and me, Brian," I grit out through clenched teeth. "Our relationship as anything more than friends has nothing to do with us being their parents. I *have* thought about the kids, that's why I'm living with you!"

"Why are you getting so fucking pissed off?" he gripes.

I sigh and shake my head at his stupidity. "You don't love me. You're not over Griffin in the slightest, Brian. I'm not going to entertain the thought of 'us' being... whatever it is you think we'll be, until you are. Which, honestly, I doubt you *ever* will."

"You're wrong, Justin," he remarks, glaring at me. "It isn't about *me* getting over Griffin. I'm never going to be 'over' his death, or the love we shared. It's about taking a chance and moving on from the past. For me, that's Griffin, but I don't know what past you have to move on from, Justin."

I feel like I want to hit him. How could he not understand what I have to move on from? It isn't easy to move on from *years* of mistreatment and torment! I can't look at him. I don't even want to be in the same room with him. "You're an idiot, Brian," I hiss, standing up.

"Don't run away from me, Justin," he pleads, blocking my path to door as I walk to it.

"You need to move. *Now*. Or, I won't be responsible for what I do to you," I warn.

"Fine," he resigns, stepping to the side. "Leave. It's what you do best, isn't it?"

"Asshole!" I scream and raise my hand to hit him, but he catches it and turns me around, pressing me up against the door.

"You promised you'd never hit me," he growls. "Don't you remember you promised me that?"

I push at his shoulders but he doesn't move. "Get away from me Brian," I hiss. "That was a stupid, bullshit promise I made to you that meant as little as all the ones you made to me." I slide out away from him and jerk the door open, hitting him in the foot as I do. "I'll see you at my Mom's after work," I say, walking out.

"Why?" he calls after me.

"Because we're going to tell her, today," I call over my shoulder.

"Justin," Cynthia tries to stop me as I walk past her. "You don't look good. Are you okay?"

I nod my head, wipe at my eyes, and continue my path out of Kinnetik. The sun is shining but all I feel is darkness.

Saturday, January 25th 1997
Griffin's Point Of View

All my love
All my love
All my love
All my love
Well you said
Reattribute
reattribute
Well you said
Substitute
substitute

"I'm so happy."

"Me too," Justin replies, but his forced smile tells me otherwise.

"What's the matter?" I ask, whispering into ear as we continue to dance.

He kisses my cheek and then looks me in the eyes, his smile easier. "It's just been a really big, long day."

"Do you want to sit down?"

"We have to at least finish our first dance as a married couple," he informs me.

I nod and clumsily slide my feet on the dance floor. I'm a horrible dancer. Justin is leading this whole thing. I'm glad that the song I chose is a relatively short instrumental piece; I can't keep up with him for too much longer.

A round of applause roars as we finish the song. We bow accordingly, which let's face it, they were probably all clapping for Justin's talent and glad to see the lack of mine come to an end. We start to walk off the dance floor as an unfamiliar song starts to play and other couples step into the dance area to crowd in around us.

"Can I cut in?"

"Sure," Justin says, stepping away from me and ushering Brian to take his place.

Brian looks back and forth between us. He smirks at Justin. "You don't

think I'd want to dance with the man who has two left feet do you?"

"Hey..." I protest. However, honestly, I know by experience that I can't hold my own on the dance floor with either of them.

Justin grabs my hand. "I loved *our* dance Griffin," he says dramatically.

"Go ahead," I tell them. I look up at Brian and say, "Take care of him."

Brian laughs and takes Justin's hand and they walk toward the center of the throngs of couples.

I grab a drink from the bar and go to sit beside Jennifer. "Hello Mom," I joke.

I'm not sure she hears me so I open my mouth to say it again and then stop. She has tears in her eyes and I see her stare focused on Brian and Justin. I take a quick glance and see that everyone on the floor has dissipated and they're the only ones dancing, with every eye in the place watching.

"Griffin," Jennifer gasps out, noticing me beside her. Her face flushes. "Sorry... it's just I've never seen them dance like that."

I have. This is a regular sight at Babylon. Different moves of course, but I've seen it many times before. There was a time that I was a little jealous of it, but not anymore. Justin is my husband, he loves me and I know that Brian loves the both of us and wants us to be happy. He'd never do anything to interfere with our relationship...our *marriage*!

Wow, just a few months ago I thought that Justin wouldn't even want to try to have a relationship with me, but now we're married and we're going to have a family too.

Growing up in the foster care system was pretty horrible and because of that, I always imagined having a real family. Even though Justin getting pregnant was an accident, it was a blessing to me. I'm going to get the family I always wanted.

I'm going to have to work harder at my career. As much as I'd like to join Brian at his Ad Agency, I want to be able to support Justin and my child on my own. He relies too much on Brian, he always has. In a way, I can understand that but I wouldn't feel comfortable with having our income come primarily from Brian's good fortune. Even if it means we have to sacrifice a little of our dreams and have a strict budget, I at least want to try to do it on our own.

The crowd lets out a surprised gasp and I turn my attention back to my husband and friend. Brian is spinning Justin around and they're both smiling. They look so happy and...

"How can you let them do that Griff?"

I look up beside me and see Julian, Brian and Justin's old roommate. I'm still not sure why Justin insisted on inviting him here today. I always got the feeling that he didn't like me. Brian and Justin swear it isn't true.

But, I can't help but think it is. I stand up and start to walk back toward the bar. I guess I really needed that drink.

"You'd think *they* were the newly-weds," he whispers conspiratorially into my ear as I pass him.

I turn to him and roll my eyes, not looking out on the dance floor. "Shut up. They're best friends; they've always been like that."

He laughs at me. "That isn't how best friends dance."

I glance at Brian and Justin and yeah, I'll admit that the dance seems intimate. Nevertheless, that's just them. They always have that way about them. I've learned to live with it; anyone who loves them has to. "Like I said, they're best friends. That's all it is, that's all it'll ever be, that's all they ever have been."

"Since when?"

I roll my eyes at him.

"Do you mean to tell me the two of them *still* don't admit to fucking one another wild that night of my anniversary party?"

Okay. I know this party. I went to it! It Oh. No, I had to work. "What are you talking about?"

"They spent the whole first night locked in their hotel room. No one ever saw them go in or out until they came down for breakfast the next morning; acting as though nothing happened. Brenda and I figured they were just playing with us and didn't want to give anyone the details when we asked about it. I mean, they were nearly fucking in the elevator up to their room. We were quite surprised when Brian told us you and Justin were together."

"Well... maybe that's because there weren't any details for you to find out. Maybe you got it wrong," I spit out at the little fucker. I'm not going to have someone ruin my wedding day.

He shrugs. "Chill Griffin. Christ, I thought I was doing you a favor. Brian and Justin are my friends, but I think any man should know what they're getting into with marriage."

"Whatever," I mumble walking away from him.

I go over to the bar, get myself another drink and take my seat next to Jennifer as the song ends.

"Is there a problem?" she asks hesitantly.

"No, he just doesn't like me much."

Jennifer frowns. "Well I've never cared for him. Just don't let him ruin your day."

I take a sip of my whiskey and shake my head at Jennifer, watching as

Brian drags my husband off the dance floor. He's smiling brightly now and his cheeks are a little flushed, that always makes me so hot.
"Nothing could ruin today, Mom," I reply.

Monday, July 2nd 2007
Justin's P.O.V.

Burn myself)
Burn myself on your bed
Your crown of thorns
My crown of led
Ah, my crown of lead

"What the fuck is the matter with you two?" my mother shouts, causing both Brian and I to jump.

Okay. She's taking this much worse than I thought she would. And, believe me. I'd imagined a terrible reaction.

"Mom, please." I try to get up to find some way to calm her but Brian pulls me back to sit next to him.

"Don't!" she growls at me in a tone I've seldom heard her use. Carding a hand through her blonde hair, she stops her pacing and let's out a long deep breath and squeezes her eyes shut. When her eyes open, I see that they're glassy with oncoming tears.

I feel my own start to well up too. Why can't my being pregnant ever be a happy thing? Why do I get myself into these situations? Well, okay... so it's not entirely my fault but...

"What are you planning on telling the kids?" My mother sits down on the coffee table in front of us and looks back and forth between Brian and me.

"I..." I don't know. That's the honest answer. But fuck if I want to admit that.

"What do you suggest we tell them Jennifer?" Brian asks my mother. His voice is shaking but has an apologetic rumble to it that I've only heard my mother get out of him. However, that was when we were kids misbehaving. Somehow, though it feels like that again. We're here in my mother's living room, essentially telling her about a booboo we never should've gotten in the first place.

"Do you love him, Brian?" my mother asks, surprising me.

I'm about to interrupt her. I want to tell her that whatever Brian feels for me has nothing to do with the fuck up we're in right now. But Brian's voice stops me from speaking.

"He's my best friend, Mom. Of course I love him."

I can't look at him right now. My heart twists inside my chest and I feel

those tears wanting to stream, so I wipe my eyes and just continue to stare straight at my Mom. When did I become his best friend again? When have I become anything but his whore, his maid, his babysitter? Yes, I know that we've been getting along a little better and he has been catering to me, but I was sure that was all because of the pregnancy.

When did the inconvenience of our situation turn to him loving me again and sounding like he means it? When did it turn into me being his best friend? I know we were going to work on that even if I won't entertain an 'us', but I don't recall the moment it all changed and I wonder when it did for Brian. It has to be some misguided feelings about the babies or something.

Mom shakes her head back and forth. "I didn't force him to marry Griffin when he got pregnant with Leighton," she says in an eerie tone.

What the fuck does that have to do with anything?

"I know," Brian huffs. "But that's what you think we should do?"

What? "Fuck no!" I tell them. I look at Brian and he seems surprised. "I'm not going to marry someone who doesn't love me. Not again. I can't do it." Suddenly I feel so sick to my stomach.

"He said he loves you," my mom counters as though this fixes everything.

It fixes nothing and yet it means more than I want it to. More than it does to him.

"Griffin did love you," Brian speaks softly.

Why the fuck is he saying that? I scream the question in my head. I lean back onto the couch, bury my face in my hands, and give into the emotions that leave me a crying wreck.

"We have to think about this, consider it," Brian says calmly.

I love Brian and I have since the first second I saw him. But to have him be forced to marry me because my mother thinks it's what we should do is not okay. That would be a torture that I couldn't bear to live with!

"Maybe I should just have the abortion," I cry, my body shaking as the resolution hits me.

Brian puts his arm around me and I feel him moving my hands from face. I open my eyes and stare at him as he brushes my hair from my forehead and looks right into my eyes. He speaks firmly. "I want this, Justin. I told you before. I want our babies."

"Babies?" my mother gasps.

We both turn to look at her and I nod my head at her. "Yeah."

Brian puts his hand on my stomach. "We made twins."

I wish that I didn't like it so much when he touches me there. Fuck I wish I didn't like it when he touches me anywhere. But he's been doing this since we found out I was pregnant and worse since our first sonogram.

I'll be doing some completely mundane task like standing in the kitchen making dinner and he'll come up behind me and rest his palm there, stroke his thumb over my belly button and then move along. And the last three days have been even worse. Somehow, touching me, making me come, has given him some weird permission to touch me at will. At least a dozen times a day he makes some kind of contact with me that isn't only a casual brush or feel.

Every single time he does it, my whole body starts to feel warm. I get tingles in the base of my spine, and this feeling of peace overcomes me. Like now, I just want to cuddle into his body, let the rest of the world fall away and pretend that there's nothing wrong. I want to pretend like the fight we had in his office, never happened. I want to be ecstatic that I'm carrying Brian's children inside me. I want to kiss him and thank him for helping me make them, for giving me what I've always wanted, long before I knew that I ever did, a baby, two babies, from *him*.

"Justin hello? Are you listening to me?" My mother taps my knee and I clear myself out of my daydreams.

"Yeah, sorry."

"He's got those pregnancy daydreams already," Brian chuckles.

I'm going to fucking kill him!

My mother smiles softly at me and her hand rubs my knee. "Are you okay honey?"

"What were you saying?" I ask. I'd be lying to her if I said I was all right, and I know she doesn't want to hear the truth. It'd only upset her more.

"I said that there's no way you're going to be able to logically explain this to Leighton or Evvie, not now or later when they're grown up and you have to explain it to all your children."

"I know," I whisper. Fuck do I know that.

"They think that the way babies are made is when two people who love each other get married and decide to have a baby. You both told them that yourselves when you told them about Audrey coming along. You need to stop being so fucking selfish and think about *them* and what this pregnancy is going to do to them, what it means to them."

"You make it sound as if we've deliberately set out to ruin their lives Jennifer," Brian pipes in, his voice tired and reluctant.

My mom nods. "I know you didn't. But I think that the two of you have gotten so used to the way things worked...before...that you don't understand why this situation you've gotten yourself into now, is different."

"Mom, we're not stupid. We know this is a huge...." I let the word *mistake* go unsaid. Because as much as I feel like in so many ways this pregnancy is one, I also don't want to think that. I don't want to think that way

about my children. Not again. Nevertheless, I know that it is accident I wished didn't happen on so many levels. This pregnancy is the most confusing thing ever to happen.

"Then you need to make it right," she says. "The only way they're going to understand any of this is if you get married and then tell them."

"No. We'll find another way," I plead.

"Look Justin, you're living in a fantasy world, or something," my mother speaks, annoyed.

"What?" This is no fucking fantasy I've ever come up with, that's for sure.

She takes her hand from my knee, stands up and starts to pace again in front of the coffee table. "You guys have fucked each other over time and time again. I've been watching you obliterate one another for the last couple of years. You're never honest with each other. While I supported *both* of your marriages to Griff, it didn't mean that I didn't believe they were wrong."

Brian hops up from the couch. "I'm not going to listen to you say that Jen. I can't let you stand here and tell me that my marriage to Griffin was wrong! I loved him and he loved me and we had a family together."

My mother walks up to Brian and looks him dead in the eyes. "You *stole* his family Brian."

Brian backs away from my mother. I can't believe that she actually said that to him. All this time I thought my mom believed that Griffin and Brian were *meant* for each other. I'm not the only one who is surprised.

Brian presses his lips together and his face is pale. "I loved Griffin."

"I know you did, but Brian, couldn't you see that my son loved *you*?"

"Mom!" I stand up and walk over to Brian. "You don't..."

"Stop lying Justin."

"Justin told me that he loved me... back then," Brian confesses to her. "But I didn't know." He puts his arm around my waist and brings my shaking body against him. "If I would've known I never would have done what I did to him."

I feel so tired, so dizzy, and my heart is beating so fast. I lean further against Brian.

"Justin!"

"What?"

Monday, January 1st 1990

12:06 a.m.
3rd Person P.O.V.

I wake up
I'll wake up
Before i drown
before i drown
I'll wake up
I wake up
Before i drown

"Happy New Year, Astin," Justin spoke, breathlessly.

Astin traced his tongue along his bottom lip, savoring the flavor of Justin's kiss. "Happy New Year, Justin," he replied.

"I want you to be my first," Justin spoke, grinning. He reached toward for the older boy and pushed him against the back of the couch, intending on straddling him.

Astin jumped up from the living room sofa. "Whoa... whoa...whoa!"

Justin looked up at the tall brunet, completely confused. "What's wrong? I thought you wanted to. I know you're not a virgin," Justin huffed.

Astin sat back down beside Justin and steeled himself against the boy's charm and the lust he could see in his deep blue eyes. "You're right, I'm not a virgin. But, we've only been dating a couple of months," he explained.

"So?" Justin shrugged, running his hand along Astin's thigh.

"I promised Brian that I wouldn't fuck you," Astin chokes out, taking Justin's hand away from him.

Justin felt a different kind of heat boil under his skin. He went from horny to pissed in a second flat. "You *promised*, Brian?" he sneered.

"He's one of my closest friends, Justin. I had to, or he said I couldn't date you."

"So, you're dating me because of Brian? What? Did you decide to take pity on poor little ole' me?"

"No," Astin gasps. "That isn't how it is. I liked you, Justin and I know how protective he is over you, so I knew I had to ask him how he'd feel about me dating you, before I asked you out."

"And he said that you couldn't fuck me? Jesus Christ! Did he dictate our first kiss too?"

Astin bit his lip and didn't say a word to confirm or deny Justin's assessment.

Justin leapt up from the couch. "He did!" he roared. "Well, I guess I'm glad I know now that Brian's been dictating our whole relationship. It

must mean so little to you."

"That isn't true," Astin defends. "I care about you, Justin."

"If you did, you wouldn't have listened to him in the first place," Justin sneers and points toward the front door. "I want you to leave," he orders.

"Come on Jus, don't do this," Astin pleads. "I'm sorry. I won't listen to anything he has to say. We can go up to your room and..."

"Fuck you!" Justin roared. "I'm *not* going to fuck you, now. Just get out."

"I really am sorry, Justin," Astin says desperately. "Please forgive me."

Justin sighs, "I can't... not yet. I need to think."

Astin reluctantly walked over to the door. "I'll call you tomorrow. Okay?"

"Okay." Justin nodded his head and turned away as the older boy shut the door behind him.

He took deep breaths to quell the majority of his anger and then bounded up the stairs to Brian's room. He stopped short of barging in when he heard the sounds from inside Brian's bedroom.

"Yeah, suck me Mac," he heard Brian encourage.

"I am," Mac moaned back. "You taste so good."

Justin fumed inside. He didn't think it was very fair that Brian could ruin his New Year's night of fucking and get to fuck around while Justin couldn't. More so, he was livid that Brian had gone behind his back. If Brian would've asked Justin to wait to have sex, he probably would've listened to him.

"Oh, oh fuck. Mac, use your tongue," Brian directed. "Yeah, right there. That is..."

Fuck that! If his night was ruined, than he'd ruin Brian's too! Justin turned the handle on the door, he expected it to be locked but was surprised when it gave way and opened.

"So hot, Mac," Brian groaned.

Justin walked inside the room, instantly fully aroused at the site before him. Brian sat on his bed with his boxers on, his cock sticking out from the fly, glistening wet. Mac was kneeling between his legs, holding onto the base of Brian's dick and licking a long line up the shaft.

"Brian," Justin mumbled.

"Justin!" Brian hissed, surprised.

Mac turned to look at Justin, embarrassment clouding his features for a moment and then suddenly fear.

"What the fuck is going on in here!" Craig roared, marching up behind Justin.

"Fuck!" Brian yelled.

"Shit!" Justin whispered, backing away from his father.

Mac scrambled to button his jeans and stand up.

"Get out!" Craig yelled at Mac. "Get out!"

Brian and Justin were both so shocked to see Craig and seconds later, Jennifer standing in Brian's room, they barely noticed Mac running out.

July 2nd 2007

Brian's P.O.V.

All my love

Oh my love

Lets be free)

All my love

Oh my love

Let's be free

All my love, all my love...

"I'm sorry," Justin's voice is tired and gruff.

"I'm just glad you're okay," I tell him and run my hand down his cheek. "I don't know what I would've done if..."

"Don't," he stops me from speaking and captures my hand. "I'm going to be fine. You heard the doctor. He said it was just stress coupled with me not having anything to eat. The babies are just fine."

I should've been watching him more closely. "But now you have anemia," I say regretfully.

"I'm going to eat right and take more vitamins Brian. I'll be okay."

When did Justin being in the emergency room turn into *me* being the one that is being comforted?

"Justin," Dr. Raleigh interrupts us, coming through the curtains. "I just need to go over some things with you, have you sign some papers and then you'll be free to go."

Justin sits up straighter in the bed. "Good. No offense, but I hate hospitals."

The man smiles at him. "No one likes to be in the emergency room."

Sunday January 25th 1998

Griffin's P.O.V.
We'll hang ourselves
By the English fire
We'll hang ourselves

I don't know what to do.

I thought that Justin would be happier once I took the job at Kinnetik. However, he isn't. He has changed so much since he became a father. I know that statement seems normal, after all, *I* definitely changed. But, how we've changed is completely different.

He's so protective of Leighton, way too protective. I'm his father too, I love him and would do anything for him, but Justin is going too far. He won't let me take Leighton out of the apartment alone. When he was small, I understood, sort of. But Leighton is six months old and I've never spent any time alone with him. Justin insists on going with me, whenever I suggest having a 'Papa and Son Day'. I know it isn't because he doubts my parenting skills. It's something deeper with him.

When we spend any time together, which is rare, I feel like he isn't completely there with me. He talks, he smiles, but it doesn't seem real.

I try to do everything I can to make him happy. I buy him little gifts when I can afford it. I write him love notes when I leave early for work or I'm going to be gone on business. I constantly praise him for being such a wonderful father. Nevertheless, none of it reaches him.

It's as if he doesn't care about anything but Leighton's world. I'm beginning to think I'm not a part of that world. He's forcing me out.

He rarely does anything artistic. I've tried to suggest that he get a job, I mean, Leighton is old enough to go into a daycare, but after that discussion last week, he didn't speak to me for three days.

I just want him to focus on something other than our child. It doesn't have to be work. Now that I'm working at Kinnetik and making a decent salary, we're fine financially. But I want to see him create again. Art is a part of Justin! I've seen a few rare sketches he has drawn of Brian and Leighton when Brian used to come over on his lunch breaks and spend them with him. But now, Brian and I usually spend our breaks together, most of them, anyway.

I've asked Justin, repeatedly if he would like me to keep an eye on Leighton so he can go paint or draw, but he always refuses. He tells me that he wants to be with our son and me. He says that he doesn't want to be alone, but I think he's lying. I don't know why. But I'm getting the feeling that Justin only says what he thinks I want to hear. He's too accommodating, too passive, too involved with parenting.

However, tonight, our one-year marriage anniversary, he certainly wasn't passive. He was more than aggressive in deciding what he wants. And, that isn't me.

Leighton has his own crib in his nursery, but Justin insists on having him

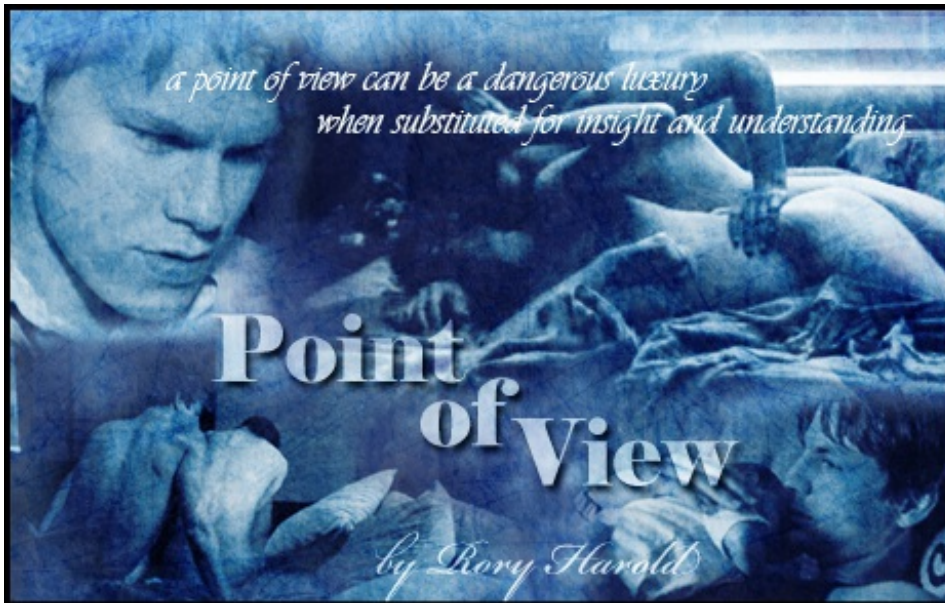
sleep in the pack and play beside our bed. He'll lie him down in his nursery to take naps during the day, but at night, he wants him there in our room. For some time, I believed that it was because he nurses Leighton and it makes it easier for him to have our son close.

But tonight, when our son was fast asleep, I tried to initiate some touching and hopefully sex with Justin, but he freaked out and told me we couldn't do it with Leighton in the same room. I tried to get him to go into the living room with me. I know the pullout sofa isn't that comfortable, but I understood that he didn't want to move Leighton, he wakes up easily and if we got 'hot and heavy' we might awaken him.

Justin made excuse after excuse about why he couldn't leave Leighton alone in the room. He deflected every attempt I made to assure him that our son would be fine. I even plugged in the baby monitor but then he accused me of being uncaring. He explained that he would have to be the one to wake with Leighton in three hours and he needed to get as much sleep as he could. I told him that I'd wake up so he could sleep. Brian let me take the day off tomorrow so sleeping wouldn't be an issue. I know how to heat up the milk he keeps in the freezer. But he refused, saying those were for emergencies. I gave up trying after that. If I were a different kind of man I might be jealous of the attention my son gets from my husband.

But I'm realizing that Justin's weird behavior isn't only because of Leighton, it is because of me. I don't think he loves me. I'm not sure he ever did.

Chapter Eight: "Bonedriven"



Point of View

Chapter Eight: "Bonedriven"

July 2nd 2007

Brian's P.O.V.

We're just a wish away

27th letter

Much maligned

Beat me clever

When we get home, I hold one of his hands in my own and place the other on the small of his back, to lead him up the stairs. Once we reach his room, we both abruptly stop our footsteps, just inside the entrance.

"Shit," Justin groans in a weak voice, "I was supposed to finish the laundry after we got back from my mom's house. There's a load of my sheets that need to go into the dryer and the extra sheets for the kids still need to be washed."

Fuck. I know he could get by with sleeping on the bare mattress with a blanket; but after all this stress he deserves to made extremely comfortable. "Okay, well I'll put them in the dryer; you can just stay in the other guest room."

"Those are in the pile too. I think I'm fucking 'nesting'," he explains. "I can't stop cleaning and organizing everything. When I left for the doctor this morning, I didn't plan on not coming home so late."

"What about my room?" I hope he didn't clean in there too. I can wash my own sheets, I've been trying to do everything I can and leave him as little as possible to do.

He looks up at me and his cheeks flush. "I put fresh linens on but I

haven't..."

"Well then you can sleep in there for now. I'll finish washing the rest and you can move to your bed later, okay?" I can't believe that he did *my* bed first. I guess that's just more proof that he puts me first, more often than he should. Whether he does this on purpose or not, I have to start putting him first. He needs to do the same.

"Okay, just let me change into some sweats first."

I watch him as he walks slowly over to his dresser; when he bends down, I can't help but look at the way his ass fills out his new pair of jeans, pushing at the fabric and tempting me. He's always had such a great ass.

"What?"

Shit. I've been staring but I can't help it.

Justin smiles at me innocently, takes off his shirt and shucks his jeans down his hips and steps out of them. "What the heck are you staring at me for?"

"Your body is changing so much," I tell him, eyeing him up and down, my gaze finally resting again on his stomach. Yeah, there was no way I was going to tell him that I was lusting after his stellar ass.

He blushes and reaches for his pants, pulling them on over his briefs. "Thanks to you, I have this beautiful 'round' body," he says sarcastically.

The only thing 'round' about him is his ass. He's perfectly fit every where else. I smile and walk over to him and help him pull on his sweats the rest of the way. He laughs at me as my fingertips tickle his stomach. "I think you're beautiful like this."

He playfully pushes me away and rubs his belly. "You mean looking like a haggard with a blubber belly?"

"No," I say. I take his hand and lead him out of his room and into mine. "That's not blubber in there and you don't look like a haggard; you just look a little tired."

"I'm fucking exhausted," he admits.

We get in my room and I see that he made my bed perfectly. It looks completely inviting, and even more so when Justin crawls in it.

"I can wash my own sheets and make my bed," I tell him. "But thank you for doing it." I tuck the covers around him and sit down beside him, unable to stay completely out of the bed he's in.

"You're welcome," he says, yawning.

"Please take it easy from now on and let me do this kind of stuff, or at least help you with it."

"Okay," he agrees. "But sometimes I just can't help it."

"Well, when you can't help it, I understand. But I don't want you exhausting yourself ever again."

"You just can't stand to be around me when I look ugly," he jokes.

"I think one of the biggest problems I've had with you, is that it's the total opposite, Justin. One day you suddenly became so hard to be around." I touch his belly gently with one hand while looking in his eyes and stroking his cheek with my other hand. "You have always been flawlessly beautiful, Justin."

"You...you are too," he whispers. His eyes widen, obviously shocked at what he said.

I know he's embarrassed about his confession so I'm not going to dwell on it. He's still so fucking pissed with me; I doubt he means the sentiment as much as I did. I kiss his forehead, leaving my lips on his warm skin for a moment before I pull away. "I'm going to make you something to eat and get your vitamins; you stay awake just a little while okay?"

He nods and requests, "If we have any of that poppy seed bread can you get me some?"

"Warmed with melted butter?" I ask, remembering he how prepared it for me and the kids last night.

He licks his lips, his tongue poking out innocently. "Yes, please."

My dick reacts to him and I find it so hard to leave him. We stare at each other for a couple of long moments before I finally turn to walk away from Justin. "I'll be back in a bit. Just turn on the TV and relax. I'll call your mom and let her know I've got you safely tucked in bed."

"Talk to the kids too; I'm sure Evvie and Leighton were a little freaked out when my mom picked them up from Daphne's. Audrey is probably wondering where I am," he speaks uncertainly.

He cares about my children as though they are his own. It's obvious in not only his words but also the timbre of his voice when he talks to and about them. How in the world he thinks he wasn't supposed to be a father is beyond me. I have to calm him down or he's not going to relax. "When I talked to Mom while you were being examined, she said they were fine. She didn't tell them anything was wrong with you. They probably thought it was a special day to spend with Grandma."

"I know... but just make sure they're not scared. If they are, will you bring the phone up so I can talk to them."

"Of course," I reply. I hope that I don't have to do that, Justin needs some peace.

"And tell my mom I said thanks for watching the kids and keeping them over night."

"I will, Justin; try and relax, now," I tell him and close the bedroom door behind me.

Monday June 16th 1997
Justin's P.O.V.

Say you will
Never mind
Open up
Open wide

"Holy shit, Brian!" I squeal, feeling the crazy rolling around in my stomach as I answer the door to him.

"Hey," he says, surprised at my exuberance. I haven't exactly been very cheery lately.

I give him a quick hug and usher him into the apartment. "I'm so glad you came today. The baby is using my womb as if it's a jungle gym. You've got to feel this shit!"

He laughs and sits down beside me on the couch. "I've felt it before."

"Not like this," I tell him, taking the bag of food from his hand and setting it on the coffee table. I grab his hand and push up my shirt, exposing my huge belly. I still have awhile before I give birth, but I'm so big; so far all the weight I've gained has gone straight to my stomach. The doctor says it seems that way because I had such a light, small frame before I became pregnant.

"I swear to God, your belly is enormous! How in the fuck do you carry this thing around? You have the smallest body of any guy I've ever seen but the baby must have inherited your eating habits, but not your metabolism," he snickers.

His words don't bother me in the least. He's just as amazed about everything my body's done as a result of my pregnancy as I am. That's what makes this whole 'having a baby' thing so cool; sharing it with Brian. I feel the baby push extremely hard against my lower abdomen and move Brian's hand there. "Do you feel that, Brian?"

"Jesus," he laughs his words out, "Not only can I feel it, but I can see it."

"I know," I squeal. I can't help my excitement as I have this huge feeling of revelation barrel through my body. "I'm going to have a baby, Brian!"

"Did you just realize this now?" he asks jokingly.

I take his hand off my stomach and push down my shirt. "Shut up, you know...its just crazy real right now. I can't believe it. I mean, in just a little while I'm going to get to hold my baby."

He smiles at me. "I can't wait to see that. You've wanted a kid since I

bought you that Cabbage Patch doll for your birthday. Now you get to see what it's all about."

"I doubt that it'll be as easy," I joke.

"No, it won't. You can't exactly put this kid away in your toy box when we want to go outside and play."

"No, but we'll get to go outside and play with him."

"And the poop in the diapers will be real; so don't think I'm going to change any of them."

I can't help but grin at him. "So, what'd you bring for lunch?"

He takes his hand away from my stomach and grimaces. "Did you really just go from talking about poop to asking what I brought for lunch?"

"It's not uncommon for the baby to poop while it eats," I tease.

"Okay, just for that," he reaches and grabs the white bag, "You have to guess what I brought before I give it to you."

I smell the air. "It's definitely Italian."

"Duh."

I sniff a few times. "Hmmm...well I'm gonna say cheese manicotti with red sauce for me and a chicken garlic salad for you."

He stares at me with a look of disbelief. "That's fucked up you know."

I smile and laugh at him. God do I love our lunch dates. Whenever I spend time with Brian, it's the only time I feel as if my life is normal. It's the only time that I feel like I can relax and just enjoy being Brian Kinney's best friend.

I don't mind being pregnant, but Griffin sort of acts like that's all I am. I'm his pregnant husband. I want to only be Justin, sometimes. With Brian, I am.

July 2nd 2007

Brian's P.O.V.

Bonedriven

Bonedriven

See we're taking all the life

To all pollutants

Shave your face

We're all confusion

We're all the rage

It's nearly nine o'clock and I'm completely beat. Thankfully, tomorrow starts the holiday and both Justin and I have off work the next few days. We'll be able to relax and lounge around the house a little with the kids.

Today was one big frightening day. I was nervous all afternoon about talking to Jennifer. After Justin left my office, his pregnancy was the only thing I could focus on. I rehearsed all the ways we'd tell Jennifer; but came up completely short with an explanation that would explain our, mostly my, fuckup. I was terrified when I drove over there. Let's face it; I had a reason to be. She was right of course, about almost everything she said. However, it still hurt to hear it all. Nevertheless, I really deserved it; I deserve more lashings for the mental and emotional beating I've given Justin.

It makes me sick to think of how I treated him. I wish I could go back and change it all. I can't though, so I'll have to stick with my plan and do all I can to show him I love him. The love I can offer him may not be the romantic love he once wanted from me, and maybe still does. Nevertheless, it's what I can offer him, now. I hope that there will be more in the future, no matter his doubts, I'm positive things will change between us. I have to show him that I want that change.

While Justin's been resting, I've been cleaning up the house and doing laundry. It gave me a chance to be alone with my thoughts. When he passed out and collapsed into my arms, I'd never been so scared in my entire life.

Losing Griffin was terrifying, but it was also something that we knew was coming. I will never say that I was 'prepared' to lose him, I won't ever say that it is easier to know that I would; but even if I didn't want it to happen, even if I barely wanted to acknowledge that it would, I wasn't shocked when he died. I may have had moments of disbelief, of hope that he would not; but I *knew*, I knew it would happen.

With Justin, it was only a minute or two that I had to think that I would lose him. Those two minutes with him sweating and shaking in my arms, felt like forever. The fear of losing him, losing our babies, pummeled me; those moments injured me more than I ever thought was possible. I had always known that I could find a way to live without Griffin; I promised him that I would. I made no promise like that to Justin and I don't think I could; I couldn't live with Justin and I have no idea how I practically have for so long.

Jennifer was on the phone with 911 and I was just held him, helplessly calling his name repeatedly. Finally, his blue eyes opened and centered on mine and I couldn't help but let my tears fall as I leaned forward and quickly kissed his quivering lips. I don't ever want to know what it's like to live without him.

He told Jen not to let the ambulance come; he swore that he was all right. But I insisted on taking him to the E.R. I'm glad I did, otherwise we wouldn't have found out about his iron deficiency until his next appointment. I don't want to imagine how things could've gone this week if I didn't know there was something wrong with him. To be honest I didn't notice that he was tired and worn out. I knew that he was getting sick I didn't realize that he wasn't eating regularly until he admitted this to Doctor Raleigh as she checked him out.

Now I am determined to make sure that he remains healthy. I love Justin. I don't know exactly what that entails right now, but I know that I don't want anything to happen to him or my children inside him. I'm going to do everything I can to make sure he and the babies are cared for in the best possible way. I owe that to him and much more.

I checked in with Jennifer again and the kids were all fine. They were busy finger painting and Jennifer assured me they weren't worried. I hope all goes well with them over-night. I made sure to tell Jennifer to have Leighton call Justin if he has a nightmare; he's the only one that can calm him down when he wakes up from one.

After Leighton's birthday, we're all going to start family therapy. I have put it off for too long. We all need in help in dealing with our lives as they are now and in growing from the past.

I finish putting fresh sheets on all the beds, turn off all the lights in the house and head toward the master bedroom. When I open my bedroom door, I see that he's fallen asleep again. The dark circles under his eyes have dissipated slightly. He looks peaceful and comfortable; the way a man carrying my children, a man who cares for my children every day, should look, especially while they sleep in my bed.

I take off my clothes and slip into a pair of sweatpants, opting out of a shower. I'm too tired; I don't think I could lift my arms to wash my hair. I grab the remote placed near his hand and turn off the television.

Justin stirs and slightly opens his eyes. "Is it time for me to get in mine now?"

"Go back to sleep," I whisper. Fuck. I don't want to move him. He looks warm and inviting all sleepy-eyed.

"Mmmkay," he whispers and shuts his eyes again. I don't think he realizes quite yet what's going on or where he is.

I walk around to the other side of the bed and lift the covers to get in. He turns over to face me as I crawl in beside him.

"Did ya get the laundry done?" he whispers, worry-lines creasing his forehead.

"Yeah," I whisper, running my hand over his bare arm.

"Are there sheets on my bed?"

I nod and shuffle closer to him and drape my arm over his hip. "Go to sleep."

He closes his eyes and snuggles his head into my chest. "In my room?"

"No, you're in my bed with me."

"I should lie down in there," he whispers back, his lips moving against my chest.

Isolate
Crowded out
All that's left
Inside out
Maybe I can't erase
All that's left
Inside out

I stroke his silky back with my fingertips and speak softly. "You should stay here, Justin. It's where you belong."

He turns away from me, causing me to think that he's going to get out of the bed, but he doesn't. He just shifts positions so that his back and ass is flush against my chest and groin. "Mmmkay," he yawns.

I hold onto him, resting my hand on his stomach and stroking him, feeling his breathing getting deeper and more even and matching my own to his pace as we both drift off to sleep.

January 1st 1990

New Years Day

Heaven knows who walks away
Heaven knows who walks
Who walks
Bonedriven
Bonedriven
See we're taking all the life
Bonedriven
Bonedriven
See we're taking all the life

"Answer me!" Craig yelled as he stood above Brian.

Brian tucked himself back into his pants and stood up. "I was having some fun," he replied boldly.

"You smart ass piece of shit!" Craig stepped closer to Brian, balling his fists at his sides.

"Craig, calm down," Jennifer spoke, getting in between her husband and adopted son. She placed her hand on Craig's back. "You'll wake Molly."

Craig ignored her and turned his attention to Justin. "This is sick! You call one another brothers and you're in here watching him get his dick sucked. What the fuck is the matter with you?"

Justin backed away from his father's advancing steps toward him. "I... I just came in here to talk to him," he defended.

Craig pushed Justin up against the wall and screamed, "Don't lie to me. When I came in here you looked like a whore in heat!"

"Craig!" Jennifer screamed.

“That’s your son!” Brian yelled, pushing Craig away from Justin and standing in front of the young boy. At seventeen Brian had reached his full height and used it to tower over the man. “Don’t ever call him a whore. You’re the one that can’t keep it in your pants!”

“You ungrateful son of a bitch!” Craig yelled and pulled his hand back.

“No Dad!” Justin pushed Brian to the side and his father’s fist connected with the side of his cheek.

“Justin!” Jennifer gasped and ran to her son.

“You fucker!” Brian pushed Craig as hard as he could, causing the older man to fall on the floor.

“I’m fine Mom,” Justin seethed, backing away from his mother.

Craig quickly got to his feet. “Get out of my house!” he screamed at Brian. “Now!”

“You’re over-reacting to all of this!” Jennifer protested. “You need to leave, Craig. I want a divorce.”

“Over this piece of trash?” Craig asked, glaring at his wife. “All he’s done since we’ve taken him in is ruin our family!”

“That isn’t true,” Justin yelled, standing beside Brian.

“This isn’t about Brian,” Jennifer hissed. “Why do you think I wanted to come home early? I was tired of watching you flirt with your secretary all night. Brian’s not the only one that knows you’re a cheater! I won’t turn a blind eye to it anymore. You humiliated me tonight!”

“Mom!” Justin gasped and turned to his father. “How could you do that to her?” he demanded.

“That’s none of your business,” Craig growled. “You’re a child, an ungrateful one, just like him,” he said, waving his hand at Brian.

“Get out, Craig!” Jennifer said, stepping up to her husband. “Pack your bags and get out of my house.”

“Mommy, why are you making Daddy leave?” Molly’s small voice cut into the room.

Jennifer wiped her tears and walked over to her daughter. “Sweetie, you need to go back to bed. We’ll talk about this in the morning.”

“No!” Molly screamed. “I want to go with Daddy!”

Craig gave Jennifer a smug expression. “Go pack an over-night bag sweetheart; we’ll go stay in a hotel tonight.”

“You will not!” Jennifer screamed.

"She's my daughter," Craig replied snidely. "If I want to take her with me, out of this hell you call a home, I will."

"Molly, please, you have to stay here with us," Justin tried.

"I don't want to stay here! You and Brian hate me and I want to go with Daddy!"

"We don't hate you Molly," Brian protested. "We love you."

"You sent me to bed early!" Molly cried. "I wanted to watch the ball drop on t.v. but you wouldn't let me and Daddy said I could."

"I told Brian and Justin that you couldn't," Jennifer defended her sons. "You aren't old enough to be awake this late."

"You let Justin when he was my age," she huffed, crossing her arms and glaring at her mother.

"That's because your father and I spent the New Year at home," Jen tried to explain.

Craig grabbed Molly's hand and crouched down beside her. "Go pack a bag honey."

"No!" Jennifer yelled, running after them. "You're not taking her. I won't let you. Not after what you did to your son!"

Craig looked at Justin and sneered. "He's not my son, not as long as he follows that trash around."

July 3rd 2007 **Justin's Point Of View**

I was wrong and i will wait
I was wrong and i will i will wait
I was wrong and i will
I will
I will
Wait

I wake to morning sunlight peeking out from the slits of curtains covering the large windows in the master bedroom. I feel Brian's body pressed up against my back. His breath is even and warm as he breathes in and out onto my neck, tickling me as he does. One of his arms drapes across my hip and his hand rests on my stomach. Every so often, I feel him rub his thumb over my belly button. I remember that this is how we fell asleep last night and I'm surprised we both slept like this all night.

"You awake?" he whispers the question into my ear.

I turn toward him, keeping my body in the safety of his arms. My stomach growls and we both laugh. "I'm hungry," I say needlessly.

"Me too, how about we go out for breakfast before we pick the kids up?"

My stomach lets out a growl of agreement and we both laugh.

He disentangles himself from me and then crawls out of the bed. I shield my eyes from the sun as he draws the drapes open. "Come on sleeping beauty get up," he says, standing over me beside the bed.

I groan and my eyes adjust as I take him in. I let myself imagine, for just a second, that I wake up to Brian every morning; his olive skin shining, his lips drawn in a lazy smile that's reserved only for me.

"Come on, we have to get the little beasts fed." He grabs my hand and helps me sit up.

"I want to stay in bed with you." Oh my God! I just said that aloud!

He laughs. "What?"

I cover my face with hands and mumble. "I'm sorry, I'm tired. I didn't mean to say that."

He sits down and places his hand on my thigh. "Do you really want that?" he asks, his voice so quiet I barely hear him.

I remove my hands and look him in the eyes. "Brian, I didn't mean to say it. Please forget about it."

"Tell me the truth, please?" he begs in the softest voice I've ever heard come out of him. "Sometimes, you make me so fucking confused, Justin. But I'm not anymore."

"Why?"

"I woke up this morning, wanting you... so bad. I was afraid to move, because I wasn't sure I could stop myself from touching you. And I feel fucking guilty even thinking about it. When I... when we had sex last time, it came from somewhere else inside me. I was so consumed with so many bad feelings that I needed to release. I poured them out into you without thinking. Now, it's different. I want you, just as badly, but from a different place inside me."

I close my eyes, take a series of deep breaths, and tell myself that there is no way I am awake. I have to be dreaming because Brian doesn't talk like this, especially about me!

"Justin," he squeezes my thigh, showing me his presence is definitely real. "Tell me how you feel. I know I don't deserve you; I don't deserve to have you in my life. But I want that. I do. I want you to be my husband and not just because getting married is what is best for our children. I've been thinking about this since I woke up, wanting you and wanting you to stay in my bed, in my arms."

I look at him again and see how different his expression is from any way I've seen him look at me before. "You feel guilty though, Brian," I speak.

"I'm not going to be with someone who feels guilty every time they're with me. It'll be just as it was before. You'll feel like you're betraying Griff, you'll hate me for it."

He shakes his head and smiles at me. "All that guilt I was feeling was misplaced, Justin. I realized that for the most part, the guilt wasn't because of Griff. I remembered the night before we got married..."

"Oh, Brian, please," I interrupt him. "I don't want to know about that."

"No, God! Just listen, okay?"

"Fine," I say, preparing myself mentally. He's already left my mind and heart a complete mess I doubt there is much else that he could say that would change my state.

"There was a condition, a promise I had to make to him, before he'd marry me. I had to promise him that I'd move on, if anything ever happened to him. And, last night, while I was doing the laundry, I had some time to think about us. I was still confused until I walked upstairs and saw you in my bed. Do you remember what I said to you last night?"

"You said I was in your bed," I recall.

"And, I said that it's where you belong. I meant that. I was sure of it, the second I woke up today. I promised Griffin that I'd fall in love, again and when he was sick I promised him that I would live, even after he was gone. I wouldn't ever be able to promise you that, because when you passed out; I got so scared. I knew that I couldn't live without you, Justin"

"That was just your fear talking," I tell him. "You don't want to be alone and you think you're moving on because I'm here."

"You don't understand what I'm say. It isn't about my fear of being alone. Justin, I didn't have to fall in love with you."

"Right," I snap. "Because I was already here, easy to get in bed!"

He laughs at me, takes my hand, and places it over his heart. "No, you were already here. My guilt is because of you. I hate myself for what I did to you, to us and I'll never forgive myself for it. I'll never, not feel like a guilty fool. Especially because I know, I don't have to fall in love with you. You're not easy, in any way. I fought against every feeling I had for you, for years. I thought it was wrong and I made myself believe that it was just brotherly love, but I know that isn't what it is. It never was. I fell in love with you in the third grade and I've never stopped loving you; even if I didn't understand that's what it was, even if I behaved like the biggest asshole on the face of this earth, and even if I loved Griffin, and acted like I hated you. You may never believe me, but I never hated you. I loved you. *Constantly.*"

Oh. My. God.

Friday, May 18th 1990
Brian's P.O.V.

A thousand lamps
Won't lift the dark
Rest of our lives
Might have already passed
See we're taking all the life

"God, damn. Look at that ass!" Henry whispers in my ear as we turn down the hallway, dressed in our caps and gowns.

I look to where he's pointing a few feet away and see a kid bent over, tying his shoe. The sun coming in through the large hall windows blinds me as we walk toward him, but I can definitely see and appreciate that hot ass that caught Henry's eye first.

"I've never seen him before," Henry goes on, adjusting himself under his black graduation gown.

"Probably here for the ceremony and got lost," I say, still admiring the bubble but as we near its owner.

"I saw him first, Brian," Henry tells me sternly, punching my arm. "I bet he's a virgin."

I lick my lips and shrug. "Just because I didn't say..."

"Brian!"

I stop in my footsteps. Holy fuck! I was staring at Justin's ass. I was imagining what it'd be like to fuck him. Sure, we've jerked off together a few times, but... he's like my brother.

"You look different," Henry, speaks as Justin walks up to us. His voice is on edge and he's blushing furiously. He knows that I'd kick his ass if he laid a hand on Justin.

Good thing I didn't voice my own desires. Henry would *never* let me live that down!

"Mom told me I had to wear something nice that wasn't my school uniform," Justin replies. He skims his hands down his hips and wrinkles his nose. "I fucking hate these slacks, they're too tight."

I try my hardest not to look at his crotch and the bulge his cock makes under the fabric. It isn't my fault though, he's right, the black slacks are entirely too tight on him. They practically look painted on him. The pale blue button up shirt he's tucked into his pants brings out his eyes and the sunlight shining in makes his blond hair glimmer golden. Oh my god! What the fuck am I thinking?

"Well they look good to me," Henry croaks out what we're both thinking, unable to stop himself.

I don't blame him! The outfit Justin's wearing makes him look completely different. He still looks damn young, but he doesn't seem like a little kid. "Where's Mom?" I ask, trying to divert the attention away from Justin's state of dress or the ideas that I have about his undress. Maybe the pot in that joint Henry and I just smoked was laced with some heavy shit that is making me unable to control my libido.

"She had to bring the rest of Molly's boxes to my Dad's apartment. The movers were loading the van today," he says softly.

"They're not leaving tonight, are they?" I know Molly seems to hate Justin, me and her mother right now, but I still want to say goodbye to her before they move to New York.

I think once she grows up she'll see that her father's a prick. I hope so, because Jennifer and Justin have been in so much pain since Molly declared to the court that she wanted to live with her father. I feel guilty about how everything happened, but I also know that even though Craig wants to blame me for him and Jennifer's marriage breaking up, I know it's his fault. I only wish that he didn't put Justin and Molly in the middle of it.

"No, they're still leaving tomorrow morning, but I guess the movers want to have it all packed up because they're leaving really early."

"Sucks about your Mom and Dad," Henry says gently. "When my parents divorced last year I couldn't believe it. They always seemed happy, but it turns out my Dad was bonking his secretary."

"Yeah," Justin says gruffly, the pain evident in his twisted expression, "same here."

"Come on," I say, putting my arm around Justin and then Henry. "Let's take one last walk down the hallowed halls together."

Justin looks up at me and smiles wistfully. "I wish I was graduating too."

"So do I," I say. "But I've decided that I'm going to stay at home the first year."

Justin turns out of my arms and steps in front of me. "What?"

I drop my arm from Henry's shoulder; he looks at me, realizing we need a moment. "I'm going to go take a piss."

When he walks into the bathroom I elaborate, "It's cheaper in the long run and I'll have more freedom at the condo with you and Mom than I would in a dorm room."

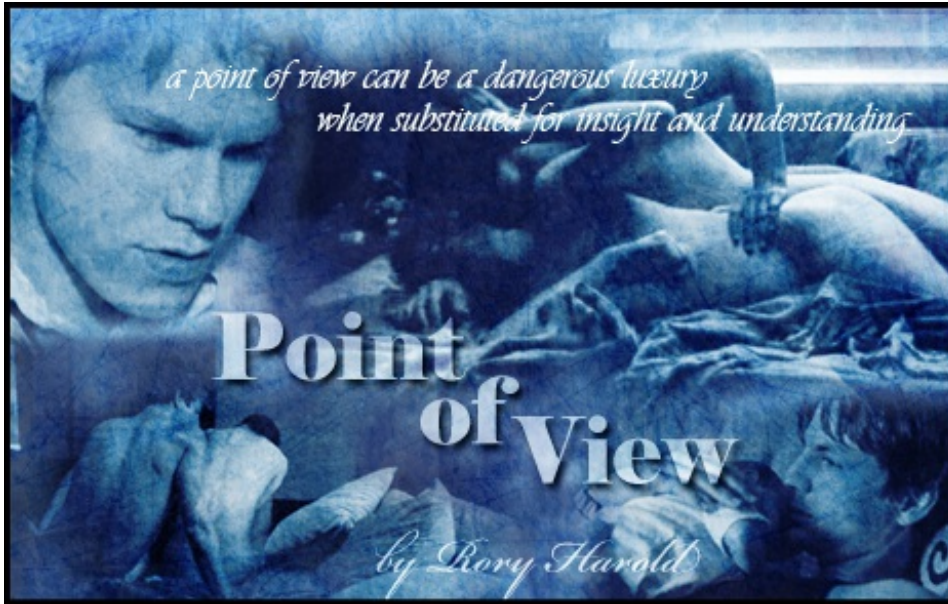
He jabs me in the stomach and smiles. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Cause I haven't talked to Mom about it. I mean, we're going to have to share a room," I remind him. "Do you think you can handle that, Sunshine?"

Justin launches himself into my arms and hugs me tighter than he ever has. "I can handle it. I'm so happy, Brian. I was so worried I'd not only lose Dad and Molly, but you too."

I hug him back, tightening my arms to match his exuberant embrace. "That's never going to happen, even when we don't live together," I promise.

Chapter Nine: "The People That We Love"



Point of View Chapter 9: "The People That We Love"

Tuesday, July 3rd 2007
Justin's P.O.V.

Speed kills coming down the mountain
Speed kills coming down the street
Speed kills with presence of mind and
Speed kills if you know what i mean
Got to feel - woke up inside again

"Brian," I grasp his hand and look directly in his eyes, as I speak, "you don't love me. Not the way I want you to. You may think you've got it all figured out now, but you don't. You're still in love with Griffin. What happened yesterday was that you got scared, you think you'll lose me if you don't tell me what you think I want to hear."

"You said you loved Griff," he says, his eyes clouding from bright greenish-blue to dark brown. "But you were in love with me. Right?"

"That isn't the same thing. Griffin didn't..." Shit. I hang my head as the enormity of the word hangs between us.

"Griffin didn't die, when you were married to him," he croaks, tilting my chin up so I meet his eyes again. "That's what you were going to say. Isn't it?"

"Yes," I admit in a whisper that does nothing to alleviate the impact of my revealed inner thoughts.

"But that's exactly it, Justin. Griffin died. Seven months ago. No matter how much it hurts me, or how hard I still love him, he's not going to come back to me, and he doesn't have my heart. Because mine is still beating

and I'm still alive. Christ Justin, if I hadn't met you, if you hadn't saved me a hundred times since I've known you, I may not be. And I don't want to live like the walking wounded."

"You were never into pity," I supply lamely. I have to dampen the significance of what he's saying or I will give into the impulse I have to go against my sober better judgment and allow his words to bend my thinking.

"Don't mock me, Justin," he warns. "I know I deserve your apprehension, fears and distrust, but please don't sneer at my confession. You know that I... I have a hard time talking about this and you have to know that I wouldn't say what I have to you if I hadn't thought it over a million times."

"I'm not mocking you," I defend. "I just don't know how to react to this or what to say, Brian. I always wanted you to tell me what you're admitting to now. But," I laugh nervously, "It's a little hard to believe that suddenly, what I've wanted could be mine. I'm afraid that it isn't real and I want to be happy, but I've learned to be happy without you because for years now, you've made me miserable."

Brian states simply, "I know." He gives me an understanding smile as he tilts his head so our foreheads rest together and the only place we can look is in one another's eyes.

It's entirely too unbelievably *Brian*. The Brian I fell in love with as a little boy and never stopped loving. However, I was under the impression that Brian wasn't ever going to return to me. "You really think that you've always loved me?" I whisper, my lips a hairsbreadth away from his own.

"Constantly," he breathes the word out and his air invades my slightly open mouth. "I failed you here, Justin," he speaks and moves our hands to touch the side of his head. "But here," he says, moving them to rest his heart, "Without fail."

I feel... Fuck! I can't analyze shit right now. My brain is shutting down, all common sense is blocked and I have no power over my want for him, for what he says to be the truth.

"Believe me," he begs, pinning my hand under his so I can feel his strong, quick beat under his toned chest.

Got to feel less broke more fixed
Got to feel when I got outside myself
Got to feel when I touched your lips

I've never kissed Brian's mouth in anyway that is comparable as to the slow, needy, exploratory kiss I've locked us in now. His nose gently bumps mine with every twist of our lips. My tongue is almost numb as its nerves and taste buds try to compute to my brain the exquisite pleasure I experience with every drop of spit, ridge of tooth and soft lip it encounters in Brian's mouth. My stomach growls, loud enough for him to hear. I don't want to stop devouring him. I've only gotten started, however I feel him stiffen when the noise overtakes the sound of our

bated breaths and loud groaning.

"Justin," he sighs my name into my mouth. His hands cup my cheeks and he glides his fingers between our mouths to separate us.

I keep my eyes closed to hold onto the sensation of us a little while longer. Our lips disconnect but I capture one of his thumbs in my mouth and suck on the tip of it, tasting his salty warm skin.

"Oh, god... Sunshine, please," he groans.

I smile around his finger and hold his thumb in place as I open my eyes and stare at him. I take a long lick, feeling the slight wrinkles on the knuckle and coat them in my spit.

"You're evil," he declares, brushing his other fingers under my chin.

My stomach begs for food again and I drop his thumb reluctantly and smile in a way I know I haven't in years. "I'm sweet."

Brian runs one of his hands through my messy hair and nods his head. "I've never tasted sweeter," he groans, adjusting his cock with his other hand.

Friday April 30th 1999

3rd Person P.O.V.

The things we do to the people that we love

The way we break if there's something we can't take

Destroy the world that we took so long to make

"Daphne?" Justin asked in surprise, seeing his friend on his doorstep. He rubbed his bleary, drunken eyes with the backs of his hands. "What are you doing here?"

"You gonna let me in?" the young woman asked, tapping her foot on the concrete walkway outside the apartment.

"Uh... yeah," Justin said in a suspicious tone, backing away from the door.

Daphne shut and locked the door behind her. She turned and found Justin pouring what was obviously not his first drink, into a chipped green shot glass. The fifth of tequila in his wobbling hand was a quarter gone. She was almost sure that Justin hadn't had a drink since he found out he was pregnant with Leighton and figured that the amount he'd already drank was probably enough.

"You want one?" Justin offered, lifting the glass in the air, drops of alcohol sliding down the side as he brought it to his lips.

Daphne tried to keep her disapproval hidden as she spoke, "Your mom called me. She said you'd probably need a friend tonight."

Justin shrugged. "Nice of her to suddenly care about me, I guess."

Daphne walked over to Justin and pulled the bottle out of his hands. "She was right, you need me. You can't sit here and get drunk, Justin."

"Why not?" he asked, seriously having no idea why it sounded like a bad idea to his friend.

Daphne rolled her eyes. "You're not supposed to be drinking while you're nursing, for one," she couldn't help but chastise him. "It's completely irresponsible!"

"I'm not," Justin said, grabbing the bottle back, this time he took sip from the source.

"What are you talking about? That's not apple juice in that bottle, Jus. I'm not an idiot."

"Yeah, I know," Justin said as he laughed sarcastically. "I meant that I's not nursin'."

"I thought you wanted to do that until he was at least two years old. Did you change your mind?" Daphne asked.

"It'll be too hard ttto do it now," Justin explained walking over to the desk in the living room. He took out a packet of papers from the manila envelope sitting on top of it and handed them to Daphne. "That's the new visitin' sched... scheules and custody agreement. Griff gets him every Thursday, Friiiday, n Satarday," he slurred. "I'll be dried up!"

Daphne gave Justin a compassionate look and took the liquor bottle away from his waving hands. "You and I both know that isn't true. You can fre..."

"That isn't the point!" Justin yelled, interrupting his friend. "He's takin' him away from me! I won't get to hold him and rock him to sleep every ssssingle night. They'll give him a fuckin' bottle all the time and he won't want me no more. I've heard stories, Daphne; ya lose your bond with your child, it's what happens if your kid gets a bbbottle too much and he'll be getting one for days ssstraight. An' Griffin doesn't care! I promised him that he could have him over night after he turned two. But he couldn't wait a couple months," Justin cried out. He was emotionally exhausted and the intake of alcohol paired with his feelings caused his knees to shake, prompting him to collapse backward onto the couch. "He...he hates me and he's taking it out on Leighton. But it's all my fucking fault. I never should've married him."

Daphne put her arm around Justin and ran her hand through his hair. "First of all, I agree, you shouldn't have married him, but that's a whole different story. Honestly, Justin in this situation I may have been worse if hadn't though. You would've had to split Leighton between you two this whole time."

"I can hardly stand leaving him for a couple of hours. How am I going to be alone, without him, every single night Griffin has him?" he asked in desperation. "I thought I was finally getting over my dep..." Justin stopped his words short. Even in his inebriated state, he still could not

bare to confess the truth to his friend. He was ashamed of himself for not being strong enough to fight the post-partum depression and he believed that everyone else would think he was crazy.

"You thought you were finally getting over what?" Daphne wondered.

"I thought I was finally getting over Brian," he lied.

Daphne sighed deeply, feeling helpless and wanting nothing more than to do something to make Justin's life better. "Justin, I don't think that's ever going to happen. Not unless you really want to get over him. But I don't think you do, if you did, you'd tell him the truth."

Justin told Daphne much about how he felt about Brian. Throughout high school, their main topic was usually Brian. It had been Daphne that had alerted Justin to his lust. It took Justin time to admit his fawning but when he did, she couldn't get him to stop. They would convey to one another their fantasies on a daily basis, hers of Billy Houser and his of Brian. That is, until things he only thought of in fantasy actually took place.

Then, Justin began leaving out much of the details of the time he spent with Brian. He denied ever sleeping with him when she asked; and as for his so-called cheating, Daphne was under the same impression that he'd given Griffin and his mother. He lied and told her that he'd been sleeping with one of the single fathers from the parent-group he attended. He'd rather they think he was a cheater than a lunatic who might be unable to care for Leighton due to his severe depression and mass mood shifts. He couldn't take the risk of telling anyone the truth about it, though he himself knew that the only time he didn't feel depressed or crazy was when he had Leighton in his arms.

"I want to get over him," Justin said passionately. "I wish I... I wish I never loved him," his words sounded weaker than he wanted them to sound. This only made the desperation he felt to mean the words even more intense. "I hate him."

"I know you don't want to hear this, Justin. But..."

Justin crinkled his nose at Daphne and interrupted her, "Do me a favor then, and save it for when I'm sober." He was already too absorbed in the reality of his life. He didn't want anymore truths, he wanted escape.

*We expect her gone for some time
I wish her safe from harm
To find yourself in a foreign land
Another refugee outsider refugee*

Tuesday July 3rd 2007
Brian's P.O.V.

*How's it feel she's coming up roses
How's it feel she's coming up sweet*

"Come in," Jennifer says, ushering me inside the Condo. "Oh, Justin," she gasps, seeing him behind me. "I didn't know you were coming into town too."

I smile and nod. "We had some things to take care of."

She looks at us both warily as I shut the door behind me. "Should you be out today? I thought you were supposed to be resting."

"I've been making sure he eats and rests," I assure her, giving her a hug.

"Yup!" Justin says happily. "Brian's taken good care of me." He gives Jennifer a forceful hug, practically bouncing on his tiptoes with excitement. "Where are the kids?"

"Evvie and Leighton are in the guest bedroom watching cartoons. Audrey is in her swing in the living room," she answers, walking toward the staircase. "I'll call them down."

"No," I stop her, walking into the living room. "We need to talk to you."

"Dada!" Audrey squeals, spotting Justin walk in the room behind me.

Justin's face lights up brighter than it already is. "There's my baby girl," he coos, walking over to the swing.

"You both seem..." Jennifer glances between us searching for the right word.

I'm sure she's probably trying to figure out why we're both acting so happy, it's been so foreign to her, seeing us this way. That in itself is sad. "Happy?" I supply.

Justin gathers Audrey in his arms and kisses her fat cheek. "Yes, happy," he stage whispers into her ear, making her laugh.

I walk over, put my arm around his waist as I kiss my daughter's nose, and can't resist, softly kissing Justin's lips.

Jennifer gasps and I turn to her. She looks like she's just seen a ghost. Slowly she walks over to couch, staring at Justin and me as she does. "What is going on?" she whispers.

I gently shove Justin forward so he'll sit down on the couch with Mom and I sit beside him. "We talked about it over breakfast and we decided to get our marriage certificate today," I tell her.

"And you're happy?" she says shortly.

Justin laughs. "Don't sound so disappointed."

"I'm *not* disappointed, believe me," she defends. "It's just that you've both done a complete one-eighty since I saw you yesterday. I haven't seen you two smile at each other in years!"

Justin and I both look at each other and giggle. Yes. We're giggling.

Maybe Jen brings out the childish side of us? I laugh harder when I see her looking at us with a horrified expression. "Aren't you happy for us?" I ask, forcing my laughter to stop.

"There's an *us* now?" she asks, her voice rising in pitch. "What in the fuck happened between you two last night?"

Justin chuckles and squeezes my hand.

Mom puts a hand over her mouth. "Never mind, I don't think I want to know."

"Nothing happened like what you think," I promise her.

"Gosh Mom, you really have an imagination," Justin jokes.

"What's gotten into you boys?" she asks sternly.

"We're in love, Mom," I say simply, yet our love is anything but simple. It's both, the scariest and most exciting rollercoaster I've ever been on in my life.

"Brian!" she snaps. "This isn't funny. You can't do this to him. I won't let you hurt him."

I run my hands through Justin's hair, kiss his temple, and look her dead in the eyes. "I won't hurt him. I won't ever hurt him as I did, ever again."

She nods in acceptance but asks the question I knew was coming, "What about Griffin?"

"I'll always love him," I assure her. "But I'm alive because of Justin, you have to know that."

"Just because he makes you feel like living doesn't mean..."

"Mom," Justin cuts her off. "I was skeptical, believe me. I don't have any desire to get my heart and soul ripped apart. If Brian says he loves me, more importantly, if I can feel he loves me, than he does."

"But you have always said you felt that he loved you," Jennifer says, trying to protect Justin.

"I always did," I assure her. "I just didn't know it, or understand it. I don't want to be with Justin because he makes me want to live, Mom. I want to be with him because I can't live without him. I know you're scared for him, especially after how I treated him, but I promise you, I love him. I know that I can love him and that it doesn't take away anything from what I shared with Griff."

"But it's so soon," she says. "When I suggested you get married I thought you'd be doing it for show."

"I told you that I wouldn't agree to that and I meant it. Brian wants to marry me because he loves me. I love him, Mom. You know I do, please try and understand."

"I *am* trying," she states, her posture not so stiff. "But look at it from my point of view guys. This is something I always wanted for you both but never thought I'd see."

"I know the feeling," Justin whispers, tilting his head against my cheek. "Please don't be angry, Mom. Please don't doubt us. I couldn't take that if you did."

Jen lets out a long deep breath and places her hand over the ones we have clasped together. "You both are my sons and all I've ever wanted was for you to be happy and see the love I saw between you two when you were too young to even begin to know what it would one day mean. I'm not angry and I don't have any doubts, you're both, *finally* where you're supposed to be. Together."

Justin and I both let out breaths of relief.

"Down!" Audrey yells, breaking the emotional moment.

Justin places her on the floor and we stare at her as she makes a beeline for her stuffed teddy bear, the one Griffin bought her before she was born. My heart aches as I watch her snuggle it and I wish that he could be here with us too. It's probably a weird thought, especially because I am holding Justin's hand and rubbing his pregnant stomach with my other. I miss him, but I think that he'd approve of Justin and me. He never came between us, even if he thought he did. It was me, it was *always* me.

"So, when do you think you'll get married?" Jennifer asks us.

"We thought we'd have a small ceremony during the barbecue tomorrow," I say calmly.

"Tomorrow?" she gasps. "But..."

"I want a small wedding," Justin interrupts her.

"And everyone we want to be there will be," I add.

"Except Molly," Justin says sadly.

Jennifer smiles at Justin. "Actually, I talked her into driving down. Your dad's been pissing her off more than usual and I think she may have finally gotten it through her head that he unfortunately doesn't care about anyone but himself."

"But she hates Pittsburgh," I say in disbelief. I haven't seen her in years, she always claimed she was too busy to come see us and even when I was in New York on business, she was too busy to meet for lunch. She visited Justin and Leighton while they were in Chicago once, and rarely called her mother, Justin or me. When she didn't show up after Griffin died; I really didn't think we'd ever see her again.

"She says she has some news to share."

Justin snorts. "She's probably getting married and wants to throw it in my face."

Mom and I both laugh at him.

"What?" he asks, clueless.

"You're having a shot-gun wedding tomorrow," I say. "You can throw that in her face."

"But it isn't a shot-gun wedding," he retorts. "We're getting married because we want to get married. Right?"

"Right," I assure him, kissing him quickly.

Jennifer had a huge, pleased smile on her face but she soon frowns.

"Wait, how are you getting married on the fourth of July? There's no way you could find a minister to do it!"

"Mr. Chanders agreed to do it," Justin tells her. "All he expects in return is some free barbecue."

"Daphne's father?" I swear Jennifer is blushing. "When did he get officiated?"

"A year after Loraine died," Justin, explains. "He's now the minister of our old church. I thought you knew that."

"I haven't talked to him since about that time," Jennifer admits. "Is he doing okay?"

"I'm guess so," Justin replies, obviously not noticing Jennifer's eagerness.

She has the hots for him. I grin at her, "Well you can find out tomorrow."

"Daddy! Dada!" Leighton's yell rings from upstairs.

Evvie and Leighton's footsteps sound like thunder as they run down the staircase. Evelyn yells as she comes into the living room, "Dada!"

"Hey! Did you have fun with Grandma?" I ask her, giving her a hug.

"Yup," she says smiling and hugs Justin.

"We made you and stuff," Leighton tells us, digging into his jeans pocket.

"You did?" Justin asked, pleased with them. "What is it?"

"Let me give Daddy his, Leighton." Evelyn drags Leighton a few feet from us.

"We did an art project," Leighton explains, turning his back and secretly handing Evvie something.

Almost every time they stay with Mom, she does a craft project with

them. It's no wonder that Justin and I both have jobs in the art field. Of course I don't sketch anywhere near as good as he does and I don't think I've picked up a paintbrush since high school, but it's great that Jennifer has always encouraged our artistic side. I'm glad she does the same with our kids.

"Here you go Daddy," Evvie says, opening her palm to Justin.

"Here's your present Dada," Leighton says quickly, not wanting me to see Justin's before he shows me mine.

"Wow!" I really am shocked. "It's beautiful, Leighton."

"Look at mine," Justin speaks in a thrilled sounding voice.

"They're amazing." I can't believe they made these.

"How did you make these?" Justin asks.

"Grandma bought kits," Evvie explains.

"Thanks Mom. And thank you both, I love it," I tell them, kissing the sides of their faces.

I hold out my wrist and Justin ties the cowry shell bracelet on me and then I do the same for his.

"You don't think they're girly right?" Leighton asks.

"Nope," I assure him.

"They're perfect," Justin says hugging the kids.

Audrey crawls over and pulls herself up on my pant legs, curious about all the commotion. She immediately tries to pluck one of the shells off the leather band. I place her on my lap. "Sorry Sweetie, but it's going to be awhile before you wear jewelry."

"Speaking of wearing jewelry," Jennifer says. "Evelyn asked if she could get her ears pierced but I said she'd have to ask you first. I don't mind taking her next week to do it, if you approve."

"Can I? Can I? Can I?" Evelyn asks, hopping up and down.

I really don't have any objections but I can tell from Justin's expression that he does. There's no way I'm going to agree if doesn't. We're both Evvie's parents, now. "What do you think?" I ask him.

"Come here Ev," Justin prompts her to sit on his lap. Once she's situated, he takes her, left ear lobe between his fingers and pinches it.

"Ouch!" She narrows her eyes at him. "Why did you do that! That hurt!"

Justin smiles at Evelyn and kisses her ear lobe. "That's what Daphne's mom did when she asked to get her ears pierced. It hurts a lot more than that pinch. Do you know that?"

"That's okay," Evelyn says. "There's always pain in beauty."

We all laugh at her remark.

"She's your daughter," Justin says.

"Definitely," Mom agrees.

"What?" I say. Of course, I know they're referring to how image and fashion conscious I am. I don't feel guilty about that though.

Justin leans toward me and we share a small, leisurely kiss.

"Daddy?" Leighton asks, looking back and forth between Justin and me.

"Oh," Justin gasps. "Leighton, we have something to tell you."

"You were kissing Dada Brian," he says worriedly. "Why?"

Evelyn doesn't seem to understand that the kiss we shared means anything. She stares at Leighton confused at his outburst.

"Dada and me are getting married," he says, grabbing onto my free hand.

Leighton's frown slowly turns into a crooked smile. "We're going to be a family forever?" he asks.

"Yes," Justin and I both answer him in unison.

"What do you think about that?" I ask.

"It's cool!" he squeals, giving me a hug and taking Audrey in his arms. "It's cool, right Audrey?" he asks her.

Audrey enjoys being bounced around and she loves Leighton, so of course she giggles in agreement.

"What about you?" Justin asks Evelyn. "What do you think?"

"I think I get to wear a pretty dress," she giggles.

"You can be the flower girl," Leighton says. "And I can be the ring bearer. Right Dada?"

"Sure you can," I agree. "But you don't have to wear a suit. It'll be too outside tomorrow."

"You're getting married tomorrow? What about the barbecue?"

"We're going to have the ceremony during the barbecue," Justin explains.

"Do we get to eat cake too?" Evelyn asks.

"No," I say. "We're not having a big wedding."

"You *have* to have a cake Brian," Mom cuts in. "All right, lets get ready to go."

"Jeez," Justin says, laughing. "What's the hurry?"

"If I'm going to get a cake topper before tomorrow I have to get going before the store closes," she says, gathering Audrey's diaper bag and handing it me.

"You're going to make our cake?" Justin asks.

"Of course," Jennifer says. "I don't care how small the wedding is going to be. I've been waiting for this day since you were sixteen, Justin."

"Me too," he speaks softly. Blush creeps up his cheeks and I have to kiss him soundly, to make him pay for looking so fucking beautiful in his honesty.

Thursday, February 17th 2000
Griffin's P.O.V.

How's it feel when it's all in spite of you
How's it feel when she's out of your reach
The things we do to the people that we love
The way we break if there's something in the way
Destroy the world that we took so long to make
We expect her gone for some time

"Brian, stop," I whisper, batting his hands away from my ass.

"Justin's not stupid," Brian growls. "He knows we're together."

"Whatever," I say. "He doesn't know that for sure and I don't want him to find out right before he leaves Leighton with us."

"It's not like he can go against court orders," Brian says, following me down the hall.

I reach the foyer and give him a quick kiss. "I don't care," I whisper. "I don't want to hurt Justin. He's still our friend and he's Leighton's father."

Brian rolls his eyes at me and opens the front door. "Justin," he says in a faked, surprised voice, "come in."

I elbow Brian and whisper, "Be nice."

Justin barely looks at either one of us as he walks inside. I can't recall the last time he looked either of us in the eyes. Leighton is fast asleep on one of his shoulders. "Can I help?" I ask.

Justin sits down on the wooden bench and drops the cooler bag beside him. "No," he croaks, obviously on the verge of crying. "I've got it."

I grab the cooler, hand it to Brian and gently order, "Go put this in the fridge." Justin tends to ignore Brian and me completely, but when Brian's not around, he'll at the very least, acknowledge me when he talks.

Brian looks down at Justin as he takes the bag from me. For a moment, I see a pained, regretful expression cross over his face, but he quickly turns and walks down the hall, hiding it. I know he loves me, I do. But sometimes I wonder if Brian's anger toward Justin is manifested from a place that has nothing to do with Justin cheating on me.

I never wanted to come between Justin and Brian. To any outsider, I'm sure that's what it seems my intentions were from the start. But it isn't true. I loved Justin and Brian loved that I loved Justin too. The love I felt for Justin is still in my heart, but it's lessened with the lies and hurt. He never really loved me and knowing that Brian always has loved me makes the pain of losing Justin less. I can't compare them because they're scores different from one another, but being with Brian.... Shit, having Brian love me with all his heart makes my feelings for him spring to life. I fought it as hard as I could, but loving Brian Kinney isn't a feeling that is easy to suppress. Neither was loving my ex-husband.

Justin takes off Leighton's boots, hat and gloves and awkwardly unzips his over-sized winter coat. "I tried to wake him up in the car," he says the mantra he speaks every Thursday afternoon.

"You can stay until he wakes up," I assure him. The first time Justin dropped Leighton off, he was sleeping. I had to call him to come back because he was so frightened he wouldn't stop screaming for him.

"Okay," he whispers, handing me the rest of Leighton's gear.

"Take off your coat and I'll hang it up," I suggest. I know he wants to go sit in the living room while he wakes and feeds him one last time before he goes. He does this with Leighton every time he drops him off, but he each time, he acts as though the act is unwelcome and new. He's so different from the Justin I met and fell in love with. I know I'm to blame for his distance during our marriage and especially now, but no matter how hard I tried then, I could never bridge the gap. Now I've only made it larger and it kills me to know that it will probably continue to get bigger as time goes on.

Leighton whimpers as Justin moves him around to take off his coat. "Wake up Sonny boy," he says gently.

After I hang Justin's coat up, I coax him into the living room. "I'll get you a blanket," I tell him as he sits in the rocker.

It doesn't matter how many times Brian and I have seen him nurse Leighton. Now, he's skittish about every little move he makes around us. I hand him the throw from off the sofa and give him a reassuring smile. "I'll give you some privacy," I tell him, walking out of the room.

I find Brian in the kitchen pacing. "Why do you have to be so accommodating," he hisses, stopping in front of me.

"Why do you hate him?" I ask, keeping my tone quiet so Justin doesn't hear me.

Brian shakes his head; his eyes rapidly blink at me until he glares at me before replying. "He was with another man when he could've, *should've* been with you."

I put my hands on my hips and eye his expression. I don't believe him. "So what?" I say. "People cheat all the time, Brian."

"That makes it right?" he asks in a defensive tone.

I laugh in disbelief. "Come to think of it, I don't think I could count on one hand how many guys you fucked, *knowing* they were with someone else. Remember that guy Luke?"

"Who?"

"Exactly," I say. "You don't even remember him, but I do. I know he was married and I know this wasn't that long ago. So, why do you hold Justin, your *brother*, your best fucking friend, to different morals than you hold yourself?"

"I..." he can't answer me and just closes his mouth, turning away from me.

I walk in front of him and run the back of my hand over his cheek. "Brian?"

"What?" he whispers, looking shamed.

"If I can forgive you and him, why can't you forgive Justin?"

He takes my hand away from his face and kisses me gently. "I'll try," he promises.

"That's good enough," I say, hugging him and burying my face against his neck. We hold one another for some time and I do my best to calm myself down.

A cry reaches our ears, prompting us to break apart. I half-expected this. Leighton usually puts up a fight about Justin leaving. Brian and I walk in the living room and find Justin struggling to hold Leighton in his arms.

"Go home!" Leighton yells at Justin. "Go home!"

"I'm sorry Leighton," Justin whispers, rocking our son. "You have to stay with Papa and you're going to have so much fun here," he promises.

"You will," Brian says encouragingly. "We're going to play with the race cars we bought last week."

Leighton looks up at Brian and immediately stops crying. "Cars?" he asks, using the cutest, most pathetic sounding voice on Earth.

Brian bends down and smiles, first at Justin and then at Leighton. "Yup,

we'll play with the race cars."

Leighton sits up; slowly untangling himself from Justin, he reaches out to Brian. "Okay."

"Give Daddy a hug and kiss first," Brian prompts.

Justin looks up sharply, obviously not expecting Brian's prompting. He gives him a small smile and then kisses Leighton's chubby cheek. "Bye buddy. I'll see you Sunday," he tells him, handing him off to Brian.

"Bye-bye Daddy," Leighton, says, still sounding sad.

"Bye," Justin repeats, walking out of the living room.

I follow him to the door and open it for him. "I'll take care of him," I say, probably needlessly.

"I know," Justin says, looking at me and for once meeting my eyes.

Wednesday, July 4th 2007 **Justin's P.O.V.**

I wish her safe from harm

"You look hawt!" Daphne declares as she walks into 'my room'.

I'm not sure I share the opinion, but she may be right. "So," I say, turning toward her. "Did you ever, in your wildest dreams, imagine that you'd be my maid of honor and we'd both be pregnant?"

"I didn't think you'd be pregnant the first time you got married," she retorts teasingly. "At least this time I *know* you're going to be happy."

I hope she's right because I *really* want to *finally* be happy. I've been doing everything I can to keep positive today. But, since the moment I woke, I've felt like something was bound to go wrong. The situation that led to Brian and I getting married is far from ideal, but he has always been my *ideal* man and I can't deny that.

"My dad is really excited that you asked him to marry you and Brian."

"He is?" Mr. Chanders has always liked me, but I've always had the impression that he didn't like Brian.

"Yeah, he is. He went on and on about it on the drive out here. 'Brian finally got his head out of his ass,'" she says in a deep voice, mimicking her father.

"I didn't think he ever would," I admit, sitting down on the sofa.

"Do you ever wish that you didn't meet Griffin?" she asks boldly.

The question is one I've asked myself many times, though I've never

admitted it aloud. But in the end I always have the same answer. "No."

She smirks in disbelief. "I don't mean to sound insensitive, I mean, god, I didn't want him to die or anything Justin. I just think that things would've been so much easier for you and Brian if it weren't for him."

"Griffin made Brian want all the things he always said he never wanted," I explain. "I may not have been able to do that."

"I think you did," she remarks. "Long before he came along."

"He said he loved me, but he said he was confused," I confess, grabbing the bowl of grapes beside me. I pop one in my mouth and explain while I chew the sweet fruit. "He didn't think he *should* love me, because we were brothers."

Daphne nods. "Just... hypothetically then... do you wish that?"

"I wouldn't have Griffin and I wouldn't have the girls either. I could never, not even hypothetically wish that I hadn't met him. I'd trade the happiness I feel now, to have him back here," I whisper, my emotions bubbling to the surface. I wipe away the tears in my eyes and clear my throat while I stand up. "I've got to finish getting ready," I say, handing her the grapes and walking over to the mirror.

I see Daphne smile in the reflection as she munches more of the fruit. "You *are* ready," she retorts.

I look at my ensemble. I have a long button-up, silk blend shirt that does nothing to hide my belly and my pants are lightweight linen with a drawstring waist, for comfort. Both items are pure white and completely informal, but as I admire myself in the mirror I realize that Daphne is right. I look hot and I know Brian will think so.

Brian and I discussed attire and came to the decision that we'd both had large, lavish weddings and neither one of us felt that a suit was appropriate. Especially because it's a very small, outside wedding and the forecast expects a high of 85 degrees. Neither one of us wanted to be hot and sweaty, while speaking our vows; we want to save that for later. However, Brian doesn't know exactly what I'm wearing and I don't know what he has chosen. I am certain that he'll bitch about my wearing flip-flops and I'll have to loosen his tie, but either way, we'll be a heck of a lot more comfortable than we would be in suits.

I know that Brian looks amazing in a suit or tuxedo so it's a little bit of a disappointment to have him not wear one. But if he did, than so would I, it would look silly otherwise. However, when I married Griffin I couldn't help but think that I looked like a little kid playing dress up. I don't think there's room for formality with Brian and I, I'm certain that all ended the moment he held my hand for the first time.

Daphne walks up beside me, placing her hands on her large stomach. "Two pregos," she laughs, "fixin' to walk down the grassy isle in a back yard. Could we get any more white trash?"

I thread my arm through hers and do my best to emulate her country twang, "Of course we could. I could be marrying my own brother."

Daphne cackles and kisses me on my cheek. "Come on, it's time to go, you don't want to be late to your own wedding."

"No, Brian would have my ass."

"I'm sure he'll have it anyway," she jokes.

I open the door to the hallway and prepare myself. "I can't believe this," I whisper as we start walking down the short hallway.

"I can," she says confidently. "Justin, he was never your brother, he was *always* your soul mate."

I'd like to make fun of her for saying the cheesiest thing I've ever heard in my life. I can't though because I am unable to speak. We've turned into the kitchen and the French doors are open wide out onto the large deck.

Brian stands in the middle of the gazebo; Leighton holds his hand, standing beside him. They both smile at me and my breath catches in my throat. *This is real. I'm marrying Brian Kinney.*

A Few Minutes Earlier Brian's P.O.V.

"You made this look beautiful," I tell Mom, gesturing to the deck's decorations. I never would've thought that white roses and blue roses could look so elegant.

"Frank helped," she says, her cheeks blushing. "He's really good at flower arranging."

"Let's hope he isn't too good," I say conspiratorially.

She gives me a confused expression and asks, "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Only that if he's too good, he might be gay," I reply, smiling devilishly.

She hits me on the shoulder. "You know he isn't. He just enjoys gardening."

"Well, I'm glad you guys didn't go overboard," I reply, letting the fact that she is obviously attracted to Frank Chanders slide, *for now*.

"I did my best with such short notice," she says, elbowing me in the side.

I give her a kiss on the cheek and smile, "Thank you, it looks beautiful, Mom."

Honestly, this back yard is the perfect place for a wedding. The dark wooden deck is huge and in the center is a raised platform with a gazebo. In three of corners, they placed vases filled with striking blue

lilies, red celosias and white wild flowers. They threaded some red gomphrena plants through the wooden diamonds and hung a loosely tied bouquet of them in the center, acting like a chandelier. Normally, I really can't stand flowers or anything that remotely looks like something out of a cheesy design magazine. Nevertheless, the décor is perfect and I couldn't be happier to have it enhance today.

"Are you ready for this, Brian?" Mom asks, brushing invisible dust from my shoulders.

"Definitely," I tell her. I'm nervous about our future, but I'm positive that I'm ready to marry Justin.

Jennifer looks at her watch and turns toward Frank. "About two minutes," she tells him.

"If Justin is on time," I joke, taking my place beside the reverend.

"You're the one who is always late," she reminds me. "I'll go round up the kids and Molly."

"Thanks," I say with a smile.

"She's a fine woman," Frank comments as Jennifer walks down the side steps toward the yard's playground.

"If you think so, you should tell her," I say, holding his gaze. "Or show her."

The man's mocha colored skin doesn't conceal his blush. "I haven't dated anyone since my wife died."

"Maybe it's time to love again," I say quietly, watching Jennifer come back up the steps. Cynthia, Molly, Leighton and Evelyn trail behind her.

"That's what today is," Frank replies. "A new beginning."

"Dada!" Leighton shouts, running up beside me. "Grandma said to ask you for the rings."

I bend a little and dig them out of my pocket. "Here you go," I say, placing them in his open palm. "The smaller one is your Daddy's and you'll give that to me."

"I know," he huffs, standing up straight beside me. "You told me already."

"What about me?" Evelyn asks.

"Here's the petals," Cynthia tells her, handing her the small basket of white roses.

"When you see Justin get to the doorway, step in front of him and start throwing the petals," I remind her.

"Then I sit by Cynthia," Evvie says. "Right?"

"Right," Cynthia tells her.

Evelyn takes the basket and swishes the skirt of her dark red sundress as she walks over to her position.

"You look nice, Brian," Molly tells me, sounding nervous.

"Of course I do," I remark as she sits down in one of the chairs in front of us.

Honestly, I'm not sure what to say to the woman. Every word that's come out of her mouth since she arrived this morning, has been forced and she looks like this is the last place she wants to be. I only hope that Justin doesn't notice her behavior.

"I'm going to sit down," Mom says, kissing my cheek and having Audrey do the same. My eyes follow them as Mom takes her seat beside Molly. She whispers something in Audrey's ear, making her laugh and bounce in her Grandmother's lap.

"Dada," Leighton whispers, tugging on my hand.

I look back to the open French doors and see Justin a few feet from them. Every memory of pain melts out of me, disappearing through the wooden slits in the deck the cool grass and warm earth absorbing it, keeping it away from the here and now. I have never felt happier to see a man return my smile.

Justin's smile is the sustenance of life. How in the fuck I survived so long without it, without begging for it in subtle and not-so-subtle ways, I'll never understand. I can barely manage to keep the joy I feel inside me as he walks over the threshold with Daphne. Evelyn throws the petals up into the air, giggling a laugh I refrain from sharing with her, though Audrey doesn't. I scan the faces of my family and friends and find their eyes misty and their lips curled in smiles.

Justin leads Daphne to her seat beside her husband Loren. He then bends down and gives Evelyn a loud kiss on her cheek. As he does, his tailored shirt tightens, giving reveal to his swollen belly. The children, all of them, were definitely the reason we both agreed to this marriage in the first place, but as he places Evelyn in her chair and stands up-right, turning toward me; I know the exact reason that I am going to marry Justin Taylor.

It has nothing to do with fear, loneliness or necessity. It's because he is my life-blood and without him, I lived a much lesser existence.

Every moment I spent with Griffin, each day we lived our lives, were filled with honest, true love. We were happy, in love and content. However, I never knew I could feel the way I do now. I didn't allow myself to grasp the strings that dangled off these feelings for years.

I hold out my free hand, he grasps it, staring into my eyes as he steps up and stands beside me. I let go of Leighton's hand, hold Justin's face and whisper, "I'm marrying you, Justin."

He huffs a laugh and licks his lips before replying, "I'm marrying you, Brian."

"You're everything," I tell him. "*Everything!*" I speak firmly, loud enough for all who is witnessing this to hear.

I don't want one person to doubt our sudden vows. Because it isn't sudden, it's long, long, over due. We were bound for this the first time our hands entwined. I join our hands and wait for Frank to begin to bind us legally, nevertheless, from the start, we both know, we were destined for eternity.

Later that night Justin's P.O.V.

"When we can, before the twins are born, I want to take you on a real honeymoon," Brian tells me, the moment he closes our bedroom door.

"I don't need a honeymoon," I tell him. "And I don't think we can afford it. Do you?" I slip off my flip-flops, *that Brian surprisingly complimented me on, though it was because he has a foot fetish*, and start to unbutton my dress shirt.

"Wait, I want to undress you," he whispers, walking up behind me and starting the task himself. "And, we can afford it. Kinnetik is doing amazingly well. Even without me being there to provide my genius all the time," he laughs, "we're turning an amazing profit."

I turn and face him as he drags the fabric down my shoulders and tosses it behind him. "Okay," I say. I trust Brian. God, that feels good. I *trust* him, **completely**, once again.

Brian takes a step back and gives me a skeptical look. "That was easy. Maybe *too* easy."

I walk toward him and place my hand on the erection that shows prominently in his pinstripe gray slacks. "You're too easy," I whisper and stand on my tiptoes to lick around the shell of his ear. I press against him with my body and squeeze his hard cock. "But I trust you, if you want to go on a honeymoon, which I think we could use before the twins arrive, and you're sure we can afford it, then I'd love to go."

"We can afford it Justin," he assures me. His hands grip onto my waist, his head dips so his forehead presses against mine and he groans hot breaths of desire on my skin. "Justin," he whispers, his hands moving, fingers crawling up spine until he cups my face. "My husband," he speaks in awe, his eyes open and inviting me into the haven I see in them.

I beam at him and return the sentiment, "My husband, Brian Kinney."

He laughs, his hands moving down my chest, over my stomach, settling on the drawstrings of my pants. "These are so hot," he tells me, pulling one of the strings between his thumb and forefinger so the waistband loosens. He lets go of the string and my pants fall to the floor. "I've

always loved you in tightie-whities,” Brian says huskily, grabbing and pulling them down as he kneels before me. “But, I prefer you out of them.”

My dick is full, arching up toward my stomach, I jut my hips out toward his face and he takes a deep breath to inhale my scent. “You like that?” I ask him, needlessly.

He answers by sticking his tongue out, leaning forward and licking a long wet line up the shaft of my cock, making me shiver and my knees feel weak.

“Brian,” I moan his name as he closes his mouth tightly sucking at the head of my dick and gripping my thighs in his hands. I want to watch him, but the pleasure I feel gets in the way of any control I have. I squeeze my eyes shut and concentrate on what it feels like to have one of his perfect, expert blow jobs.

Brian’s P.O.V.

I run my tongue around in my mouth, tasting, then swallowing, Justin’s thick come as I rise to my feet. He looks completely sated, but I’ve only begun. I want to touch him, feel him, like I never have before.

Justin is silent as I undress before him and lead him over to our bed. He doesn’t need to say anything because I can read his mind from his expressions and his dark blue eyes. I know what he wants, *how* he wants it, and I’m going to give it to him. I’m going to give it to us. Everything our bodies and minds need will come together, tonight.

We touch one another as though each millimeter of skin is brand new to our eyes, fingers, lips and tongues. Every movement we make is almost in slow motion, allowing each of us to experience every feeling to its full potential. Sounds and nearly indecipherable words pour out of us, crashing memories and present wisdom together.

Sliding in and out of Justin’s body, our mutual gratification nears, ebbing and flowing with our rhythm, opening a joyride neither of us could’ve ever predicted we’d take together.

When we both lay spent, sticking to each other, my dick still inside Justin, and our hands sticky and warm around his messy sated dick, I’m not sure we’re still on earth. But our smells, our breathing, my chest pushing against his back, feeling each bone in his spine, his hair tickling my nose, my tears in his sweaty locks of hair, it’s a heaven on Earth. I don’t think I can call what we just experienced an orgasm. That word seems too small, far too innocent and much too flat to encompass what we reached.

“That was...” Justin whispers. However, he trails off, feeling what I feel, not sure there is a word to describe it.

I take our joined hands from his cock and tilt his chin up. I kiss his sweet, plump lips. Even though it’s a small word, and nearly unworthy, I finish his sentence, speaking into his ear, “Ahhhmazing.”

Sunday, February 20th 2000

3rd Person P.O.V.

To find yourself in a foreign land

Another refugee outsider refugee

What happened to you

What happened to you

What happened to you

What happened to you

Justin parked his car in the driveway of Brian and Griffin's house. The memory of the day Brian took ownership of the house played behind his closed eyelids, eliciting hot tears to escape and trail down his cheeks.

The day Brian closed on the house and Jennifer gave him the keys, he picked Justin up, his jeep smelling of Italian food and new car smell. They drove out to the massive, empty house and carted in the food and the blanket and pillow Brian brought for Justin's comfort.

They ate their food, sharing bites and laughter, talking about the past and dreaming about their drastically changing futures. Brian was so excited, showing him each room, asking Justin's inexperienced opinion on every detail of dream décor. They stayed there at the house until late evening, the light outside only a dim guide shining through dusty windows, creating just enough of a path to navigate out of the home and back to the jeep.

When Brian closed the door and locked it, Justin's guilt over-powered the small flicker of imagination that started to run wild in his brain. He buckled his seatbelt over the large swell of his stomach, locking himself back into the reality he knew. Brian drove, one hand holding Justin's, a tender show of affection that was intimate, yet so familiar to them.

Presently, Justin flexed his hand, nearly feeling Brian's steady, strong hand in his own. He opened his eyes and faced the house. The bright green shrubs and trees framing the home and drive were now sparse, brown, some covered with snow. The sun didn't shine as it did that late spring day; it lay hidden behind clouds in an ever-gray sky.

Justin had realized very few of the dreams he'd imagined in Brian's home that day. He knew that for Brian, he'd exceeded almost all of his own. In only a few years, so much between them had changed. He'd lost the one person he could count on, his brother, his best friend and... the love of his life.

The only thing he had left from that time, a time that was confusing, yet so promising, was a shaky relationship with his Mom and, the best thing in his life, his son, Leighton. Justin reminded himself every day that his child was worth it all. Being a father to Leighton was the salve to every wound inflicted upon him, or that he knowingly acquired. His smile, so innocent and bright was a numbing agent to every scar on Justin that had yet to completely heal over.

Justin shoved his gloves on his hands and opened the door, the cold air and wind whipped around him as he stepped out of the vehicle and into the snowy driveway. He closed the door to the 1991 Toyota Corolla, leaving the engine and heat running.

His old, holy boots drenched his socks with wet snow as he navigated his way up to the front door. Before he could knock, the door was opened and Brian stood before him, holding Leighton, bundled tight in a blue snowsuit he'd never seen before.

"Daddy!" Leighton yelled, reaching his arms out to Justin.

Justin felt his heart lighten in weight as his little boy's adorable smile entered his heart. "Hey baby," Justin said, taking him from Brian and stepping inside the foyer.

Brian closed the door behind Justin. "We went shopping," he said, picking up the diaper bag and a few bags from a department store.

"Where's Griffin?" Justin asked, looking around.

"He came down with something not too long after you left Thursday," Brian replied. He leaned in and mock tickled Leighton through the snowsuit. "So he's sequestered away in his bedroom, we didn't want Leighton to catch the flu too. So it was me and the little man this weekend."

Justin felt heat boil inside him. "He still could've caught whatever it is that Griffin has." He looked at his son, checking to make sure the little boy was free from any apparent signs of the flu.

"Stop being a drama princess," Brian sneered in a false happy tone. "He's just fine."

"Well, our custody arrangement is for Griffin to have him, not you," Justin spat. "Say goodbye to Brian," he prompted his son, using a soft voice.

"Bye!" Leighton spoke happily, oblivious to the tension between the two adults because he was so relieved to be in his Daddy's arms once again.

"I'll walk you out," Brian said, knowing that he wanted Leighton settled in the car before he told Justin what he and Griffin had agreed to confess.

Justin nodded and walked back out into the cold, taking careful steps to the car. Once there, he buckled Leighton then watched bitter sweetly as Brian kiss the boy's forehead, placed the diaper and shopping bags in the floorboard and closed the door.

"Wait Justin," Brian said, reaching out for Justin's arm, stopping the blond from walking around to the driver side of the car.

Justin sighed, his hot breath making cloud in front of him. He turned to Brian, drawing his jacket tighter to his body. "What?" he asked, expecting a snide goodbye from the man.

"I need to tell you something," Brian started, shaking from the cold and the guilt that clawed inside him.

Justin sighed again and spoke in irritation, "So tell me. It's freezing and I want to get home before it starts snowing again."

Brian pushed past the memories he shared with Justin and forced the words out of his mouth, "Griffin and I are together. We're lovers."

Justin had known the truth. He'd known for a very long time. Nevertheless, hearing Brian saying it caused millions of scenarios to parade through his mind in seconds. Images of Brian and Griffin fucking, making love, and so many every day situations assaulted his mind. He knew exactly how they'd smile at each other; laugh together, love together, because he'd done both-almost- with them. But they were together now. He was an outsider and the revealed knowledge of this beat betrayal through each pump of his heart, seared through his veins and into his stinging, watery eyes.

Brian watched Justin's facial expressions change, never seeing shock and feeling somewhat good at that. Justin knew it was coming.

"You're a fucking asshole!" Justin exploded, pushing Brian away from him. "Now you have *everything* you want, Brian. Don't you?"

"Yes," Brian answered truthfully.

"I don't know how I ever called you my brother," Justin seethed. "You don't care about me; you never really did, did you?"

Brian scoffed, "You brought this upon yourself. It's not like we hopped in bed together the second you two divorced."

Justin glared at Brian. "No, I'm sure you didn't. I'm sure Griffin put up a fight, because he's better than you are. He would never intentionally hurt me as you so easily do. You relish hurting me and I'll never understand why. But I know that one day your little policy of no regrets will come undone Brian. You'll be destroyed by the regrets that will encompass you and I will relish the day when that happens."

Brian was shortly taken aback by Justin's words and the vengeance that filled them. He grabbed onto his hand and lowered his voice as he spoke, "Please Justin. You and I both know that this was inevitable."

Justin jerked away from Brian. "This was *never* inevitable. This was nothing of any desired fate I'd ever concocted. This is you, Brian. You do what you want and you want to blame me for your betrayal. I'm the whore, I'm the bad guy, but so are you. What would your precious Griffin say if he knew the truth?"

"You wouldn't dare, Justin! You wouldn't..."

Justin cut Brian off. "I would dare! After all Brian, what the fuck do I have to lose now? He hates me; you hate me, why shouldn't I tell him the truth?"

Brian shrugged his shoulders. "Do what you want."

"I want you to leave me alone. I want you to stop acting so superior when you're around me. Leighton may not understand the hate you have for me now, but he will, soon. I don't want him around that and I can't take being around that anymore, Brian. You have everything you want so the least you can do is stop the vendetta you have against me," Justin pleaded.

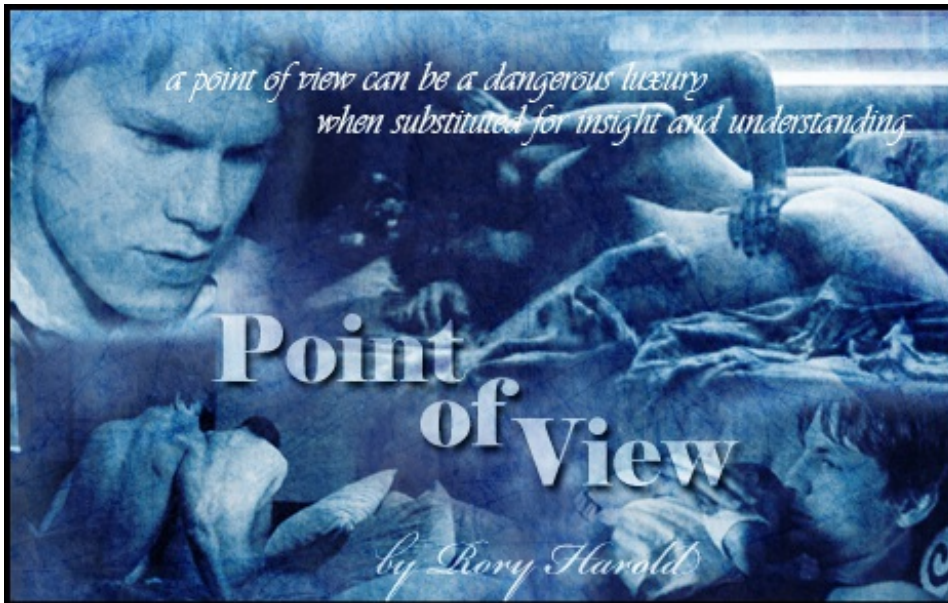
"Okay," Brian spoke softly. "Okay, I'll try to stop being so angry with you."

Justin turned from Brian and walked over to his side of the car. He got in and watched Brian stomp up to the house and close the door behind him. "Happy Birthday, Justin," he grumbled, wiping away his tears.

Leighton heard his father and giggled from the back seat. "Happy Burtday Daddy!"

Justin looked back at his son and allowed his presence and beauty to envelop his body. "Thanks baby boy."

Chapter Ten: "The Land of The Living"



Point of View

Chapter Ten: Land of the Living

Sunday, July 8th 2007

Brian's Point of View

*I found myself
In another world
I found myself
Alive and well*

"Are you enjoying your birthday party buddy?" I ask Leighton, walking out onto the deck.

He drops his color-changing Hot Wheels Corvette back into the cup of ice and looks up at me, smiling. "Yup!"

"Me too, Mr. Kinney," Adam, Leighton's best friend, tells me.

"That's great, Adam," I say, walking out onto the lawn and lighting a cigarette. "Thanks for coming."

"Anytime," he returns, giggling.

Adam is extremely polite. He's actually one year younger than Leighton is but they're on the same soccer team and they have formed a tight friendship over the last couple of weeks. When Leighton asked to invite him, Justin and I were both relieved. When we first talked about his birthday party, he told us that he didn't care to invite any friends.

Justin was upset; turning ten is a big deal in kid world and in parent

world. I'm sure he also remembered the many parties where no one besides Daphne and my friends and I would show up at his birthday bashes.

Leighton had many friends while living in Chicago, but it seemed like since he moved back here, he didn't have any. We asked many times if he wanted to call a friend to play with but he always refused. However, Friday, after his winning goal in the soccer game, Leighton asked if he could invite Adam to his party. It was short notice, but thankfully, his parents didn't have any other plans and agreed to bring him out and pick him up after the fiesta is over. The color-change car wash set is a gift from them, definitely beating out all the other gifts his family got him.

Adam's mothers are cool, for lesbians, and not too uptight. We invited Lindsay and Melanie to stay for the party too, but they decided to take the opportunity to see a movie. They asked Justin and me to come to their house for dinner in a couple of weeks. At first I was hesitant to accept, even though they both seem pretty laid back, but then Justin accepted before I could say no. I have to say, there's something extremely appealing about developing a possible friendship with people who only see Justin and me as a happily married couple.

They did stay for a few minutes and seemed to fit in really well with our family. They even surprised us by bringing a gift for Evelyn and Audrey, instructing Justin and me to not let them see them until Leighton opened his gifts. The girls were thrilled when they saw that they each got a car to use with Leighton's carwash set too.

Right now, Evelyn and Audrey are playing with Daphne. Daphne is practicing her mom-to-be skills, having a great time with them in sandbox. Looking over at her, I can't help but wonder if she'll be able to get up from the sand on her own. She really should've used the chair Justin keeps beside the sandbox, but I guess she doesn't mind getting dirty.

Mom is sitting on the swing near the stables, next to Frank, Daphne's father. He took her out on an 'official date' last night and they arrived here together this morning. I've refrained, for now, asking Molly if her mother came home alone or at all last night. Not because I want to spare myself the details. It's been so long since Mom has seen a man; even the thought of straight sex couldn't dampen my excitement for her. Frank is showing himself to be a perfect match and well, Daphne, Justin and I were laughing our asses off before they arrived because we all realized that if they got married, we'd all really be family.

The reason I haven't talked to Molly about Jennifer is that I still have yet to speak more than a few polite words to the woman. It's not as if I haven't tried. Her answers to my questions are always short, tense and clipped. She doesn't return with any questions herself, so the conversation falls flat immediately or it appears as if I'm grilling her. She was once my sister, whether she thinks of herself that way or not, and though I know I fucked up Justin's and my relationship, I do know that the problems she had with Jen, Justin and me were Craig's fault, not

mine. He brainwashed her, took advantage of her fears and spoils, and turned her against us. Yet, for some still unknown reason, she's come back here. I hope she lets us in soon on the little secret I'm sure she's hiding. I know Jennifer's been a little wrapped up with us *and* Frank, so she probably thinks that her begging worked. It never did before though, so why now?

"Brian?" Speak of the devil.

I turn toward Molly who is peeking out of the French doors. "Yeah?"

"Can you round everyone up and tell them to sit at the picnic table? Justin's lighting the candles and he's bringing the cake out," she tells me, smiling genuinely.

"Sure," I return, throwing my half-smoked cigarette into the fire pit's center. I walk over to the sandbox and reach my hand out to Daphne. "Come on, Mama, Justin's bringing out the cake."

"Cake?" Audrey asks, looking around us, dropping the bucket of sand she held.

"Not for you," I tell her, picking her up after Daphne stands.

"Thanks, Brian," Daphne says, waddling up the grass. "I don't want to miss that."

I laugh and gently poke Evelyn with my foot. "Come on, you don't want to miss it either. Do you?"

Evvie drops her shovel and castle bucket dramatically as she stands up. "No," she whines. "But I was makin' a moat for Aunt Daphne."

I laugh at the poorly constructed sand dune running around the castle that is falling apart. "I'll tell you what," I say, grabbing her grubby hand. "I'll help you make a moat after we eat cake, okay?"

She looks up and smiles, looking so much like Leighton when she does, and nods her head. "Okay!"

Sometimes, children can be so easily pleased.

I walk over to the door and open it, expecting it to be Lindsay and Melanie who are due to pick up Adam soon. I'm surprised, though I guess I shouldn't be, when I see Terence Cole, Griffin's lawyer, standing on the welcome mat. My gut twists at the sight of him. "Can I help you?"

He holds up a large, rectangular brown package under one arm and a large white envelope in his other hand. "I was instructed to bring these to you today. I'm a little late due to some car trouble."

"Come in," I say softly, gesturing him into the foyer.

"This box is to be given to Leighton, from you," he pauses and holds up

the large white envelope, "after Justin reads this."

"Not me?" I ask, feeling a little disappointed not to be included. Yet also, I feel guilty that I'm relieved too. I love that Griffin felt the need to give us letters to read once he was gone, but it can be so hard, *too* hard, reading them sometimes.

Today's been a good day, for all of us, and I know that it's going to be painful for Justin to read his letter. It's their child's tenth birthday and Griffin isn't here to see it, to celebrate it. When we celebrated Evvie's at the end of April, I got a letter too. It left me a mess and I'm sure it will leave Justin a mess too.

"No, this is only for Justin," he repeats. "Should I give it to him directly?" he wonders, almost suspiciously.

"No," I say gruffly taking both items from him. "I'll make sure to give it to him and do as you ask with the box for Leighton."

"I'm sorry to disturb you today, Brian, but I have to go along with Griffin's wishes," he apologizes gently.

"I understand," I say. "Thank you."

"Goodbye," he says, backing out of the doorway.

"Yeah, bye," I reply. I close the front door behind him, walk over to the small armoire and place the envelope and package in the cabinet. I don't want Justin to know about this until everyone else is gone.

I walk toward the kitchen and stop just outside when I hear Justin's voice rise in a whispered pitch. "You're a real bitch sometimes," he growls.

Who is he talking too?

"I didn't mean it the way it sounded," Molly whines.

Great. What the fuck has she said to him now?

"How else am I supposed to take it?" Justin hisses. "You asked me if I'll ever get married for love, or if I'll have to *always* trap a guy by getting pregnant. How could I interpret it any other way?"

What a bitch! Shit, I'd better get in there before it gets ugly. Justin doesn't need this stress.

"Justin, please I..." Molly stops talking as I walk into the kitchen.

"What's up?" I ask this in a light tone. I don't want her to know I heard them having an argument.

One of the reasons Molly wanted to live with Craig was because she thought we were mean and ganged up on her. She told the judge that her mother never did anything about it. The judge didn't base his ruling of custody on her statement, but to this day, that bothers me. Justin and I picked a few fights with her when we were younger, but usually we

always treated her nicely. She was like a baby compared to us, at least I thought of her as one. I think the truth was that she felt we ignored her.

However, to be fair, there was only so much a pre-teen girl could have in common with two older boys. Yet Molly has used the 'don't gang up on me' whiney defense any time Jennifer has ever disagreed with her and agreed with Justin. I really don't want her going that route right now. What I want is Molly to leave the kitchen, or apologize. From her furious expression, I doubt she'll do either one.

"Brian," she huffs out my name and purses her lips into a frown.

I try to ignore her obvious misery and take Justin into my arms. He looks into my eyes, kisses my lips gently and rubs his thumbs back and forth over my biceps. All this tells me that he hasn't allowed her to get him too stressed out. I kiss him again, making him laugh when I lick at the sweat on his upper lip.

Molly interrupts us by clearing her throat loudly. "I *can't* watch my two brothers make out. Do you two mind?" she asks, crossing her arms.

"We're *not* brothers, Molly. And *that* was *not* making out. I sorta feel sorry for you if you think it was. If you'd like Brian and me to show you what..."

"Oh shut up!" Molly barks out and stomps out of the kitchen.

The second we hear her footsteps grow distant we both crack up laughing. "You're evil, Justin," I tell him, tickling his underarms.

"I am not," he defends while licking my lips and forcing his tongue into my mouth.

I am the vapor
I am the gas
You be the angel
Of everything

I suck on his appendage while gliding my hands down to his perfect ass. I squeeze his cheeks in my hands and smack my lips, savoring his taste. "Mmm... sweet."

Justin grins and takes my hand, placing it on his rock hard cock. "You wanna try my cream sauce too?"

I push him back against the counter and attack his neck, licking and nibbling at the faint marks still visible from our wedding night. His skin tastes salty but I can taste the earthy lotion he uses, combined with the smell of his cologne. It might seem bitter or odd to anyone else, but I love these tastes. These tastes are Justin.

I move my hands back to his ass; he lifts his legs, wrapping them around my waist when I lift him off the ground and place him on the countertop. "Stay," I order him.

"Hurry," he whispers, giggling. "Someone could come in and catch us."

Exactly. That makes it more exciting, usually anyway. However, my mind is back on the present and I remember that we are in the middle of celebrating Leighton's birthday. I back away from Justin, very, very, reluctantly.

"What are you doing?" he hisses, his eyes dark, begging.

"Adam's parents could be here any second," I remind him, adjusting my boner in my underwear.

"Oh shit!" Justin gasps, jumping down from the counter. "It's my son's tenth birthday and I was ready to start fucking in the middle of it."

"That should be Lindsay and Melanie," I say, hearing the doorbell chime through the house.

"I thought they just came," Justin says, walking out of the kitchen with me. "Who was at the door before?"

"That was Terence Cole, Griffin's lawyer," I admit to him.

Justin stops before the door and hesitates for a moment before opening it. "He left something for me and Leighton from Griff?" he suspects.

"Yeah," I confirm and give him a quick kiss. "I wasn't going to tell you until later. I...I didn't want to upset you."

"I sort of figured he'd arrange something, Brian," he confesses quietly. "I've been thinking about him all day."

"Me too," I tell him. "I wish he was here."

Just before Justin opens the door, I hear the kids all laughing together in the living room. Jennifer is telling them some sort of silly story and their giggling is so loud it echoes around the foyer too. Justin smiles at me and I smile back, both of us thinking the same thing. Griffin is here, the best parts of him are alive, in our home.

Justin's Point of View

This is the land of the living
This is the land of reprisal
This is the land of the living
The living
The living

Today was a great day. Leighton had a wonderful time at his party and so did everyone else. After our family and friends left about an hour ago, Brian and I put the girls to bed while Leighton got to play with his new Leapster game my Mom got him.

Now, Leighton and Brian are watching 'Pirates of the Caribbean' in his room, while I'm sitting on the chaise lounge in our bedroom, holding the thick, unopened envelope from Griffin. The package Brian is supposed to give Leighton after I read the note sits on the table beside me. I've been in here for about fifteen minutes, trying to find the courage to open the letter. Nevertheless, it's not coming. I feel weak from the memories of the first time Griffin confessed his feelings for me and the memories of the night we made Leighton.

We had a party at the apartment and as usual, Brian was in our room, fucking some random guy. Everyone was past the point of drunk by the time they stumbled off into cabs or walked home. I was flying high on E, sprawled out on the sofa when Griff closed and locked the door on the last straggler.

When Griffin swaggered over to me, there was something different about him. He looked at me in a way I'd never noticed before. As he sat beside me, staring at me, electricity sizzled between us and I knew that things weren't ever going to be the same.

He asked me if I was too high, too drunk to understand him. I felt alert and open. I think he sensed that and knew that he could trust me with his feelings when I assured him that I could understand him perfectly well.

Griffin proceeded to confess that he was in love with me. He wanted to be with me, show me what it was like to be loved, truly loved. I'd been listening to Brian fucking for the last half hour, could hear his moans, even over the loud music that played. Then, there was no music and I couldn't hear the bed springs creaking or sighs of pleasure coming from down the hall. All I could hear was Griffin's words and the need I felt, that had my heart pounding so loudly. The need and the want to feel the way he promised I would, if I gave him the chance, overcame all of my trepidations.

So I did. I told him that I wanted the love he offered. I really did, it was all I wanted.

He took me by the hand and led me to his bedroom. I undressed for him and he touched me, everywhere. Experiencing Griffin's emotional outpouring of love within me was amazing. I couldn't have prepared for it. It might have been the E I was on that heightened the experience, but we did it in the morning too, long after the high faded and it was just as good, or so I remembered, as the first time.

Griffin gave me an out after our sex that morning. He said we moved too fast, he hadn't planned to get me in bed by admitting his love for me. I told him that I needed to think, I didn't want to hurt him. I didn't tell him but I also didn't want to jump into a relationship with him when I still had unresolved feeling for Brian. We agreed that we'd go on a couple of dates and build up to the sex again.

But then I talked to Brian about it and he seemed so fucking hurt. I was sure that it was because he was in love with me, but too afraid to tell me. After going on a few dates with Griffin, I thought I had deep feelings for

him but they didn't rival what I felt for Brian. I had decided that I would break it off with him and finally tell Brian about my feelings for him.

That plan was derailed when I came down with the 'flu' that just wouldn't go away. Brian suggested that I get a pregnancy test. I thought he was crazy. I was always methodical about taking my birth control pills and I didn't think there was any way I could be pregnant. However, I got an at-home test and two lines indicated that I was indeed pregnant. Everything changed then.

Now my son, my little boy, is ten years old. A whole decade has passed since I first held him. I feel horrible knowing that this decade has for the most part been darkened with pain. This is not an environment I wished or imagined Leighton would grow up in. I know there is nothing I could have done to prevent the cancer that ate away at Griffin, but I still blame myself for the childish actions I took in marrying him when I knew in my heart that I did not and would not ever love him the way I should have.

I cheated on Griffin long before I became an adulterer. I cheated him by making promises I knew in my heart were broken before they were ever spoken. However, the postpartum depression wreaked havoc on my common sense and good ideals. It spun around me, a surprise attack on my mind, heart and emotions. It destroyed me on the inside. The pieces it tore away silently became erected into a wall, cast around my son and me. The end construction revealed a barrier which rarely had leaks, a prison with walls no one could scale. I lived in a landmark of shame.

Its shadow followed me all the way to Chicago, Illinois. It breathed down my back on every trip I made with Leighton home to Pittsburgh. I have just finally begun to feel light, seeing a level plain and encouraging seeds of growth. Nevertheless, the letter I hold brings me back ten years. It warrants the trip and fall down memory lane.

"Fuck!" I look down at my stinging finger. It's bleeding, sliced from where I've been picking at the corner of the envelope. I suck on the tip of my pointer, tasting copper and the bitter tang of blood-thick foreshadowing.

Friday September 28th 2001

3rd Person Point of View

*I lost myself
To wider plane*

The relief Griffin felt to *finally* be on solid ground showed with his normal color returning to his face. He let out a deep breath and breathed the terminal's air; it wasn't fresh air, but it was much better than the recycled air he'd been sucking in on the plane. The ten and a half hours he spent flying from New York to Hawaii had been torturous and first

class seating had made no difference in the discomfort he felt.

The moment the flight attendant announced that the plane reached cruising altitude and turned off the fasten seat belts light, Griffin immediately jumped from his seat and ran for the bathroom. Three times during the non-stop flight, he had bolted from his seat to make it to the tiny bathroom and emptied his stomach's contents. He cursed himself for continuing to eat the airplane food, but he was ravenous every time he came back from the bathroom.

The entire back of the plane smelled of vomit, even though the attendants tried to diffuse it by hanging cardboard air fresheners. It was obvious to the other passengers that it was Griffin alone who made the rank smell travel through the jet. The glares they sent him and whispers of upset only made his stomach twist more. He got very little sleep and by the end of the trip, he was sure the passengers wanted to kill him.

He gathered his luggage, waited another hour to go through security checkpoints and tiredly made his way over to the airport lounge to greet his client.

"You look like crap," Julian commented as Griffin walked toward him.

Griffin dropped his suitcase, portfolio and carry-on beside him and slumped into the chair across from Julian. "It was a bad flight," he understated then elaborated, "but not as bad as check in. I had to get to the airport this morning at two a.m."

"That's precisely why I asked Kinnetik to do the hard work," Julian joked dryly and then pointed to the suitcase. "You better put your things under the table. You don't want security to think your bags are unattended."

Griffin growled as he slid the suitcase under his chair and placed his carry-on and portfolio on the empty chair beside him. "I understand the need for the new regulations but it was insane this morning. I didn't expect to be practically strip-searched, have my lighter and cigarettes taken away and then wait for hours, unable to leave the boarding area, to get on the plane."

Julian signaled the waiter in the lounge and smiled apologetically at the tired man across from him. "You need a stiff drink, which I can help you with. Brenda made me quit smoking last year though so I can't help you there, but I'm sure the bar sells them."

"That's okay, I need to quit anyway." Griffin replied, wiped the sweat from the top of his lip, and shook his head. "I just need some water and maybe some pretzels or something. The change in altitude doesn't agree with me," he explained.

"You didn't have trouble with the altitude when you came down last year," Julian spoke in concern. "Do you think you've come down with something? I know this is a business trip, but I'd hate for you to find no pleasure while in Maui."

"I don't know," Griffin said, shrugging his shoulders. "Maybe I'll feel better after I sleep tonight. I'm looking forward to testing out the new water slides you built at the West Resort."

Julian laughed. "Brenda's been begging for me to go with her on them. So if you're feeling better tomorrow, we can all go try them out."

"I probably wouldn't feel so bad if security hadn't taken Ambien from me. I never sleep well on planes, but without the Ambien, it made it worse."

"What did they think you were going to do with it," Julian lowered his voice, "become MacGyver and make a bomb out of it?"

Griffin rolled his eyes, "Apparently."

"Maybe I should get some Tylenol PM at a convenient store. I hope you don't mind if I skip dinner."

"I understand," Julian replied. "I wouldn't want to eat after such a long flight either. I don't know what I was thinking. We can stop by a store for your Tylenol on the way back to my home and you can show me the plans there if you'd like?"

"Sounds good," Griffin replied and stood from the table.

"I'm glad you feel like eating something," Brenda said smiling at Griffin.

"Thank you for dinner. I guess I just needed to be on land to feel like myself. I would've hated to miss out on this dessert!"

"I made these crème horns this morning and Julian won't touch the things. I would've gobbled up the whole dozen myself and spent all my free time at the gym working them off."

"They're delicious," Griffin said while chewing. "You don't like these?" he asked Julian, surprised that he didn't love the pastry.

"She makes the crème with lemon," Julian defended. "I'm allergic to lemon extract."

"You didn't eat them before when I used cherry," Brenda laughed. "You're too worried you'll gain a pound on that perfect physique."

Griffin laughed, "Brian's the same way. He bitched and moaned about eating a piece of Leighton's birthday cake this year, but he couldn't say no to Leighton when he offered him some right out of his hand."

Brenda shared a look with Julian that Griffin didn't notice and asked, "Do you have any recent pictures of him? Justin hasn't sent any in awhile."

"Justin hasn't called in awhile," Julian further explained. He closed the portfolio of the presentation and slid it further down the table.

"He's been busy," Griffin explained lamely while pulling out his wallet.

He took out the latest photos of his child and slid them over to Julian and Brenda. "He's such a good father to Leighton. I couldn't have asked for a better father for him," he spoke softly.

"Justin always wanted kids," Julian remarks wistfully. "He'd follow Brian and me around begging us to play house." He let out a loud laugh at the memory. "Somehow, Molly and I always ended up being the kids while Brian and Justin got to be the dads. I couldn't ever say no to him and neither could Brian. He'd have Brian changing his dollies' diapers and ordering me to time out if I didn't say 'please' and 'thank you' at dinner time."

Brenda laughed with her husband and kissed his cheek. "I'll never forget the time I walked my sister over to play with Molly and we found you up in the tree house wearing a bib and eating mashed bananas alongside Molly."

"Oh god!" Julian groaned as he flipped through the photos. "Don't remind me of that. It never happened again."

Brenda bumped Julian's shoulder. "Don't be so embarrassed, it's what made me want to date you."

Griffin placed the remainder of his dessert down on his plate and commented, "I didn't know you knew Justin and Brian that long."

Julian thumbed the picture of Leighton and nodded his head. "I attended a public school, but Brian was my next door neighbor when he lived with his parents. Our mothers were in the same church group and we played together practically since birth."

"I had no idea," Griffin spoke, feeling uncomfortable.

"And I attended St. James with Justin and Brian," Brenda supplied. "Though neither of them seemed to notice I existed, at first."

"They can be like that," Griffin said quietly.

Julian heard the man's words and knew he had to change the subject. He didn't think that Griffin should be with either Brian or Justin, but he still respected the man and didn't want to make him feel uncomfortable. He joked, "Well you don't think all the special treatment Brian gives me is purely about profit do you? Wait a minute! I *do* get special treatment, right?"

"Definitely, Julian," Griffin replied, smiling.

July 8th 2007
Justin's Point of View

*I opened up
I'm not the same*

I'm surprised to see a smaller envelope inside the largest one. Written in permanent marker, I recognize Griffin's penmanship. For a brief second I dwell on the many notes he wrote me during my pregnancy with Leighton. Betrayal and grief nibble at the stems of each memory in my brain, yet I still smile recalling the sweet romanticism he tried so hard to share with me. Mornings greeted with flowers and love notes, afternoon phone calls to tell me he was thinking of our baby and me and nights, nights of kissing, wanting, and dreaming.

I can't believe it's been ten years. I can't believe in ten years I am here, pregnant with twins, *Brian's* children, and about to read a letter from my dead ex-husband. It sounds like something out of a cheesy, angst-filled, love story, but it's not. It's what I've made of my life in a decade. It's reality.

The words written on the smaller envelope instruct me not to open it until I read the first stack of folded papers. I take those into my hands and place the envelope on my lap. I unfold the papers and see there are only a few sheets of paper. There looked to be more the way he folded them. I look at the first line and wonder how on Earth I'll be able to read when my eyes are already flooded with tears.

My first love,

I am so glad you are home with us. HOME. Yes, it is still that for you even if you wish it weren't. You can't make me believe you like Chicago more than Pittsburgh; this city is a part of you and I was always confident you'd come back here. I wish it didn't have to be because I'm dying, but I'm glad you're here. Every day that gets closer to a safe birth for my child, I am glad to know you will be here when I am not. We are scheduled to go in for the cesarean in three days and I know this will be the last letter I write.

My actions, what I did, drove you and our child from our home and for that, I am sorry. I am sorry I was an insecure coward or too prideful at times. However, I am not sorry for the life I have led beyond the one we shared together for too short of a time. I want you to know that if it were up to me, I would've stayed with you for the rest of our lives, or at least my life. But none of that matters now. It's all in the past, a flicker of time neither of us can change.

I hope you can forgive me for finding happiness with Brian, of all people. I know you would not wish me to be unhappy, but it couldn't have been easy to accept that he and I were together and in love, the way you and I never were.

I did love you, Justin. There is no scale to measure or weigh my love for you against my love for Brian. Both were in different realms, so far from each other yet so alike in some ways. It was your love for me and is your love for Brian, however, that could easily be measured. I know now that I never measured up when it came to him and I never stood a chance in being your first love, nor your last. If I had realized the scale of your definite love for Brian before we married, before I was pregnant with Evelyn, I swear to you I would have left him. I probably would've left

town. I do not nor have I ever known for sure what his feelings are for you, but I would guess somewhere inside him he feels the same way you feel about him. Or, maybe he'll grow to love you the way he should once I'm gone.

I hope so. I really do. Because you two will need each other.

I did not want to leave the world with regrets, Justin, but I have many. I trust you to know that much of the positive show I put on was for Brian's and the kids' benefit. To be honest with you, I'm terrified. More so now that I've received what I asked for.

When I first had this idea of writing these letters, I didn't imagine that I would write this one. It was always in the back of my head, but I didn't think I'd ever do it. Now I have to.

I wanted only to fill this letter with words of encouragement. I thought that maybe I'd throw in some bittersweet memories or last requests for Leighton and how he remembers me. However, I trust you. I trust you to do the right thing for him, I always have. I have no doubt in your ability to be a wonderful father to him.

I have left letters for all the children to read, or you and Brian to read to them until they are able, for each year of the birth, some holidays, some spur of the moment days. I hope you will not dread them and that you will like to read some with them. These past few months I've done a lot of writing. It seems it's the only thing that I can do that doesn't hurt, physically anyway. At night when I wake up in pain, it is writing my dreams, hopes and memories out on paper that soothes me.

If you feel it is ever too much to give the kids the letters, I respect your decision. Nevertheless, I do hope that all the letters I have for them will be, for the most part, uplifting. I am so terrified that I will only be a ghost in their lives. I want to have some kind of presence, even if that is only words written in the past showing my love and hopes for their futures.

Now, comes the part where I have to explain the unexplainable. I still am uncertain whether or not you know this and I don't know if I did or I'm doing the right thing by not telling you before I die. It's weird trying to talk to you as though I'm already dead, but in a way, I guess I am. I know that I won't see the week out. I am only fighting for my child to live. After my baby is taken from my body, I have to let go. It is my time. I've accepted it. Because of this, I could not tell you, it would've been too much for you and Brian before.

I have arranged for you to receive this letter on Leighton's tenth birthday for numerous reasons. Mainly because I feel by then, even if by some miracle I do hold on for another month, I will not be here to see him blow out ten candles on his birthday cake. I also hope that you and Brian will be able to handle what is in the second envelope, now that you've had time to process my death.

If you both hate me for not telling you before I died, I accept that. But I couldn't do that to either one of you. And, still, I am not positive that you don't already know and are too scared to tell me. Or, maybe you both

know and never wanted to admit the truth to one another or to me. Whatever the case, know that I love you both. You and Brian gave me the family I always needed and now I hope you can be the family you were before me.

Please pause in reading this now and open the second envelope now. When you do, try to remember that I did this because I had to know the truth and if I didn't, you never would.

What in the fuck is he talking about! What might I know already? What? He knew I was in love with Brian! Did he know we cheated on him together and this letter is proof of some kind?

I quickly open the smaller envelope. I practically tear the sheets of paper out. When I look at them, at first I don't understand what I'm seeing. I look at the second paper and scan down it, my pulse racing so fast from what I think I may be seeing that I'm not sure if this is right. It can't be!

Ohmygod! Ohmygod! Ohmygod! I grab the rest of the letter and keep reading.

I had these tests run because for years, I always wondered. There were so many little reasons that I told myself it wasn't true. I didn't think you could ever betray me in such a heartless way, Justin. I'm ninety-nine percent sure that you and Brian would never do this to me. You may see this as a betrayal. Yes, I went behind both of your backs and got DNA from all of us to be tested. However, I had to know. Not only for me, but for you and Brian too! I couldn't die without knowing the truth. Worse yet, if you both don't know, you would never know unless I told you.

I had my suspicions mostly because of things Julian would say about you two at his anniversary party, but I pushed them away because you both promised me that nothing happened. However, I overheard Julian talking to Brenda one night I was staying with them in Maui. He said that you were both so high on E that you probably didn't know what you'd done. He and Brenda talked about how much Brian and Leighton look alike and how I look nothing like him, how the timing fit. I didn't want to believe anything more had happened than what you two told me happened. Then, just a few minutes later that night I found out I was pregnant with Evelyn and those suspicions fell to the back of my mind.

They arose again when Julian came for a visit and brought with him a picture of Brian, you and him. In it, Brian is around ten years old. Leighton looks identical to him, with a sprinkling of you. I couldn't deny my need to know the truth any longer.

As you can see, now I do. And if you didn't before, now you know. Brian is Leighton's father. The test is legitimate. You can be sure that Terence Cole would never supply me with false results. Leighton will always be my son in some way, but I hope that you will be honest with him and yourself and see this not as a betrayal of trust, but as a need for the truth.

I love you all, Justin. Please forgive me and know that I do forgive you and Brian for lying to me about your relationship. I am sure you and he

are together, taking care of my children, and for that, I am so grateful to you. I was honored to once call you my husband and it is an honor to know that you will be the father to my children that I no longer can be.

Love, Griffin

"Brian! Brian!" I yell through baited breaths as I stand up to walk toward the door. Shit! I feel so lightheaded. I can't breathe! I can't think. I have to force his name out again. "Brian!" I yell again as best as I can.

I think I hear running down the hall and suddenly, Brian and Leighton rush into the bedroom. Both of them have matching concerned expressions on their faces.

I am electric
Made of wire
You be the match
I'll be the fire

"Justin, what's wrong?" Brian asks, running over to me.

"Oh god!" I gasp, feeling my stomach turn. I drop the papers from my shaking hands as the world tilts and sways around me. "Oh god, Brian!"

"Justin, calm down! Take some deep breaths," Brian tries to say calmly as he backs me up to the bed.

"I can't! Brian, Leighton!" I can hardly speak as my mouth feels so dry and my entire body feels as though it is being turned inside out.

"Daddy, what's wrong?" Leighton asks, afraid to come near me. I see him pause in his footsteps and look down at the scattered papers.

"Brian!" I can't get my body to move, to listen to what I need. He can't..."Don't, Leighton!"

I'm too late, Leighton has them in his hands and he's reading them. He's a smart little boy and he knows what he's reading in the last lines of the letter and on the papers of results. Griffin circled the findings in red ink and spelled out right under them!

"Brian is my *real* Daddy!" he gasps looking up at me and Brian, his hazel eyes swimming with tears.

"What?" Brian asks, grabbing the papers from Leighton's hands and letting me fall back to sit on the bed.

"Daddy?" Leighton says worriedly, walking over to me. "Daddy, Papa wrote that?"

"Yes," I say in a hushed tone.

Brian snaps his head toward me. "Justin, that's impossible!"

"It's true," I gasp pointing to the results. "You're Leighton's biological father, Brian. Griffin had us tested. You're his father! Read the fucking

letter!" I cry.

Oh God! Oh God! I'm going to be sick!

Friday September 28th 2001

3rd Person Point of View

This is the land of the living
This is the land of reprisal
This is the land of the living
The living

Griffin set the timer on his watch, washed his hands and walked out of the bathroom that attached to his guest room. He lay back on the large, vibrant-colored bed and closed his eyes. His fingers crawled toward his stomach, pushing up his shirt and resting on his abs for a moment before he moved them around. A few minutes before, he had seen it in the mirror when he was looking for it after his shower. The *change* and evidence of his possible pregnancy couldn't be ignored. He wondered how long the difference was there and he hadn't noticed.

Pressing with both palms and walking his ten fingers, Griffin started at the top of his stomach. He moved from his ribs, over his abdomen and then down under his sweat pants to just above his pubic hair. Every inch he touched above his belly button felt unchanged but when he applied a little pressure to the area under his belly button he felt a swelling hardness he never recalled experiencing before. Twice he pressed down before he opened his eyes and looked down at his body. Lying down flat, he could see the small rise around his belly button.

Griffin slowly sat up, keeping his tear-filled eyes on his stomach. The pooch was still evident.

He jumped a little when he heard noise outside his bedroom. The shuffling of footsteps drew closer and he heard Brenda and Julian's voices talking as they entered their room across the hall.

"I'm telling you," Brenda whispered, "he's pregnant."

Griffin sucked in a deep breath, wondering how on Earth they figured that out. He'd made certain to keep his purchase of the pregnancy test secret from Julian when they stopped at the store. Then he realized that it was probably obvious, all the symptoms were there, right in front of him and them.

"Well at least this time he'll have a kid that's *actually* his," Julian retorted.

Griffin stood up sharply from the bed but remained unmoving as the words sunk in and his heart raced.

"You don't know that Leighton isn't his," Brenda chastised. "You're being foolish, Julian. That child could be his."

Julian grumbled, "You and I both saw that picture of Leighton. He's the spitting image of Brian Kinney."

"Or maybe with Justin and Griff's features combined, it appears that way. Do you really think Justin would ever lie to Brian about his child? He loves him."

"He may not be lying, Bren. He may not know. You know they were both flying on E at our party that night. They didn't step out of their room for hours. I thought that finally they were both going to admit their feelings for each other."

"Well, they must not have. Otherwise, Justin wouldn't have gotten together with Griffin and made a child with him."

Julian groaned. "Whatever. You believe what you want. If I were Griffin, I'd be asking for a DNA test. Hey! Where are you going?"

"Downstairs," Brenda spoke harshly. "I want to finish cleaning up the kitchen or something. I don't think I could go to sleep now that you've got my mind running wild."

"Fine," Julian grumbled. "I'll come help you."

Griffin licked his dry lips and forced himself to breathe as he listened to the couple walk back downstairs. As the sound of their steps faded, his tears fell down his face. "It can't be true," he whispered aloud and began to pace. "Brian and Justin swore that nothing happened that weekend. They swore that they are only friends. They'd never lie to me. Julian never liked me, from the beginning. Brenda is right. She *has* to be right. Any similarities between Leighton and Brian are pure coincidence. There's no way Justin would deceive Brian and me. I know he cheated on me, but he was honest about that. He loves Leighton; he'd never keep him from his father. But what if... what if...? Maybe I should confront him. Even if Brian and Justin get pissed at me for calling them out, maybe I should?"

Griffin stopped his pacing when the timer on his watch started to beep. He hit the button to silence it and rushed back into the bathroom. His eyes landed on the test stick and he saw the readout on the digital screen. "I'm pregnant," he choked out, feeling a mixture of emotions catapult through his body. "I'm pregnant with Brian's child."

Griffin's hands shook as he picked up the stick and read the result over and over. He and Brian hadn't ever spoken about this possibility. They were, in a sense, taking things slow. Brian never proposed marriage and he'd never thought about it. Until now. Now, everything would change. He and Brian would be connected forever. They would be a family. They would have the family he had always wanted to have, the family Brian had always told him he wanted, in so many words. And now, Griffin could give that to both of them.

He placed his hand over his stomach just as his cell phone rang in the bedroom. He rushed to it, found it in his carry on and read the caller ID display. Brian had chose that moment to call him, as if he must've some

how known that Griffin would need him. It was fate, Griffin was sure of that as he flipped open his cell. "Hello?"

"Griff?" Brian asked worriedly. "Are you okay? You sound out of breath."

"I'm...I'm okay," Griffin spoke softly. He swallowed a deep breath and sat down on the bed. "I'm just..."

"What happened?" Brian asked in alarm, hearing Griffin's worried tone. "Was Julian an asshole or something? Did he piss all over the campaign ideas?"

"No," Griffin said strongly. "It isn't that, Brian."

"Then what's going on? You sound like you've been crying."

"I'm pregnant," Griffin admitted. "I took a test just a minute ago and it says I'm pregnant, Brian."

Brian's relief pushed a deep breath against the receiver of the phone and vibrated into Griffin's ear. "Okay," he whispered. "That's all then? You're okay? Nothing bad happened?"

"Yes. I'm okay. I just want to come home. I want to be with you, right now."

"You'll be coming home the day after tomorrow," Brian said gently. "Then we can be together, talk about... our baby and our future."

"Okay, but Brian?"

"Yeah?"

"You want to be a dad, right? Even though this was an accident you're still happy to have a baby with me?"

"Yes," Brian said firmly. "And it wasn't an accident. I can't believe you'd even say that, he who only believes in divine karma and fate."

Griffin wiped his tears and spoke in a soft voice, "I love you."

"I love you too, Griffin, more than you'll ever know."

July 8th 2007

Brian's Point of View

This is the land of the living
This is the land of reprisal
This is the land of the living
The living
In myself I try for you

"He's finally asleep," I whisper, my voice sounding foreign to my ears.

"You can lay him down now," Justin replies, giving me a small smile.

"I don't want to," I tell him. "Even though I've known him, *loved* him for his whole life, it's different now that..." The lump that forms in my throat prevents me from speaking and I find myself huffing small sobs as I cradle my son close to my chest.

"You're his father," Justin finishes for me. He places one of his hands on my back and the other on Leighton's head. "I feel so stupid, not knowing you were his father," he cries softly, burying his face against my shoulder.

"Let me lay him down and we'll go talk in the bedroom," I tell him, turning my body so that I can place Leighton's head on his pillow.

Justin stands up and reaches for my hand. "Come on, Dada," he speaks, his voice cracking.

I look up at him and take his hand; the orange glow from the lamp sitting on our son's dresser illuminates Justin's face, bringing forth a recollection of the past which I hadn't thought about it years.

Shortly after I started living at the Taylors' home, I woke up from a horrible nightmare. I kept thinking that my father was standing in the shadows somewhere, waiting to pounce on me the minute I went back to sleep. Jennifer did all she could to calm me down but I couldn't stop shaking in fear, even with her holding me. Then Justin brought the same tiny, orange basketball lamp into my room for me. It was the perfect amount of light to see around my room and when he crawled in to sleep with me, I held onto him as if he was my own teddy bear and was able to fall asleep peacefully.

That's what I want now, to crawl into Leighton's bed and hold onto them both. "Let's sleep in here," I request, pulling him to sit back down.

Justin smiles softly and nods his head. "Okay, but I want to change into some sweats first," he whispers.

"Me too," I say, standing up, still holding his hand.

We walk into our bedroom, silent expect our tired breaths, but we both hold them the moment we notice the letter and unopened package sitting on the bed. "Shit," I breathe out.

Justin lets go of my hand and grabs the package. "I forgot to give this to Leighton. Griff wanted me to..."

"I don't give a fuck what he wanted," I grit out, suddenly awash with anger. "He's upset Leighton, *all* of us enough. I want to see what it is before he opens it any way. I don't want him to freak out again."

Justin gives me a confused look and asks, "Why are you mad at Griffin?"

"Are you serious?" I stalk over to my dresser and pull us both out a pair

of sweat pants. "He *lied* to us! For years he suspected..."

"For years we didn't!" Justin interrupts me. He throws the clothes he's wearing right at me and then pulls on his pair of sweatpants. "Why would he want to believe a far-fetched idea that to him and the people that he loved the most would be devastating if it were true? If anyone should've told or known the truth, it's you and I, Brian!"

"But he should've told us, Justin," I tell him. "It's been what? Nine months since he got the results. All this time..."

"Do you love him any differently? Do you? Do you love our son any differently than the way you loved him yesterday?"

"No, I don't love him any differently. It's just that now I'm allowed to love him the way I have since the day he was born."

"I don't understand," he speaks softly. "Do you think I wouldn't allow you to love him? Have I ever stood in the way of it?"

"You took him to Chicago." I know that's not his fault, and I know that I shouldn't have said it.

He rushes over to the bedroom door, slams it closed and turns to me, his face contorted with anger. "I didn't know he was your child! You didn't know! I took him to Chicago with me with Griffin's permission. He was his father, Brian."

"But if it were me, if you knew that I was, would you have taken him?"

"How can you expect me to answer a question that has absolutely no basis in reality?"

"I don't fucking know."

He walks up to me, puts his hand on my cheek, and stares into my eyes. "Do you want me to tell you that because I loved you, I would feel differently about taking Leighton from you than how I felt taking him from Griffin?"

"Yes," I admit.

"I can't," he says hoarsely. "Because if I knew that I was carrying your baby, I never would've married Griffin. I never would have let you go. You would've been mine, Brian. You may hate me and think I'm the biggest asshole in the world for admitting this, but I wished he were yours many, many times. When I was pregnant and we'd go out together and people would see us, smile at us, I knew it was because they were thinking that we were a happy couple, looking forward to the birth of our child."

"I remember that."

"Yeah," he says smiling. "This one day Leighton was kicking a lot and you kept touching my stomach, you wouldn't stop, not that I minded. Anyway, you took me to a baby store and we picked out a bunch of baby

clothes. You went to the bathroom and the shop clerk came up to me and asked me how far along I was and he gushed about how beautiful our child would be because he thought we were both gorgeous. I didn't tell him differently, I couldn't. I wanted it to be true, and for the rest of the day I imagined that it was. I even had a dream that night of us walking down the street, each of us holding one of his hands."

"I imagined those same things, Justin. But I was so confused about feeling that way. I passed those feelings off because I thought they were manifested somehow because I was jealous that you were having a child with Griffin and I wasn't."

"I didn't stop wanting that after I had him. I felt guilty because I didn't want Leighton when I found out I was pregnant; I wanted to get an abortion, remember?"

"Yes, I... I wouldn't let you."

"Imagining that it was your child, knowing that you wanted the baby, made me want the baby too, Brian. It was wrong, feeling like that. It drove me crazy."

I take him into my arms and hold him against me. "You weren't crazy," I tell him. "Maybe it was your subconscious telling you the truth. Maybe that's why I felt that way too. I just can't believe we really didn't realize we fucked that night of Julian's party. I remembered you using that dildo and I jerked off while I watched you, but I thought that was it. I wish I could remember it."

"Me too," he whispers. Suddenly, his body starts shaking and he's crying desperate-sounding sobs, muffled against my bare chest. "At least we know now," he mumbles. "At least we found out and Griffin gave us that." He looks up at me, tears still falling helplessly down his cheeks. "Please don't be angry, Brian. We're barely able to handle the truth now, can you imagine what it'd be like if Griffin had told us the truth then? Hell, he wasn't sure that we didn't already know and were hiding it from him."

"When Julian and Brenda visited you in Chicago last September, they came here after visiting you guys. Julian kept saying that Leighton reminded him exactly of how I behaved. I wonder if that's one of the reasons why he finally decided to find out."

"Must be," he agrees, stepping out of my arms. He grabs the package and picks it up. "Do you want to open it?"

"No," I tell him. "I think we should do as Griffin asks," I reply. "We'll give it to him in the morning."

"Then come on," he says, grabbing my hand. "Let's go to sleep."

Saturday, October 12th 1996
3rd Person Point of View

Walk a thousand miles to get us through
Airways
Jet planes
Safe landings
No brandings
Land
Land
Land
Land

"Come on," Brian growls in Justin's ear. "You've danced enough."

Justin pushed Brian away from him and giggled, "No such thing as enough. You taught me that."

Brian watched Justin dance for another moment, standing still amongst the mass of dancers surrounding him. His dick was hard as rock and his balls were heavy and begging for release. There were men, many men at the party that would love a go at taking care of his hard on. In fact, he'd been sucked off twice already in the bathroom. But, after he'd taken the two hits of ecstasy, the forbidden feeling that started in his body, in an untouchable place, started to throb and grow like wildfire.

For the last hour, he'd tried to distract himself by talking with the guys, taking shots and dancing with his friends. Brenda's father owned the hotel, and for the weekend it had been reserved for everyone to party. One of the ballrooms was turned into a billiard room, another into the dance club and the pool was decked out to look like you stepped into a spa.

Many things could have distracted Brian. Yet the whole time, his eyes darted back and forth to Justin. Usually, he watched him to keep an eye on him; knowing that the younger man was also tripping made him go into protective, older brother mode.

But he watched Justin differently tonight. He watched who he danced with, but his eyes were on the way Justin danced. The tiny black t-shirt that rode up on Justin's torso, revealing glowing, creamy skin, called to Brian. The movement of Justin's hips, working in perfect rhythm to the beat of the song playing which Justin owned, connected itself to the beating of Brian's heart and sent his blood pumping through his veins in a cadence designed for him.

Brian could smell Justin's sweat and cologne as he waited for the blond. He knew that Justin would turn away from the brunet he was dancing with as soon he felt he'd given Brian enough of a show. That's just how it worked with them. They'd go out partying, put on a show for one another and go home. Sometimes they'd bring guys home and fuck them together, still putting on a show. It turned them both on, but they rarely ever touched one another, sticking to their own beds or couches.

Brian and Justin started calling what they were doing, *experimenting*. Later, it advanced to *messing around*. They only truly fucked three times.

One of those times there was someone else in the room with them.

Tonight, Brian didn't want anyone else in the room with them. He wanted to watch Justin lose himself as he fucked himself on the new dildo he'd bought at the porn shop in town. Brian stared at Justin's ass while he ground up against his dance partner. He imagined the blond's legs spread, back bowed, as he slowly pushed the dark red phallus inside his hole. Brian would be on his own bed in the room, slowly jerking his cock and talking up a dirty fantasy for both of their pleasure.

The images flashing through Brian's mind overrode his patience. He grabbed Justin around the waist and pulled him against him. "You've been behaving like a whore," Brian spoke into Justin's ear.

"I have?" Justin asked, turning his head up, mocking a frown while he ground his ass against Brian's crotch.

"Hey, he's with me," the brunet dancer yelled over the music and grabbed for Justin's arm.

"You want him?" Brian asked courteously. He'd never get in between what Justin wanted with a trick.

Justin looked at the brunet dancer and then back at Brian. He slipped out of Brian's arm, took his hand and pulled him with him.

"Guess that answers my question," Brian yelled over the music, following Justin out of the club space and into the hotel's hall. The E in his system soared with every footstep he took toward the elevators.

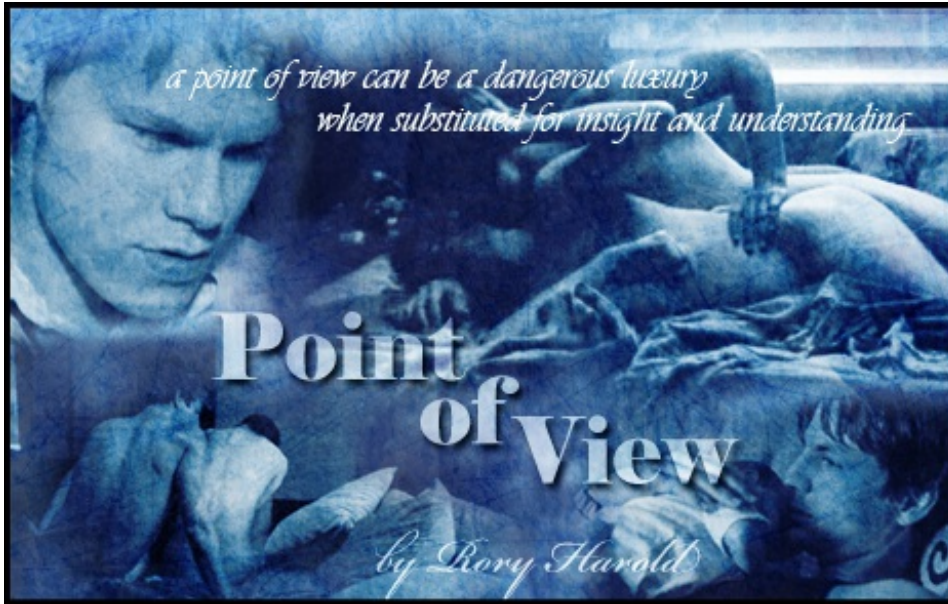
"You've been thinking about the dildo I bought," Justin whispered in his ear as the elevator doors closed.

"Mhmm," he purred into Justin's ear and stepped away from him. Brian waited for the two couples in the elevator to get off on their floors. The instant the doors closed, he shoved Justin up against the elevator wall and attacked his mouth with a bruising, crushing kiss.

Justin's legs wrapped around Brian and he humped himself against him. "I'm weightless," he giggled in Brian's ear, flicking it with his tongue as he talked. "I'm flying with you, Brian."

"Flying," Brian agreed, sucking on Justin's neck and tasting the color of his skin. He saw the colors in a wave of euphoria as the flavors washed over him. Justin was as sweet as vanilla ice cream, hot as red chili peppers and as earthy as cumin. The combination was dangerous, heady and more orgasmic than anything Brian had ever tasted before. It alone induced the trance Brian entered, calling Justin along with him.

Chapter Eleven: "Personal Holloway"



Point of View

Chapter 11: "Personal Holloway"

Tuesday, July 24th 2007

Justin's Point of View

*I tune my weaker eye
Spit white
Hold the world up all day
She's blue in the face again
Paracetamol*

"Thanks for letting me stay last night."

"You can show your thanks by helping me fold this laundry," I reply to Molly, pointing to one of the five baskets of laundry.

She winces and picks up one of Audrey's yellow dresses. "I don't have to fold your and Brian's underwear, do I?"

I laugh. "Just stick to that basket; it's all the girls' things." I grab one of the small purple hangers from the rack and hand it to her. "Evvie and Audrey's dresses and shirts get hung up. We put the dresses for Audrey on the purple hangers, shirts on the yellow ones. Evvie's dresses on the pink, shirts hang up on the light blue."

"I never thought you'd be so organized. Your room was always so messy," Molly observes.

"Did my house in Chicago look messy when you visited?" I ask.

"It wasn't as clean as this house is," Molly replies, placing the dress on

the bar above the washer and dryer, in between Leighton's shirts.

"Hang it up at the end," I correct her. "By the rest of her clothes."

"Right," she says hotly.

"Look," I tell her. "You don't have to help me. Brian's in the kitchen making breakfast. You can go help him."

"That's okay," Molly replies and gives me small smile. "You need help in here. How long did you let this laundry pile up anyway?"

"This is all from the last three days," I tell her. "That's why I have to be so organized Molly," I explain. "With three kids and all of their activities, accidents and grass stains, I have to keep up with it. It's going to be even crazier around here once the twins are born. This way I can have the kids help with chores too. The kids know exactly what is theirs and where to put it; it'll make it easier once the twins are born."

"Mom did that with our clothes," Molly says sadly. "I remember now, that was one of our chores. When I went to live with Dad and Catherine we had a housekeeper that took care of everything."

"Brian wanted to get a housekeeper too," I tell her.

"Well, you could definitely afford it. He's riiiiich! Especially after Griffin's life insurance policy. No wonder why you're with him."

"You did *not* just say that, Molly," I hiss in a whisper, tearing the shirt away from her hands. "Brian's never touched a dime of that money. It's for the kids, Molly. His hard work at Kinnetik made him wealthy. That's why instead of working full-time, I only work part-time at the gallery. That leaves me time to spend with the kids, who as I'm sure you know need to be with us as much as possible. I enjoy being here, taking care of my children, even if that includes cleaning up puke, washing soiled linens and folding a dozen loads of laundry a week. I'm not with Brian because he's rich, Molly. I'm with him because I love him and because we have a wonderful family. But if every time you're around us you're going to poke fun at us or make innuendos, then you don't need to be a part of my family."

"Justin, I'm sorry," she says quickly, her eyes watering. "I never should've said that. I want to be a part of your family. I do. I just... I've been feeling so weird. Justin, the reason I came home is because Dad..."

"I don't want to hear about Craig," I interrupt, stepping back a little and picking up another t-shirt to fold. "I'm too stressed out as it is and it's not good for me to be."

"Besides the baby and stuff, what are you stressed out about?"

We're going to family therapy this morning. That's why we all had to get up early." I look at the clock on the laundry room wall. "Shit, I need to go get in the shower or I'm going to be late."

"Well, I can finish this."

"You sure you want to?"

"Sure, but what about Brian's clothes? I know he's a queen about his stuff."

I laugh because it's so true. "Everything of ours can be folded; he puts it all away anyway. Anything that goes on hangers of ours is at the dry cleaners so you don't have to worry about that. However, there is our underwear."

Molly scrunches her face up at me. "Well, how about I just leave that stuff in a basket?"

"That's fine," I say. "Thanks for the help, Molly."

"You're welcome," she says, smiling at me. "You know, I don't mind spending some more time here to help you out."

I'm pretty surprised she'd even suggest this. "Aren't you going back home?"

"Not for a while. At least not until the baby is born," she tells me.

"Babies," I remind her.

"Right," she grins. "So what do you say? I promise not to be a bitch."

"You'd rather stay with us than with Mom?"

"Well, she's hardly ever home now that she and Frank are dating. Besides, I'd really like to spend time with my nieces and nephew."

"Really?" I ask, feeling like there is another motive.

"Really. I wouldn't mind babysitting while you and Brian are at work, too. Daphne's going to have her baby soon and she probably won't be able to take care of them when she does."

"Yeah, well I figured I'd take my leave from work at that point," I reply. "I'll have to talk to Brian about it first."

She groans. "He hates me; he's going to say no."

I laugh. "You really don't know Brian, do you?"

"No, I guess not."

"Then don't say he hates you, Molly. Brian has *always* loved you. You were his little sister as much mine. You're the one that didn't want to believe that."

"Daddy!" Leighton yells, running into the laundry room.

"Hey, aren't you supposed to be helping Dada make breakfast?"

"I am, Daddy. But Audrey is being so cute. You have to see her."

"Okay," I tell him, kissing his cheek. Really, he has no idea how cute he is by saying that.

"Come on, Daddy!" he takes my hand and drags me down the hall to the kitchen.

Brian and Evelyn are standing in front of Audrey's high chair. Brian turns to me and smiles. "Look at her, Justin."

Audrey is covered in what looks like bananas and rice cereal. She's opening her mouth and blowing bubbles with the baby food, laughing loud and hard. "Dada! Dada!" she giggles.

"You are very cute," I say, walking over to her and kissing her forehead. "But you're a huge mess."

"I couldn't help but let her get messy," Brian defends, laughing.

I kiss his mouth and mutter, "Then I can't help but say that you'll be the one that helps her get clean."

Brian's Point of View

"Daddy, we had fun!" Evelyn says, rushing over to Justin and hugging him.

"That's great, Evvie! Can I see your picture?"

"It's of you and me!" Evvie says, showing Justin the coloring page.

"It's beautiful," Justin tells her.

"It is, Evvie," I agree, kissing her head.

The therapist, Mira, carries Audrey in her arms and Leighton is trailing behind her, looking solemn. "Everyone did wonderful today," Mira says. "But Leighton didn't feel like painting today."

Leighton presses himself up against Justin's side, looking down at the floor. "I don't like painting with anyone but Daddy."

"You painted at school in art class," Justin says gently.

"I wanna go now," Leighton whispers, looking as though he's about to cry. "I want to go, Daddy."

Mira looks at both Justin and I. "Can I speak with you two alone?"

"Can you sit here with your sisters while Dada and I go talk to Mira, Leighton?" Justin asks.

"Fine," Leighton grumbles, sitting down in the waiting room chair.

I place Audrey in her stroller and Justin and I walk a few feet away from them with Mira.

"Did you two have a progressive session with Dr. Knight?" Mira whispers.

"Yes," I answer, but I don't want to talk about us. "What's going on with Leighton?"

"In the last two sessions he's made a lot of progress talking to me, but today he seemed really blocked. Did anything happen at home that might have made him angry?"

"No," Justin says quickly.

"He was happy until we came here today," I add.

"Next week during our family therapy time, I'd like to schedule things a little different. I want only Brian and Leighton to come in. I can talk to Dr. Knight and reschedule your appointment with him," Mira says.

"Why do you only want to see us?" I ask her.

"Do the both of you ever do anything alone?" she asks, not answering my question.

"Of course we do. We play games and..."

"And I'm sure that makes him really happy?"

"Of course it does," Justin tells her. "Leighton has always loved Brian. Finding out that he's his biological father hasn't changed anything."

"I think it has," Mira responds softly, "which is why I want to see the two of them alone. Of course, it's up to you as his parents; what you feel would be best for him is what we'll do."

"What do you want to do?" I ask Justin.

"Let's do as she asks, Brian. She wants what's best for our children, just as we do," he tells me, grabbing my hand.

"Okay," I agree. "We'll see you next week, Mira."

"Thank you, Brian. I really do think after next week you'll see why I'm asking this."

"We ready yet?" Leighton calls us. "Audrey has a poopy diaper!"

"We're ready," Justin tells him. "Thanks, Mira."

"You're very welcome. I think Evvie did great, and I look forward to seeing all of you the week after next, Justin."

Justin and I turn and walk back over to our kids. I can smell Audrey as soon as we reach them. "Oh, Justin. This one is yours," I tell him.

Justin smiles and rolls his eyes.

"I'll help you, Daddy," Leighton says empathetically.

"That's okay," Justin says, pushing the stroller toward the bathroom.
"You can stay with Dada."

"No," Leighton whines, tears filling his hazel eyes. "I wanna go with you."

"Okay buddy," Justin says worriedly. "You can come with me."

"I'll pull the car up to the front then," I tell him.

"I love you, Daddy," I hear Leighton whisper as he grabs Justin's arm as they walk.

"Shit," I mutter. Leighton is definitely not okay.

"I'll stay with you, Dada," Evvie says as though to comfort me.

Leighton's mood seemed to improve the moment he got into the car. He became his normal, happy self once again. I know that when I had to see the therapists as a kid, I didn't like it. Sometimes they wanted me to talk about stuff that I didn't want to talk about and it made me feel even worse. I'm afraid that it's the same thing for him. My biggest fear is that I'm going to fuck up my children's lives as much as my parents...

"Dada, can I get the Hannah Montana backpack?" Evvie asks.

"I want Star Wars!" Leighton says.

"Can he get the Star Wars one?" Justin asks me.

"He can get whatever one he wants," I answer. "Mom got me the first backpack I ever had that was new," I say, recalling the specific one. "It was Star Wars, Return of The Jedi."

"Clone Wars is definitely not Return of the Jedi," Justin whispers into my ear so that Leighton won't hear the distaste he has for....

Shit.

I can't move. I need to move. But my fucking body isn't listening, it's like all the blood my heart is suddenly pumping so quickly through my body is weighing me down.

"Brian, are you okay?" Justin asks me, waving his hand in front of my face.

Finally I snap out of it and my body propels the shopping cart into the next aisle.

"Wee!" Audrey yells and claps her hands from the cart's quick

movements.

"Brian!" Justin yells after me, following me from the outside aisle.

"Come here, guys," I speak, panicking no matter how much I try not to. I grab Leighton and Evvie's hands when they don't listen quickly enough and pull them into the aisle with us too.

"Dada!" Leighton grumbles. "What are you doing?"

"I wanted Hannah," Evelyn whines, stomping her foot.

"Brian, what's going on?" Justin asks me and then looks around us trying to figure out my frantic dash into this aisle.

*Sleep the darkness all away
And drinking kitchen paint
To dye the winter
I hope we'll never see again*

*Deaf and dumb with the lights on
Deaf and dumb with the lights on*

"My... J...Joan, and Claire... they're headed this way," I whisper, pulling him toward me and the kids. Fear, apprehension and shock shoot up my spine as I hear Joan's high-pitched voice call from the opposite end of the aisle.

"Brian, is that you?"

"Shh..." he tries to soothe me, staring coldly over my shoulder. "Just ignore them."

"I don't want them around the kids," I speak through my dry mouth.

"Dada, did you get hurt?" Leighton asks me gently. "You're crying."

"What?" I pat at my face and feel wetness under my eyes.

"Justin," I breathe out. "Let's... let's go. Now!"

"Okay, okay," he agrees, wiping the tears from my face. "Come on kids, hurry up," he says, taking their hands and walking briskly down the aisle.

I follow, pushing Audrey in the cart as fast as I can. I'm holding off the emotions that are begging to be let loose from my body.

"Why?" Evvie asks Justin. "Why do we have to go?"

"Dada isn't feeling good, Evvie."

"It's not fair!" Evelyn whines.

Leighton looks back at me and then tells her, "Be quiet. Dada is hurting."

God. He's such a perceptive, sensitive child. I suck in a deep breath and

let it out as we reach the main aisle. I hope we're far enough away from them, or that they've gone another direction. I saw Claire a few years ago at a gas station; she tried to talk to me, but I ignored her. But I haven't seen my mother since court. I would've recognized her though whether or not Claire was with her. She looks just the same, except that now her face is filled with wrinkles.

I don't know what I'll...

"B...b...Brian?"

Fuck! I stop pushing the cart as somehow Claire and my mother intercept us and block our way with their shopping carts.

Justin grabs the kids close and moves to stand beside me. I'm completely unable to move as I stare at my biological mother for the first time in twenty-three years.

Married by signs
Married by signs

September 2nd 1983 **3rd Person Point of View**

Brian placed his Return of the Jedi backpack on the kitchen table.

"Did you have a good day at school, Brian?" Jennifer asked as she poured the boys glasses of milk.

"It was good!" Brian said enthusiastically. "I like my teacher this year much better."

"What about you, Justin?" Jennifer asked.

Justin shrugged. "She's okay." He opened his backpack and took out the newest coloring page and handed it to his mother. "Look, I drew a castle today." Justin pointed to two people standing on a bridge in front, one was taller and had brown hair, and the other was shorter and blond. "That's me and Brian."

"This is amazing, Justin. You didn't have to tell me who it was. Not only can I tell because of the hair color but you've drawn both of your faces so well. Are you sure that you're only eight years old?" She asked, hanging the picture up with a magnet on her fridge.

Justin beamed at his mother's praise. "You're the one who told me when I was born," he replied. "I am really *only* eight, right?"

"Yes, Justin," Jennifer laughed and ruffled his blond hair. "You're only eight." She turned her attention to Brian and queried, "What's that you have there, Brian?"

Brian had taken a project of his own out of his school bag and was holding the piece of cardboard close to his chest. "I... I'm not a good

artist like Justin is," he spoke uncertainly.

Justin put his arm around Brian and looked up at him adoringly. "Yes you are, Brian. You're the best."

Brian laughed at the younger boy's lie and felt himself relax. "Today we went through some of Mrs. Horton's old magazines that she brought to class. We had to cut out pictures of people that looked like our family and make a collage with them that showed our favorite summer memory."

Jennifer took the piece of art from Brian when he finally, slowly handed it to her. Brian was still uncomfortable with adults' praise, something Jennifer and his therapists readily worked on. Often it would make him shut down and he would go off to be alone. She couldn't contain her complete joy at what Brian had made though.

He had cut out a blond model that had features similar to hers and pasted what looked like a designer dress on her body. Brian had cut out a picture of his favorite soccer star and put a very nice suit on him and a briefcase on which he wrote Taylor Electronics. Brian cut out a picture of a little blond boy and glued an artist's pallet in his hand and a Mickey Mouse t-shirt on him. He cut out a picture of a strawberry blonde-haired girl and put a teddy bear in her hand and a princess crown on her head. In the middle of them was a picture of a brown-haired boy with a huge smile on his face, a soccer uniform glued on him and a soccer ball near his foot. The scene behind them all was of a beach and ocean. There were pictures of beach balls, inner tubes, sandcastles, buckets, shovels, beach towels, a picnic basket, an umbrella; everything they used when they'd made the trip to Virginia Beach to visit her mother and father's house that summer.

The collage was amazingly well thought out. The best part, the part that brought tears into Jennifer's eyes were the words and letters cut and pasted under each person. He'd spelled out 'my Mom' under the woman, 'my Dad' under the man, 'my little brother Justin' under the blond boy, 'my little sister Molly' under the small girl and in the center in two big letters was 'me'. Jennifer felt almost as proud and happy as she did the first time Brian had told her he loved her. This was a testament to how much he loved and felt like a part of his family; it left her speechless.

"Do you like it?" Brian asked in a quiet voice, rocking from his heels to his toes in nervous anticipation.

Jennifer looked down at her oldest son and brought him into her arms. "I love it, Brian," she whispered to him.

Brian looked up at Jennifer and gave her a tiny smile. "Can we go outside and play now?" he asked.

"Yeah, can we?" Justin asked.

Jennifer reluctantly let the little boy go. "Drink your milk and eat your carrots first," she said, pointing to the snack she'd placed on the

counter. "Then you two can go play, as long as you don't have any homework."

"We don't," the boys answered in unison.

"Okay," Jennifer said, smiling happily at the two of them. Brian's drawing had put validation to all the hard work she'd done in helping Brian to feel accepted and loved in their family. "I'm going to hang both of your pictures on the fridge and then I'm going to wake up Molly from her nap."

"Is she still sick?" Brian wondered caringly. He took a huge bite of his carrot, practically getting half of it in his mouth.

"She's feeling better," Jennifer answered. "She just has a little cough now." She grabbed two magnet clips from the top of the refrigerator and placed each one of the boys' pictures in them.

"So she can't come out and play?" Justin asked sadly, wiping the milk mustache from his face with the back of his hand.

"No, not until her cough completely goes away," Jennifer answered her son.

"That stinks," Brian pouted.

Jennifer was glad that the boys took such interest in playing with Molly. She knew that most little boys their age would not like to play with a little girl. They always tried to include her in their games, even if Molly seemed reluctant to play with them. "I'm going to check on Molly; make sure you two wash your hands and put your cups in the sink before you go outside."

"We will," Brian assured her as he took another bite of his carrot.

"Yup," Justin agreed.

After dinner that night, Jennifer sent Brian, Justin and Molly upstairs to get ready for bed. She'd been thinking about the talk that she wanted to have with Craig ever since the boys went outside to play after school. Even though Craig had brought home food from her favorite Italian restaurant, she was barely able to it. Her thoughts were so preoccupied with the conversation she wanted to have with her husband and later with Brian, she was giving herself a stomach ache.

Craig had cued into his wife's distance throughout the meal but waited until the children were upstairs before voicing his concerns. "Are you pregnant?" he asked, fearful and hesitant, unsure how he would feel about the results. He and Jennifer had only talked about having two children and with Brian in their home he'd adjusted to their being three. He wasn't sure if he could handle a fourth.

Jennifer nearly dropped the take-out container of spaghetti she was putting away in the fridge. She sensed disappointment in his question

and was relieved that she was not. She managed to put the styrofoam box onto a shelf in the fridge and closed the door. "No," she replied, perhaps waiting a little too long to answer.

Craig let out a deep breath. "It's something else then?" he asked. "Do you think one of the boys is getting sick or something?"

"No, it's not that," Jennifer said gently and silently hoped he'd not picked up on a cough or sneeze she was unaware of.

"Are you sick?" he asked, walking over to her and kissing her forehead.

Jennifer leaned into her husband and wrapped her arms around him. "No, I'm fine. I've just been thinking about some things today."

"What things?" Craig queried.

Jennifer stepped out of her husband's arms and pointed to Brian's collage. "Brian made this today in class. The assignment was to make a collage of your family and your favorite summer memory with them."

Craig swallowed thickly as he looked at the images and words. "He did a good job," he commented softly.

"Is that all you're going to say about it?" Jennifer asked, trying not to sound as irritated as she felt by her husband brushing off what to her was a momentous step for Brian.

"It's good, Jen," he said, trying to search for what she wanted to hear. "It's really good."

"His therapist would be thrilled to see this," Jennifer said. "I certainly was. Brian thinks of us as his family, Craig."

"I see that," the man spoke, trying to read his wife. "That's good. He made you look beautiful."

"You know, the first time Justin and Molly called us Mama and Dada, I remember it clearly. I remember how overjoyed I was and I got the same feelings when I saw this today," she revealed. She smiled and pointed to the picture that was supposed to be her husband. "He used his favorite athlete for your picture and even put the business name on the briefcase," she told him. "He loves you, Craig. He loves all of us."

Craig nodded and spoke softly, "We love him. But I'm not too sure about him calling us Mom and Dad. What if they give him back to his parents or move him into a different foster home, Jen? That will cause a lot of confusion for him."

"It would kill him," Jennifer corrected bluntly. "It would kill me, and Justin and Molly and..." she trailed off and hoped that her husband would fill in the words she was looking for.

"And me too," Craig added. He gave Jennifer a curious look and asked, "What is it that you want?"

"I want to adopt him," Jennifer spoke with assurance. "I want him to be our son, always. I don't want to worry about the day Child Services comes to tell us that his parents want him back. If it's a few months from now, a year or more, it'll kill him. It'll ruin all the progress that we've made with him. No matter how much we love him he's always going to be afraid of his own feelings, he's always going to have a hard time trusting people. If they give him back or give him to someone else because his caseworker happens to get rezoned, which she told me could happen, then we lose him forever. And I think," Jennifer paused her words and wiped the tears that sprung into her eyes.

"What, Jen?" Craig asked emotionally, feeling his wife's pain.

"I think Brian will lose himself completely and Justin might too. It wouldn't only devastate him. Brian is our son now, isn't he?"

Craig closed his eyes and took a deep breath before opening them and replying, "Yes, he's our son, Jennifer."

"Then if he agrees, I want to fight for him. I want to make sure he's ours forever."

Craig had many mixed feelings about it, but he knew that his wife was right. If Brian left it would devastate his family and he did not want that for them. "Talk to Brian when you tuck him in," Craig spoke. "If he wants us to be his parents, then I'll call the lawyer tomorrow and you call his caseworker."

Jennifer launched herself into her husband's arms and hugged him tighter than she ever had before. "He'll want us to be his parents, that picture speaks loud and clear," she assured him. "Besides Craig, we're the only ones he's ever really had."

Tuesday, July 24th 2007

Brian's Point of View

Personal Holloway

Six month linen

It's safe to say we are alone

Suburban suicide

Watching night come amber

It's all so temporary

Deaf and dumb with the lights on

Deaf and dumb with the lights on

Deaf and dumb with the lights on

Married by signs

Married by signs

Married by signs

"Would you please move?" Justin grits out between his clenched teeth.

"I'd say I'm entitled to speak to my son since your mother took him away from me," Joan snips.

"You're not entitled to a fucking thing and *my Mother* didn't take me away from you," I reply, gripping the shopping cart in my hands.

"Shame on you for speaking that way in front of those children," Claire says in horror.

"Daddy, Dada, who is that?" Leighton asks looking between me and Justin.

"No one, buddy," Justin speaks truthfully to our son. "Come on, Brian."

"No," I speak firmly, eyeing the two women. "Things need to be said," I tell him.

Justin holds my eyes for a moment before nodding his head in understanding. He digs into his pocket and produces a ten dollar bill. "Will you take Evvie over to the café right there and get you two some popcorn?"

"But I wanna stay with you and Dada," Evvie says, pulling on Justin's shirt.

"Please, Evvie," I try. "Just go with Leighton and get some popcorn and a soda."

"I can have soda too?" she asks, coming around to the idea.

"Sure," Justin and I answer in unison.

"Come on, Evvie," Leighton says, taking his sister's hand. "Dada and Daddy have to talk to those mean-looking ladies."

Justin resumes his position beside me the moment we see the kids sitting at one of the tables in the café.

I hand Audrey her bottle from the diaper bag to keep her occupied before looking at Joan and asking. "What do you want? We're in the middle of school supply shopping so..."

"All these children are your kids?" Joan interrupts me, disapproval coating her words.

"Yes," Justin and I speak together and I wrap my arm around him.

Their eyes fall on my hand resting on the side of his stomach and their expressions twist together. I know what they're going to say, but I don't care. I have to be strong and I have to show them that I don't care about them any more. They can't hurt me. I'm no longer the little boy who cried in the court room when Joan and Claire painted me out to be a rotten badly-behaved child.

"The twins I'm carrying are Brian's too," Justin quips and smiles up at me proudly.

I can't help but laugh because three minutes ago I was running from them but now I feel like I can face them, face anything. Justin being by my side and standing up for the both of us is exactly what I needed. It's what I've always needed to get by. I stupidly lost sight of that though.

"You think what you two are doing is funny?" Joan asks, placing one hand over her heart.

"It's sick," Claire adds, glaring at us.

"Why's that?" I ask nonchalantly.

"Because you two are brothers," Joan says the last word with disdain and disgust.

"All mankind consider themselves brothers," I say. "Don't you call all those men at your church brothers and sisters?" I ask. Before she can answer I continue, "We loved one another in childhood as brothers and now that we're adults we love one another as...."

"Lovers," Justin interrupts me.

I laugh again and kiss the side of his head. I was actually going to say adults, but I do prefer his word and love how annoyed Joan and Claire look. It feels good to be so proud of my life with him.

"I'm surprised those kids didn't call you Uncle Daddy," Claire sneers.

I shrug and reply hastily. "Me too."

"Oh Lord, save my son," Joan mutters, fluttering her eyes and clutching the cross around her neck.

Justin takes a step around the cart and looks Joan right in the eyes.

"Your prayers fall upon deaf ears, Joan. A long time ago when I was just a little boy, I made that prayer and it was answered. My mother is his mother. My father is his father. My sister is his sister and you, your husband and Claire, you are nothing. You will never know my husband or our children and we are better off. We will never speak to you again and you will never be a thought to us. We will live and love and be happy for the rest of our lives. You both will be miserable and you will burn in Hell for all eternity because you tried to damn your own flesh and blood before he even had a chance to live and love."

I see her raise her hand to him and before I can move fast enough she's slapped him. If it weren't for Audrey holding onto one of my hands or the employee, who probably heard the whole exchange, quickly moving in between Justin and Joan, I would have a hard time not returning the slap. Justin's arms are secure around my waist the second I push Audrey in the cart next to him. Besides the small red mark across his left cheek, he shows absolutely no sign in his expression that he was just smacked. "Are you okay?" I ask quickly, trying to assess him.

Justin kisses my left cheek as if I was the one that was hit and he nods at me. "I'm just fine, Brian," he assures.

"Shame on you!" Joan wails, backing away from us.

"Lady, what is wrong with you?" the employee asks astounded at Joan's behavior. "He's pregnant!"

"With a bastard, no doubt!" Joan hisses.

"You both need to leave this store immediately," the young worker barks at Joan and Claire.

"We'll never shop here again," Claire tells the man.

The man turns toward Justin and asks, "Are you okay, sir? Do you want me to call..."

"I'm fine," Justin interrupts him. "She's senile is all," he lies looking toward Joan and Claire who are hastily retreating toward the exit doors.

"Are you sure?" he asks. "I can call my manager."

"No," Justin says quickly. "My other children are just over there in the café and I don't want them to be left alone any longer."

"You're sure you're okay because I can file an accident report if you're hurt."

"He's fine," I say, sensing Justin's stress is more from needing to avoid a scene than because of the altercation.

"Okay then, I'll leave you to shop," the employee says softly.

The second he's out of my line of sight I take Justin in my arms and hold him tightly. "I'm sorry."

"You didn't do anything," he whispers and looks up at me. "You always protected me from bullies; it was about time I returned the favor."

"You promise me that you're not hurt?" I ask, thumbing the almost-faded red mark on his cheek.

"I'm not, Brian. Are you?" he asks me.

"No," I assure him. "I'm pissed that she did that, but what you said..."

"I kinda asked for it," he says almost laughing.

"No, you didn't. But she deserved what you told her. It's fucking weird that I actually feel happy, isn't it?"

"Brian, it isn't weird at all. You finally confronted her." He places his hand on top of mine that rests on the cart.

"You did," I tell him, pushing the cart toward the café.

"No," he says, smiling at me. "You stopped running."

I look down Audrey who now has her hand placed on top of Justin's and see his other rests on his stomach. I hear Evelyn's laugh and see Leighton smiling at his sister as he pushes the soda toward her to share with her. There's no reason to run from anything any more. I've cut the strings that wound me into the pain of the past. It's time to be free and move on.

Tuesday, August 21st 1984

3rd Person Point of View

"Don't cry, Brian. I'm here and you'll be my big brother soon and you won't ever have to be sad again," Justin said innocently.

Brian took comfort from the little blond and hugged him back. "They might not let me be your big brother," he choked out. "They don't want to listen to a kid. They don't want to listen to anyone that tells the truth. My parents and sister keep saying I'm bad and that I'm lying about everything!"

"You're not bad," Justin said adamantly and kissed Brian's cheek. "You're the nicest, bestest person in the whole world, Brian. I'll tell them if you want me to."

"You can't, Justin," Brian cried. "They don't wanna hear the truth. The judge is going to listen to all their lies and now Jack and Joan are gonna hurt me more when I go back."

"They won't make you go," Justin said, holding Brian tightly. "I won't let them hurt you."

Jennifer grabbed her husband's hand and closed the door to the room where Justin and Brian were sitting curled up on the couch. She pulled him with her to the furthest end of the adjoining room and collapsed into Craig's arms. "They can't do this to him, Craig. He's suffering and they're letting him suffer. Why are they letting those people who hurt him keep hurting him?" she cried frantically.

"I don't know," Craig spoke gravely. "But you've got to calm down. Once they come back into this room and tell us the decision, there isn't anything we can do."

"I won't let them take him," Jennifer vowed, stepping out of Craig's arms. She wiped underneath her eyes with her ragged tissue and took deep breaths, trying to calm down. "I can't let them give him back to those people."

"There won't be anything we can do," Craig replied and cleared his throat as he heard voices outside of the door. "That's them," he whispered and grabbed his wife's hand.

Eliza Clark, Brian's caseworker, and Jeffrey Moore, the custody lawyer, entered the room with smiles on their faces. Jennifer and Craig walked briskly toward them and asked in unison, "Is he ours?"

"He's yours," Eliza spoke warmly.

Jeffrey held out a stack of papers and a pen. "The three of you will need to sign these," he said, grinning from achievement.

"Just...just a moment," Jennifer said, pulling Craig with her toward the other room.

Brian and Justin looked at their parents with wide eyes as they entered the room.

Brian asked hesitantly, "Am I going to live with them?"

Jennifer kneeled in front of the couch and shook her head. "No, Brian. You're never going to live with them. You're ours now," she said, trying not to cry.

Brian leaned forward so quickly that had Craig not been in the process of kneeling behind his wife, she would've fallen backward. The brunet boy wrapped his arms around Jennifer and Justin and Craig soon joined the embrace.

"I don't ever have to see them again, do I?" Brian wept against Jennifer's shoulder.

"Never," Jennifer promised.

"I knew it," Justin said in a small voice. He kissed Brian's cheek and spoke, "You're my brother forever now."

"And that makes you our son," Jennifer told Brian.

"I love you, Mom and Dad," Brian cried in relief.

"We love you, Brian," Craig told the boy emotionally, barely holding back his own tears.

Tuesday, July 24th 2007

Justin's Point of View

"So why is your sister kissing our asses?" Brian asks me as he pulls the comforter down and climbs onto his side of the bed.

After what happened at Target, the last thing I wanted to do was bring up my sister's request. I thought I'd give Brian a couple of days to decompress; even if he did seem to act as though he was happy to be free of Joan and Claire, I don't think it's really hit him yet.

"Hello?" Brian laughs, pulling me onto the bed. "You were in outer space again."

"I just don't want to stress you out," I tell him, pulling my shirt off and throwing it onto the floor.

"So she's being a bitch again?" he grumbles.

"No." Shit! I answered much too quickly and from the way he's staring at me, one eyebrow raised, he knows something is up. "Well, she was sorta cunty with me this morning but then she apologized for it and..." I turn away from him and put my head in my hands, trying to figure out the easiest way to tell him. I don't even know if I want him to say yes.

He scoots over behind me, spreading his legs so they drape on either side of mine and grasping my shoulders in his hands. "And?" he asks, squeezing his strong fingers into my muscles.

I lean my head against his chest, really second-guessing this whole talk. "And, I'd much rather you just continue to give me a massage. I don't want to talk about Molly."

"I'll give you a massage, but I want you to tell me," he counters, kissing behind my ear.

I feel him run his hands down my back, his knuckles digging into knots I'd gotten so used to that I forgot they were there. My back arches away, my body wiggles in response and the phrase 'it hurts so good' takes on perfect meaning. Yeah, *really* don't want to be having a conversation about Molly.

"Justin?" he whispers in my ear.

"Mmmm...." I sigh in contentment but I'm more than a little disappointed when he takes his hands off me. "Don't stop," I practically beg him.

He chuckles into my ear, drags his tongue along my neck and speaks into my hair, "Then talk."

"I really can't form a coherent sentence while you're doing that," I admit, sliding around him. I crawl over to my pillow and collapse back onto it, completely disappointed that I couldn't just sit there and get a massage that I think I'm pretty fucking entitled to at this point.

"Don't be mad, Justin," he chortles, crawling toward my feet and immediately making my mood perk up. "I'll start with your feet and then when you're done telling me about Molly's craziness I'll start on massaging every other part of your body."

Oh. So that's how it's going to be? Oh.... Oh yes, Brian! Fucking holy hell, I should just talk really, really slowly so that it takes him a while before he sto... "I was thinking," I protest when he stills his movements on my left foot.

He places my left foot in his lap and picks up my right foot while smirking at me. "I was just switching feet."

Ahhh. Thank you, Brian.

"So... Molly?" he prompts, laughter filling his voice.

I feel his cock is warm and half-hard in his briefs so I curl my toes and give it an awkward but gentle squeeze to show him my appreciation.

"Molly wants to help out around here," I start.

"Yeah," Brian replies, pulling on my toes to crack them. "I noticed."

"The kids really like her," I observe. "They barely know her though. Isn't that weird?"

"I definitely didn't ever think that'd be the case, Justin," Brian admits.

I close my eyes as he begins to really work my heels. I'm getting turned on and if I watch him do this, I'm not going to be able to talk. "Me neither."

"So what does she want to help with exactly," Brian queries. "Cause if you want to tell her to come by every night to make dinner and give the kids their baths, I'm all for it."

"Me too, but I don't think she'll want to do that every night. However, I think we could definitely use the help, Brian."

He goes back to my other foot and the massage gets more intense.

"Why? Why this turnaround all of a sudden. If you said she was acting cunty, then why is she also offering to help us out?"

"Because she said that Mom is always gone with Frank."

"Isn't she going home soon?"

"Not from what I can tell. I guess something happened between her and Craig, but I stopped her before she could get into explaining whatever it was."

"Maybe you should find out. Maybe he doesn't plan on hiring her to do P.R. like she said he was."

"I don't think that job is supposed to start until next year," I explain.

"Anyway, the thing is, she wants to stay with us."

"She is staying the night," Brian says, though he knows that's not what I'm saying.

"Yeah," I open my eyes and look at him. "But she wants to move in with us. She plans on being here long enough to help me out after the twins are born, or she alluded to that."

"Do you want her to move in here, Justin?"

"I really don't know," I'm quick to say. "I'd like to have her be a part of our family but I don't know that I can deal with the bitchy attitude she

takes whenever you and I are affectionate with each other.”

“It’s got to be weird for her.”

I can’t believe he just said that. “Then she shouldn’t be asking to live with us,” I reason. “Should she?”

“I think maybe if we see it from her point of view, it probably would be weird, Justin.”

I’m not feeling as relaxed as I was two minutes ago which is precisely the reason why I feel like Molly moving in would be a bad idea. “What are you saying?” I demand. “You think that our love is weird? You think there is something wrong with it?”

“No, I don’t think that way. But Justin, she was so little when I came to live with you guys. She only remembers you and me as brothers. That’s got to be weird for her. It certainly did a number on me when I realized that I was in love with you.”

“I know, but she’s an adult now. She’s not a child. If it doesn’t freak our children out or our mother who raised us as brothers, then it shouldn’t freak her out either,” I say reasonably.

“Justin, it’s not that simple and you know it.”

The relaxation and yearning I feel when he skims his hands up my thighs and starts kneading my muscles makes me not feel as angry as I know I should with his statement. “Brian, can we just forget about this?”

“Justin, she already blames me for everything that happened between your mom and...”

“It wasn’t your fault,” I cut in, staring him down until he nods his head in agreement.

“But no matter what the truth is, she does. I don’t want to shut her down when she’s trying to have a relationship with us. Don’t you want your little sister back? Don’t you want the kids to know their aunt?”

Oh, bring the kids in it. He really does play dirty. “That doesn’t mean she has to live here for that to happen.”

“What did you tell her when she asked you?” he asks me, raising one of his eyebrows.

“I told her I’d have to talk to you first,” I answer. Didn’t I already answer that question?

“Then she’s going to think that it’s my fault if you tell her no, no matter what other reason you have, Justin. I don’t want that.”

He’s probably fucking right and all because of my big mouth. Shit! “So, you want me to tell her yes?”

He nods and smiles. “I do.”

I lean and reach to grab him and pull him closer and halfway to sitting one of the babies knees me in my ribs. "Oh!" Again! "Fuck," I gasp, falling back down on to my pillows.

Brian smirks. "Which baby was it? Oh, never mind, I see."

"This is so fucking weird," I say, freaking out. "I didn't see anything like this until I was almost ready to pop with Leighton."

"You look like you are," he responds as he kisses my stomach. "Or at least what you looked like when you were eight months pregnant."

"That's because I was skin and bones and my stomach looked freakish."

"Nah, it was beautiful. I loved Leighton, Justin. I loved taking care of you and in turn him when he was inside of you. But sometimes I had to pull back because I knew the baby wasn't mine. With Evelyn, Griffin and I were so surprised by her and he worked so much that I barely saw him pregnant. And Audrey..." he chokes on her name and lets out a deep breath.

"I know, Brian," I assure him, placing my hand over his for a moment.

"I love all my children," he whispers. "But this pregnancy has been the best out of all of them. You let me touch you and you don't have to be scared and neither do I."

I don't know what to say that, so I just smile at him and blink rapidly to fight off my tears. I relax a bit more when the movement slows, which I'm convinced is in direct response to Brian's hand gently sweeping over my stomach repeatedly. His head rests on my chest and his lips are open, breathing deep breaths across the rise of my belly. I sift my fingers through his soft auburn hair and allow myself a moment to revel in having him here with me during this pregnancy. I don't have to pretend this time, even if it was true before. I can lie here and be thrilled that Brian Kinney is the father of the babies inside of me.

3rd Person Point of View **Thursday, November 28th 1996**

Move a little way forward
Move a little way now
Move a little way forward
Move a little way now

"How could you not have told me that you're pregnant?" Brian whispered, closing the bathroom door behind him.

Justin glared at Brian in the bathroom mirror as he brushed his teeth. "I'm not," he spoke after spitting into the sink.

Brian daringly raised Justin's sweatshirt but the blond quickly knocked his hand away. "Let me see," Brian demanded.

Justin wiped his mouth off and spun around to face Brian. "Stop it. I'm not fucking pregnant."

"You threw up your entire Thanksgiving dinner and you threw up your breakfast yesterday," Brian growled. "Tell me the truth."

"You think I'd take a test or something and not tell you?" Justin questioned.

"No," Brian answered, shaking his head back and forth. "I think that you haven't let me see you naked all week. I think it's because you've noticed that you've got a belly or something."

"You're nuts," Justin sighed and reluctantly lifted his shirt for a split-second before putting it back down. "See, there was no fat belly."

Brian bit his lip and fought Justin's hand so that he could lift the sweater again and observe Justin's stomach. "For a person who doesn't have anything in their stomach, yours seems to look awfully swollen."

Justin fixed his shirt and pushed Brian away from him. "Fuck you," he spat, stepping around Brian to get out of the bathroom.

Brian stepped in front of him. "We're going to go downstairs and tell mom and Griffin that we're going to run to the store to get cigarettes. You're taking a test there."

"I'm not," Justin said firmly.

Brian shrugged. "Then I will go down and tell mom my observations."

"Stop it," Justin cried in a whisper, gripping Brian's arms. His head fell against Brian's chest, "I lied to you."

Brian wrapped his arms around Justin and held the shaking man to his body. "You already took a test?" Brian asked softly.

Justin nodded and admitted, "Seven of them."

Brian gulped. "They were all...."

"Positive," Justin wept. "I just kept hoping that one would say otherwise but they didn't. They just kept saying the same thing. I don't want to have a baby. I don't want to be a father. I'm still just a kid, Brian. Griffin's still just a kid too."

"It's okay," Brian spoke the words even though dread settled over them.

"I'm scared, Brian," Justin whispered.

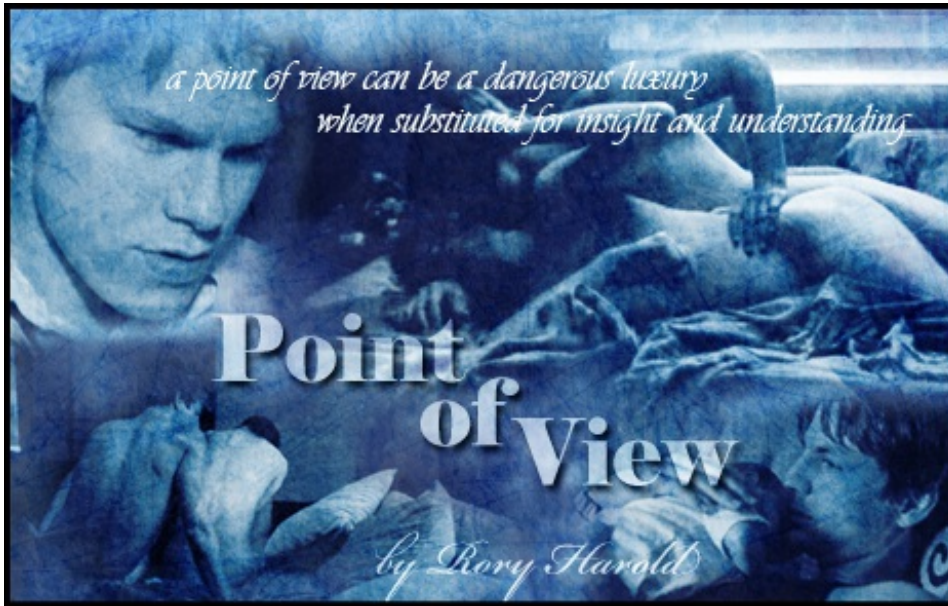
"Me too," Brian empathized, kissing Justin's hair. "But I'll help you. You don't have to worry; I'll always be here for you."

Bleed life

Breathe life

Could be a better plan

Chapter Twelve: "Glycerine"



Point of View

Chapter 12: "Glycerine" Part A

Justin's Point of View

Thursday, October 18th 2007

*It's not my time to wonder why
Everything's gone white
And everything's grey
Now you're here now you're away
I don't want this
Remember that
I'll never forget where you're at*

"Bye, Papa!" Evelyn yells, running along the shore of the lake. The crisp wind picks up, blowing south, plastering her hair against her face as she keeps pace with the ashes until they disappear from sight. "Have fun flying," she says innocently, waving at the sky.

It's enough to make any parent want to scream their lungs out at the unfairness of life, but I can't because I have to be strong for everyone else right now. This was a huge step for our family but it was a mountain to climb for Brian and Leighton.

Our family therapy sessions ended last month, though Brian and Leighton have continued to see Mira together twice a week. They've both been learning to bond as father and son on a different level than they had before. I had thought that they couldn't love one another more or differently, but there are changes that I do see with their relationship. Almost every change has to do with the level of comfort they now have and seek with one another.

There are little odd things that I never noticed before that they didn't do as most fathers and sons do. I don't know if it was because Leighton

distanced himself from Brian because he had a Papa and a Daddy, or if it was for no reason at all. Little things that mean a lot like the length of a hug, the giving or accepting of punishment for bad behavior or acting 'just like Dada.'

They've grown from being best friends to father and son over the last couple of months. It's been an amazing thing to watch, though it hasn't been easy.

At first, Leighton was so confused about all that had happened that he appeared to resent Brian and would avoid him. During one of their therapy sessions, Leighton admitted to Brian that he still wanted Papa to be his father too. He was afraid that if he loved Brian that it would mean that he couldn't still love Griffin.

That issue took a while to work out. What helped the most was when Mira asked Leighton to make a list of things he, Griffin and Brian did together that was special. Then Brian was to do each one of those things with Leighton and then also do special things that Leighton and Griffin did together alone. There wasn't anything that Leighton could think of that only he and Griffin did together, so it helped to show him that Brian could be the same Dada that he always was to him. Of course it's much more complex than that, but that was pretty much how it worked out.

We've been working hard to make sure that each of us spends alone time with each of the children every day. It doesn't always happen, but we try so that they realize how much we love them and want to share special moments with each one of them. This moment we're all sharing in is one I wish that we never would've had to experience together. We can't change the past though and now on Griffin's birthday we're taking a leap forward. I'm scared that it's too big of a leap though.

Releasing Griffin's ashes was something that Leighton said he wanted to do. Neither Brian nor I wanted to so soon, but Leighton begged us to because he wanted to do it on Griffin's birthday so that he could fly with the leaves. Griffin's favorite time of year was the fall and today, his birthday, was the final day last year that Leighton remembered going outside with Griffin. He informed Brian and me that Griffin had told him he wanted to fly away and be free with all the pretty colors of leaves and wished it wasn't so cold because he really wanted to swim in the lake before it froze over for the winter.

It was quite a lot to put on a child, if you ask me. He never said a word to us in any of his letters and I'm sure that at the time Leighton had no idea why Griffin had told him what he did. But this is Griffin's wish and Leighton's too, so Brian and I agreed to it.

But it's so hard to watch my son and husband look so shattered. I have never had anyone close to me die that wanted their ashes released but I thought it would be a freeing as Leighton sort of said it would be. It doesn't feel that way and I'm not sure it feels that way for them.

"It's c...cold," Evelyn says, rushing toward me. "Can we go back in?"

Molly had dinner prepared for us when we came back inside. We all sort of forced ourselves to eat the pot roast, which I'm more than surprised she actually knew how to cook. It all tasted great but we were all too emotional to eat. Audrey and Evelyn seemed to really pick up on the sadness cascading between Brian, myself and Leighton. The two of them ate so little I'm afraid we're all going to be ravenous in the morning.

The decision to allow Molly to stay with us has proved to be a good one so far. Both Brian and I had a long talk with her about her behavior toward us and she took it to heart. There's something that tells me more is going on with her, but I can't put my finger on what it is. She acts so sweet and kind to me, Brian and the kids. It's more than I expected, much more.

The help she's been to us has been great. She cooks dinner almost every night; she helps clean up house, helps to get the kids ready for school and helps Leighton with his homework. Brian and I work well at raising the kids together, but there aren't many moments we're able to relax because there is always something that needs done in the house. Molly's extra hands have allowed Brian and me to spend time together that we need. It won't be long before I have the twins and then everything in our lives will get even busier.

Brian gave the girls a bath, put them to bed and is now in Leighton's room reading to him. Leighton didn't want me in there with them tonight. Brian tried to fight Leighton's request but I understand. Leighton's emotions are really raw and I know that he loves me and I respect that he needed Brian. Leighton feeling comfortable enough with Brian to allow Brian to do the nightly routine with him is fine with me. I wish I could be the one comforting him, but now that place is as much Brian's as it has always been mine.

They're comforting each other and right now I think that is exactly what they both need. I'm very sad too; I've cried pretty much any moment I was alone today. I still have these feelings inside of me that link me to Griffin in an emotional bond that I always believed was there. The emotional bond is still there but the reality isn't. It's confusing to me and I'm sure it's not any better for Leighton. There are no easy answers for any of us but it doesn't stop me from wishing there were.

I have to do as Molly so wisely told me. I have to take each day at a time. She's been surprising me a lot lately. After dinner Molly drove over to pick Mom up and take her to a movie. When my mother figured out that she'd left she called me, completely forgetting about what we did today and started gushing about how pleased she was that Molly was finally asking to have mother-daughter time with her. She rambled on and on about it and her happiness was so bright I couldn't tell her about what she'd forgotten. Molly made it to her house and Mom and I said a quick goodbye.

I kissed the kids goodnight and headed into the nursery where I've been spending any free time I've got when Brian isn't around. He's helped too but I usually do most of the work in here while he's at work. I'm still working at the gallery but my last day is next Friday. I would love to stay

on working there, but there really isn't any way that would be possible. I don't know for sure how long Molly is going to be here and I wouldn't want to leave my children in the hands of strangers. Both Brian and I are well off financially now. I know that I'll miss working, but maybe I'll get back into painting again. Brian's offered to have the stable house renovated for me. I still don't have a clue when I'd have time to paint once the babies come. I barely have time to brush my teeth in the mornings and that's with Molly's help and without two newborns.

Daphne and Loren became the proud parents to Amelia McKayla a week ago. Poor Daphne was in labor for nearly two days before the little girl decided to greet everyone. She's such a beautiful baby and has the darkest brown eyes of any baby I've ever seen. I'm so excited for her. It's going to be great that our children will get to grow up together.

"Shouldn't you be taking it easy?"

I jump, startled from Brian's voice. I guess I was so lost in my thoughts I didn't hear him walk in. I look over my shoulder and give him a small smile as he walks toward me. "I wanted to put the bedding on."

"Could you use my help?" he asks, picking up the bumper I have draped over the crib I have almost completely made.

"Are you sure you're up for it? I can do it another time if you want to..." Brian's kiss is so sudden and fierce it makes me fall back against the crib.

"Sorry," he whispers, pulling his mouth away from me as he puts his arms around me and brings our bodies together.

My stomach bumps into his and I realize that if he didn't have such long arms he might not be able to hold me the way he is. "So what do you want to do?" I ask, holding his face in my hands.

His eyes still look blood shot from crying but his lips quirk into a smile. "I want to help you put their room together," he replies and releases me.

"Do you want to do the bumper then? I was really worried about getting down on that floor."

He grabs the item and kneels down. "I think what you were worried about was getting up," he has the nerve to joke.

"You're probably right," I admit, ruffling his perfectly styled hair.

"I'll go start on the other crib."

"Wait." He reaches his hand out and grasps my thigh. "You've already done so much in here without me, Justin. I'd like to do this with you."

"You would?" I thought the only reason he really wanted to help me was to take his mind off today or just to be a good father and husband by helping me out.

He vigorously nods his head and my heart soars as his cheeks blush and

his smile turns shy. "Griffin did it all for the girls and you didn't really get to personalize Leighton's room because you didn't have any help. I want to do it with you so that I can remember it. I don't give a fuck if that's cheesy, but I didn't get to take part in things like this for any of my children. I don't want to miss anything."

I wish I could bend and kiss him because if I could I'd give him the most passionate and grateful kiss he's ever received from me. When Brian opens himself up to me, even after a day as emotionally draining as today, it makes my heart surge with love for him. I can hardly suppress it. "Stand up here and kiss me," I order him, holding out my hand.

He chuckles and stands up slowly. "Why?"

I place my hands on his shoulders; stand on my tip toes and whisper, "So that I could do this." My mouth molds to his and he moans, opening his mouth to me and I give him every feeling I have, I let it envelope his senses with the same urgent love I feel for him. It's what I've always felt but now I can unleash it whenever I want.

The most amazing thing about us is that Brian and I know how to get through anything.

Don't let the days go by

Glycerine

Glycerine

3rd Person Point of View

Saturday, April 20, 1985

"Does it feel different?" Justin asked, snuggling closer to Brian. The cool April night air drifted in through the cracks in the planks of the tree house.

Brian was nearly asleep but heard Justin's question. "What are you talking about?" he asked, a little testy because it had been a long day and he was ready to sleep.

"Being a teenager," Justin said in exasperation, annoyed that Brian couldn't read his mind.

The just barely thirteen-year-old turned in his sleeping bag toward Justin. He didn't really feel different than he had yesterday, but even in the dark he could see that Justin's eyes were wide with wonder and awe. He didn't want to let him down so he replied, "Yeah. It feels different."

"Like how?" Justin asked, propping himself up on his elbow. Now that Brian was facing him he felt it was surely the time they would start talking. He loved camping out with Brian, even if it was a little chilly. He loved listening to Brian talk and tell him stories. He wasn't sure if they were all true but Justin imagined that they were and he didn't care if they weren't.

Brian noticed Justin's lips chattering and unzipped his sleeping bag. "Come on. Get in with me and put yours over us. It was probably too cold to sleep out here this year."

"Last year we were sooo hot," Justin said, wishing for that warmth. He quickly got out of his sleeping bag and slid in next to Brian.

"That's because last year there was a weird heat wave," Brian said all-knowingly. "You're freezing, Justin. Maybe we should go inside?" he suggested feeling the tiny ten-year-old shaking.

"No, I'll get warm," Justin assured, pulling his sleeping bag over the both of them and resting his head close to Brian's. Brian's hot breath tickled his nose and warmed his face, his long gangly arms wrapped around Justin and immediately the boy felt warmer.

"Now go to sleep," Brian ordered, yawning once again.

"But you didn't answer my question," Justin grumbled.

Brian groaned. "Yes I did, Justin." He was so exhausted from spending his birthday at the Fun Factory his brain was shutting down his short-term memory.

"Nuh-uh," Justin retorted. "You didn't tell me why you feel different. I asked how you feel different when you become a teenager."

Brian closed his eyes and whispered, "You feel stronger."

"Strong enough to beat up any ghosts that haunt Ms. Miller's house next door?" Justin asked seriously.

Brian held back from laughing and hugged Justin tightly. "Yeah."

"Strong enough to beat up anyone that messes with me at school?" the blond persisted.

"Definitely."

"Strong enough to...."

Brian's eyes popped open and he put his hand over Justin's mouth. "Strong enough to keep my hand here until you go to sleep. Now stop talking, I'm tired."

"Brrweerrshffstataataahh," Justin mumbled, laughing at the older boy who pinned his own arms to his sides so he couldn't remove his hand.

"I'll take my hand off your mouth but you have to promise to be quiet. Do you promise?" Brian asked.

Justin nodded his head and as soon as Brian took his hand away he made a motion to show that he was zipping and locking his mouth closed.

Brian gave Justin a sleepy smile. "Good night, Justin."

Justin pouted and huffed.

Brian rolled his eyes. "You have permission to say goodnight."

"And I have to tell you happy Birthday, Brian!" Justin practically shouted.

"Okay, tell me," Brian laughed.

"Happy thirteenth birthday, Brian," Justin spoke with Brian and kissed Brian's cheek. "Good night, I love you." He snuggled down further into the sleeping bag and closed his eyes.

Brian closed his eyes for the last time that night and whispered, "I love you, too."

Justin smiled but didn't say a word back to Brian. Jennifer had told him that sometimes it was hard for Brian to say he loved people because of how his parents hurt him and that was why he didn't say it often. Justin was sure that when Brian told him he loved him that he didn't hurt any more.

Justin's Point of View **Friday, October 18th 2007**

"Dada, sleep with me tonight, please?" Leighton begs Brian, clinging desperately to him.

I watch through the crack in Leighton's bedroom door as Brian tries to soothe our son by patting his back. "For a little while," Brian answers, his voice cracking.

Leighton allowing Brian to soothe and calm him after his nightmare is huge. Even if he does want Brian a lot, he almost always calls out for me. I was taking the second of my middle of the night bathroom breaks when I heard Brian call to me and tell me that Leighton was crying. By the time I made it to the hall Brian had Leighton relatively calmed down.

Brian gets into the bed and immediately Leighton crawls on top of him, practically smothering Brian. When I try to hold Leighton he seems so big to me, but looking at Brian holding him makes him look so small. It could just be the moment or the position of their bodies but it looks exactly like the picture hanging above Leighton's bed.

The birthday present from Griffin was the sketch I'd drawn of him and Brian when he was only a little baby. I don't know where Griffin ever found it or when he decided to have it matted and framed, but I'm thankful he did and so is Leighton. Leighton loved it and I think he understood the symbolic meaning it held because Griffin had given it to him. It was giving Leighton permission to love Brian as his father and to see the love I had for them both when I drew it. I definitely hadn't expected such a gift for him but I suppose it was quite fitting.

Brian covers them with a blanket and his eyes lock on mine. I give him an

encouraging smile and turn to head back to our bedroom. I'm sure Brian will be back in our bed before I wake up for my next bathroom rush. I'm almost to our bedroom when I notice the guest bathroom light is on.

It's almost one in the morning and I know Molly got home shortly after Brian and I went to our bedroom. I don't hear the shower running so I'm pretty sure that she's just using the bathroom. I want to wait for her and ask how things went with her and mom, make sure she understands how happy her spending time with mom made her.

When Molly opens the door she jumps back a little.

"Sorry, didn't mean to scare you. I just wanted to see how things went with Mom. She was really happy about you spending time with her." I'm careful not to tell her that she missed out on a lot of mother-daughter time they should have had while she was growing up.

Molly brushes her bangs away from her eyes and I notice how blotchy her skin looks in the nightlight coming from the hall lamp. "Things went good," she says nervously.

"What happened?" I say, feeling extremely disappointed with her. "Did you and mom get in a fight? She was thrilled to finally get to do something with just you and her, Molly."

"Justin, we didn't get in a fight. We had a good time. A really good time," she speaks quickly, brushing past me.

"Then what's going on?" I ask, following her as she walks toward her room. "You look sick."

She stops and turns to face me. "Justin, I'm not sick. The reason I came back here was because Dad hired someone else to fill my position."

"When did he do that?" I ask. I can't believe him! Okay, I guess I could believe it, if it was me, but Molly he still considers his child.

"Before I came here," she says, walking into her bedroom.

I follow her and sit down on the bed beside her when she flops onto her back. "Why did he do that? I thought..."

"You thought Dad liked me better than you?" she cuts me off, staring at me for an answer.

I nod.

"Well, he didn't. I just hadn't had a bullshit reason to disappoint him yet."

"How did you disappoint him, Molly?"

Her eyes get glassy and she sniffles, on the verge of tears. "When I was in France I met a guy at the hotel bar. It was love at first sight, but it only lasted until the next morning."

"Dad found out about him?"

"Sorta."

"You're totally making me go nuts here, what happened?"

"I got pregnant and I truly have no idea who the father of my baby is, Justin. He's some random guy and I'm just some random idiot girl who is definitely NOT the apple of her father's eye."

I swear to god a light wind could blow my huge body over right now. It's a damn good thing I'm sitting down. I can't fucking believe my father would do this Molly! "So that's why you came back here," I surmise. "Molly, you should have told us sooner!"

"I know," she cries, throwing her arm over her eyes. "I'm sorry; I just don't know what the hell I'm going to do now."

I remove her arm and hold her hand in mine. "You told Mom tonight?"

"Yeah," she whispers, tears rolling down her cheeks. "She was ecstatic until she remembered that I have no job, no home and no father for my child."

"Dad actually kept it from Mom?" I ask in disbelief.

She sits up and starts shaking her head from side to side. "He told me that there wasn't any reason for him to talk to Mom any more because I'm no longer his daughter."

"That asshole."

"Yeah, well I didn't expect any different, Justin."

"So what do you think you're going to do, Molly? You can't just hide here forever."

"I know. I was hoping that maybe Brian would let me work for him," she says hopefully, wiping her eyes. "Then maybe I could save up for an apartment."

"Molly, you can't just expect Brian to hire you. He might not need anyone right now."

"I know," she whispers. "But it's worth a shot. I've already given my resume to a lot of companies but I haven't heard anything. If Brian doesn't have a position for me then I'll just keep looking."

"Are you sure that there isn't any way you could find that guy?" Maybe at least then he'd be able to help support his child and take some pressure off of Molly.

"There's no way I would even know where to start. We didn't exchange names or numbers; the only thing I know for sure is that he's French. I wasn't planning on starting a relationship with the guy and he left right after we had sex. There's no way I'd ever find him."

Shit. I thought my life was fucked up. I'm too tired to even process how to help Molly right now. "Listen, we'll talk to Brian in the morning about the job. I'm really tired and my brain isn't exactly working right now."

She throws her arms around me and whimpers, "Thank you."

"I haven't done anything," I say, pulling away and standing up.

"You didn't kick me out," she retorts. "I was worried you would."

"Never," I promise her. "We'll talk in the morning, Mol. Good night."

"Good night, Justin."

Saturday, May 25th 2002

Brian's Point of View

I'm never alone
I'm alone all the time
Are you at one
Or do you lie?
We live in a wheel
Where everyone steals
But when we rise it's like strawberry fields
If i treated you bad
You bruise my face

Coming to Chicago to visit Leighton and Justin was a horrible idea but we had no other choice. Originally we'd planned on Justin bringing Leighton to Pittsburgh for the weekend and flying back with him the day after Memorial Day. He still has two weeks of school and then he'll be coming back to spend the summer with us. Things changed when a pipe under the house burst and we woke up last Sunday to find about two feet of standing water in the kitchen and family room.

Having this happen is a huge inconvenience but with a newborn in the house it only made things worse. Immediately I called around and got the initial problem taken care of, but Griffin, Evelyn and I had to pack and stay in a hotel for the whole week. Mom offered us her pull-out sofa, which is where Justin stayed when he and Leighton visited the weekend after Evvie was born, but there was no way with all the baby stuff we could manage in her small condo.

The water ruined our carpet in the family room and made the tile in the kitchen start to bubble so it all has to be replaced. We decided to get wood floors to match the ones we have in most of the rest of the house in both of those rooms. The only company in all of Pittsburgh that had the exact same flooring was only available to do it yesterday and today. Then no one would be able to walk on it for another day after that. If we didn't get it done now then they wouldn't be available to put them in for another week. There's no way Griffin could handle being out of the

house with Evelyn for another week.

Mom had been planning to spend the weekend in New York with Molly and though she said it'd be okay if we all stayed at her house while she was gone, I didn't feel right about it, especially when Justin said he'd just stay in a hotel room for the weekend. I didn't want to isolate him like that. It's different if he's staying with Mom, then he's at least visiting with her, but without her there he would've been spending the majority of his time holed up alone in his hotel room.

There was no way that we could all fit into her condo. Thankfully she's moving into a bigger place next month, but for the time being she's living in a place she's selling and it's the smallest condo I've ever seen. When I just go to visit her I swear I feel like I'm tripping over the furniture. It's amazing she got it sold. That being the case, we decided to call off the trip entirely. But then Leighton started crying and begging to see us and his new sister. Justin offered to let us stay in their house; apparently the entire upstairs is empty besides his the attic which he uses for his studio.

Griffin and I agreed that it would be what was best for Leighton and I must admit that I really wanted to see where Justin was living. Justin seemed really happy when I told him that we'd come. He was so excited and rambled to me so much that my heart started beating really fast and I felt excited with him. We talked about the landmarks he wanted to take us to while we were there or some other time we visit, planning our next trip even before the first had happened. He was so excited to show us the gallery he worked at and made a list of all the things he wanted to cook for the barbecue. It was the best conversation we had in years.

Justin had to pick all of us up from the airport because none of the rental car companies at the airport I called had anything available on such short notice. They acted like I was crazy for even trying. Justin came to pick us up and we all piled in his car, me in the front seat next to him and Griffin in back with Evelyn and Leighton. The moment our shoulders brushed together when I got in beside him I knew that coming to Chicago had been a bad idea.

Justin had hugged Griffin when we first came out of the gates which completely surprised me, but I felt relieved and was actually considering hugging him next. Then as soon as Leighton tired of hugging me and Evelyn started crying, Griff handed her off to me since it was my turn to change her. When I came back from the bathroom only Leighton and Griffin were waiting for me where I'd left the three of them. Justin had gone to pull the car up, so I accepted that I wasn't going to hug him the way I had foolishly wanted to.

The electric spark I felt when our bare shoulders met burned me. I felt the spot throbbing, begging me to rub it away the entire ride to his and Leighton's house. I was glad that Leighton was doing most of the talking, because the shock of touching him once again had made my tongue incapable of forming words. I nodded like some bobble-head doll about all the things Leighton and Justin pointed out to us on the way, and when I wasn't doing that I was thinking sick, sick thoughts about

Justin. Thoughts that I have acted on, thoughts that I know aren't right.

As we pulled into the driveway of his brownstone I was shaking with the need to get out of the car. It was great to finally see that Justin didn't live in a shitty neighborhood and I felt relieved to know that he finally had a home, a home far away from me, far away from the places where I tainted him.

I don't even know if the car was completely in park when I hopped out. He'd touched me again when he reached for shift between us and his fingers brushed against my thigh making me want to scream. No one noticed my behavior, thankfully. They were so busy talking and carrying on as if it wasn't the most awkward situation in the fucking world. Maybe it wasn't for them, but it certainly was for me.

For the first hour I basically hid from Justin by playing with Leighton in his room. Then Griffin called us into the kitchen for a snack. Justin and Leighton had made popsicles out of juice prior to our arrival and I was instructed to eat one so that Leighton's feelings wouldn't be hurt. I ate mine and the 'ice-cream headache' I got from it did nothing to quell the erection that I popped from watching a man who was most definitely not my husband lick at his popsicle. I almost screamed at both Justin and Griffin in the middle of it, wanting them to tell me how they could be so oblivious to my turmoil.

Why did I ever think it was okay to fuck Justin? Why did I ever think it would be okay if I loved him? It isn't. It's not right. I ruined his life because I couldn't leave him alone. I twisted his mind into thinking that what we did together was okay. He doesn't understand how wrong it all really was because he was still practically a child when I stripped him of his innocence. He didn't have a right to choose how he felt about me because I encouraged it when he was too young to understand that he had a choice.

If I hadn't fallen for Griffin and realized that he could be my out and that he could be the one thing that really separated me and Justin, I would've led Justin into a life that's far worse from the one he's living now. Justin deserved far much more than what Griffin or I could ever give him. Yes, I'm still fucking angry at him for cheating on Griffin, even if one of those times it was with me, but really I'm to blame for it all. He never would've gotten married to Griffin if it wasn't for me introducing him to a world of sex when I knew all he really wanted was one man to love him.

This weekend is totally fucked. I don't know how I'm going to get through it. I love Griffin, I do. I love him! Why is it so easy to love Griffin when I make Justin the bad guy but as soon as I see Justin the way he is now, laughing, holding my daughter and kissing her cheek, completely disregarding the fact that the reason that child exists is because I lured his husband away from him, made him bite the bullet and divorce him so that I could have him, so that I could put my love into someone else, why is that I'm falling in love with him again? I know it's wrong. I've talked myself out of it every single way I can and the easiest way to deal with my feelings is to think of all the things I don't like about Justin, to vilify him.

But we show up here in his home and he's suddenly the boy I always have loved. And that's just the fucked up part right there. I think of him as a boy, that boy that was my little brother, the boy I protected from bullies and from my friends who all wanted a piece of his tight virgin ass. Yeah, I protected him all right. No. It's always been Justin that's protected me. I've only taken from him. I always did and every time I'm around him I want to hate him because I love him so much that it makes me a monster. He doesn't deserve what I've done to him because I can't handle my emotions. He doesn't. The only way to protect him now is to keep doing what I've been doing.

Only there's no way I can hate him when he's being the kind of man that I wish I could be.

I am totally fucked.

"Brian, you're dripping that all over," Griffin chides me, cutting into my thoughts.

I look at my hand and see that it's covered in melted popsicle which has also created a puddle on the counter top. "Lick it off me," I prompt him; wanting to receive a pleasure I know is okay.

He laughs and shakes his head. "Go wash your hand off," he orders me. He puts his mouth next to my ear and whispers, "Don't be an ass. I doubt that Leighton or Justin want to watch me do that."

I say nothing and walk over to the sink where Justin just has to meet me to be the good little host and turn on the water for me. "You can just leave the plastic stick in the sink; they can't go in the dishwasher."

"Okay," I croak, turning away from his smile and his blue eyes that are doing that glittering thing they've always done which I've had to force myself to look away from for years.

Justin's Point of View **Friday, October 18th 2007**

Couldn't love you more
You got a beautiful taste

From the moment Brian fell back asleep in our bed I've been awake. The babies are so active and have me in pain in almost any position I'm in besides standing unless I'm lying in the tub. I shifted around in the bed for an hour before I finally gave up and took a bath. Now, it's almost five a.m. and I'm exhausted, but at least the activity inside me has lessened. Even if the babies start moving around again, I think I'm too tired to notice the pain.

I finish drying myself off and come out of the bedroom naked, prepared to slip on a pair of boxers from my dresser. I'm surprised to see Brian sitting up watching TV and looking completely alert. He's going to be so tired at work today.

"I'm taking the day off work," he says, his eyes burning into my skin as I walk over to my dresser. "Depending on how Leighton feels we might want to keep him home too."

"Okay." I slide my boxers on, crawl into bed and lay on my side as close as I can get to him. "Did I wake you up?" I ask, running my hand down his chest and twining the sparse hairs between my fingers.

"No," he answers, shutting off the television and placing the remote on the night stand. "I had a nightmare," he admits warily, looking down at me and drawing his right hand down my cheek.

"Was it about Griffin?"

He shakes his head and takes his hand away. "No, it was about Craig."

"What?" I ask in disbelief. "Why did you dream about him?"

"It wasn't exactly a dream," he reveals in a soft voice, "more of a memory. It was a conversation I forgot about but it stayed with me for a really long time."

"What conversation, Brian?" I place my hand over his and feel his shaking.

"After Griffin told me that you were cheating on him I did something really stupid."

Immediately my mind flashes to the day he gave me the ultimatum. "Yeah, you did," I agree, but continue to hold his hand so he knows that even after that, I'm still here.

"Not just that, it's something else. I haven't told you this before because I didn't think it mattered, not if you forgave me for..."

"I have forgiven you, Brian," I assure him. "I believe that you've always loved me, even if you loved someone else much more than you'll ever be able to love me."

"That isn't true, Justin," he says quickly, turning on his side to face me.

"It isn't?" I ask. Even though I know we have a different love, I haven't deluded myself into thinking that it's the love he'd chose if he had the choice. It wasn't. He did have the choice, well... sort of.

"Justin, you're the one. You always were but I let my fears and I let some things your father said ruin it. I might've projected my feelings for you into Griffin on accident some of the time but when I really seemed to hate you and really fucking loved him, it wasn't because I hated you or loved him. It had nothing to do with the real truth."

"What was the real truth, Brian?" He's scaring the shit out of me right now!

"I called your Dad and I asked him for his help."

The world tilts a little around me and I have to open and close my eyes before I can focus on Brian's remorseful expression once again. "You did what?" I gasp.

"I... I was so fucking confused and what he said to me the last day we saw him in New York kept running through my head."

I don't even remember what Craig said to Brian that day but obviously it had to have been something huge. "What did he say? You're confusing me and scaring me, Brian."

"I'm not meaning to, Justin, but you have to know. I've been thinking about this since we saw my mother and now after this weird nightmarish memory popping into my head again I've got to tell you."

"Then tell me," I demand in a soft tone, grabbing his hand in mine again.

"He said that I was the reason why your entire life was nothing that you ever wanted. I got all the opportunities you should've had. He was sure I'd ruin your life because I'd ruined his."

"But we know that's not true," I say, finally recalling the conversations of that day. "You and I both told him to fuck off."

"And he told you that he never wanted to see or speak to you again, remember?"

"Yeah, and believe me I know I am better off without him."

"I thought so until I saw your life crumbling around you, Justin. You had nothing that you ever wanted and it was my entire fault. When Griffin told me you were cheating on him, I thought it was true because I'd made you a slut, the same way I had been. I was so angry at myself because of the feelings I had for you, feelings I knew were wrong to have for you whenever I tried to separate them from what I felt for Griffin."

"What?" I can't believe him! "But you know that there's nothing wrong with loving me, Brian. I fell in love with you the day we met you and even though we grew up as brothers, our relationship was always more than that."

"I... I know that now but it's only because I realized that I couldn't waste any more time with you. I had to take the risk and find out if what I was feeling was really returned, if it was wrong or right. You were my first love and I wanted you to be my last. I had to be honest with myself; I didn't want to do what I'd done for a decade and force you out of my life any chance I could."

"I wish you would've realized all of that a long time ago, Brian."

"Me too," he whispers, kissing my nose. "I don't know what I was thinking when I called Craig. I shouldn't have listened to him but at the time it all sounded so true."

"What exactly did he tell you, Brian?"

Wednesday, June 17th 1998
3rd Person Point of View

Don't let the days go by
Could have been easier on you
I couldn't change though i wanted to

"Brian, you're due back at work soon. Wake up," Justin called softly, shaking Brian's shoulder.

Brian's eyes opened and locked on Justin's. Immediately he felt heat pass between them and the only thing that stopped him from pulling Justin into a kiss was the baby sleeping on his chest. He blinked quickly; hoping that Justin's face would stop looking like it was glowing in the afternoon sun coming in through the windows. "How long was I out?"

"Just a few minutes," Justin whispered.

Brian placed Leighton in the playpen and covered him with the blue blanket he found draping over one side. "You're sure he's not going to wake up in here?" he asked Justin, sitting down beside him on the couch.

"I like him close to me," Justin replied, closing his sketchbook.

"Let me see that," Brian said, grabbing the sketchbook and flipping it open.

Justin felt like Brian was tearing his heart open as he watched him slowly flip through each page of the sketchbook. Every single page included something that had to do with Brian. There was a picture of his house, his car and countless pictures of the man himself.

Brian could hear Justin's breathing quicken with every page he examined. Instead of drawing his husband, he was drawing him. Brian felt like each sketch was a testament to the sickness he'd infected Justin with. He'd ruined Justin's innocence, ruined his chance to find love with a man that loved him.

Justin grabbed the sketchbook, closed it and held it securely against his chest. "Nothing's really finished," he lied. "I don't have much time to sketch."

Brian cleared his throat and looked down at Justin; his cheeks were pink in embarrassment and his blue eyes sparkled with unshed tears. "They're good," he said truthfully. "You should show them to Griff."

"No," Justin said quickly.

"Why not?" Brian asked. "He's your husband. I'm sure he'd like to see them."

"I don't feel comfortable showing them to him," Justin said. "I wouldn't have shown you if you hadn't grabbed it and looked yourself."

Brian knew that it wasn't the truth. Justin felt comfortable enough to allow him to look at every page before he took it away from him. "I've got to get back to work," he said, standing up from the couch.

"Will you come by tomorrow?" Justin asked hopefully.

Brian shivered as he watched Justin's eyes rake over his body. "No, I've got a lot of meetings so I won't be able to come by."

"Maybe you could come Friday then?" Justin asked, standing and walking after Brian toward the apartment door.

"Can't," Brian spoke abruptly.

Justin frowned. "Oh, okay. I was just... I was hoping you and I could..."

Brian interrupted, "You know, you should get out of this house. Maybe you could take Leighton to an art museum or to the park or something."

"He's too little for any of that," Justin said, confused as to why Brian would suggest it.

"You need to do something for yourself, Justin."

Justin shrugged. "I do things for myself. I go out every Thursday night with Daphne and I do lots of stuff with you."

"But you don't do anything with Griffin. Why is that?" Brian pressed.

Justin narrowed his eyes at Brian. "He doesn't have the time."

Brian didn't want to get Justin angry. It was his fault that Justin was the way he was anyway. He'd taught him that sex and love were two different things and that they rarely meshed. Whatever Justin's feelings were for him sprung from wrongful actions Brian had made him believe were right. "I'll call you soon," he whispered, bringing Justin into his arms. He held him close for a few minutes, guiltily reveling in the smell of his hair, the warmth of his skin and the feel of his body pressed close to his.

Justin felt something shift between he and Brian as the man pulled away from him. He couldn't tell exactly what it was, but it made his heart ache painfully.

"Bye, Justin," Brian said, opening and closing the apartment door behind him.

As Brian walked down the steep steps of the apartment building the desperation he felt built inside of him. As he reached his car he saw the couple who lived beside Justin get out of their truck. They were screaming at one another about who had taken the last of the beer money and continued their fight all the way up the stairs.

He saw Justin peek his head out of the window and then quickly close the drapes as his neighbors passed his door. The neighborhood hadn't

been a good place to live when they were college students but it had only gotten worse. Griffin was making good money now so there was no reason why they couldn't move. When Brian had broached the subject with Griffin, the man had told him that Justin didn't want to move. Brian suspected that Justin was holding on to the memories of them living there together.

Justin had nothing and his future, if Brian didn't find some way to help him, would be nothing like the one he dreamed of when they were kids. Brian knew that he had to do something. There was no way he could tell Jennifer about what he observed in Justin. She was barely financially stable enough and just as adamant about not accepting his money as Justin was. He'd have to figure out a way to financially and emotionally help Justin or he'd never live a life anything close to his dreams.

Brian got into his car and got out his cell phone. He dialed a number he wasn't sure why he kept in his contacts but as he asked the secretary for him he felt mildly relieved.

Craig clicked to the waiting call and spoke into the receiver, "This is Craig Taylor."

"Craig, it's Brian."

"When my secretary said you were on the phone, I was sure she was mistaken."

"Obviously not," Brian grumbled.

"I doubt you'd be calling me unless you wanted something, so cut to the chase and tell me what you want."

"Justin's in trouble," Brian said, second-guessing calling Craig when he couldn't come up with a better way to admit that he'd fucked up Justin's life.

"Why are you calling me?" Craig huffed. "He's of no concern of mine as long as he has anything to do with you. Shouldn't you be talking to Jen?"

"Mom can't know what's going on, she'd...."

"She'd want to disown you too?"

"No... it's not that," Brian defended himself even though deep down he felt that Craig was right.

"Of course it is," Craig said snidely. "Justin refused to listen to me about you, Brian. He did everything you wanted him to do and now he's married to some guy he knew for a few months, has a child with him and he's in some kind of trouble. I'm guessing whatever this trouble is it has to be really bad or you wouldn't have called me."

"The man he's married to, Griffin, he doesn't love him," Brian confessed. "He isn't happy and he isn't doing anything with his life except waiting for..."

"You?" Craig cut in. "Of course he doesn't love that guy, he loves you," Craig said simply. "He always has loved you and that's because you've twisted his mind into believing that it was okay. It's sick what you've done to him, Brian. You were raised to be his brother and you took advantage of him."

Brian said nothing to deny that. "I want to help him."

"If you mean that, then you need to stay away from him."

"I can't!" Brian gasped. "He's my best friend, I love him and I love Gri...." Brian stopped. "Griffin is my friend too."

Craig wasn't fooled by Brian's cover. "You're in love with Justin's husband?"

Brian knew he loved Griffin but he wasn't going to admit that to Craig; he was already telling the man too much. "I... I feel differently about him than I do Justin."

"You want to be with him?" Craig persisted.

"Justin or Griffin?" Brian asked, but as soon as he spoke the words he damned himself.

"I was talking about Griffin," Craig replied angrily. "You don't love Justin, Brian. If you loved him then you wouldn't have feelings for someone else."

Brian's confusion fueled the anger inside of him to boil forth. "You don't know how I feel, Craig. You gave up on love a long time ago."

"I gave up on watching my son fall for someone like you. I gave up on trying to make my wife see what a mistake you were. If you want to help Justin then you need to show him exactly what I see in you. You need to show him what your parents saw in you, Brian."

Brian gulped down the bitter bile that rushed into his mouth. "What do you, did they see?" he asked.

"A boy who takes what they can from everyone, a kid who uses everyone around them. You call yourself a man all you want, Brian. You're still that kid. You're a liar and you don't care who you hurt."

"I never wanted to hurt him," Brian choked out.

"If that's true, if you love Justin and want him to have a good life, then you need to help him get away from Griffin and you. I know you're smart; you'll figure out how to do that. Show him the truth of how you feel about Griffin, which is obvious to me. He's so blinded by you and the only thing that'll make him get on with his life and be the man he was supposed to be before you came along is if he doesn't want to know you. You understand what I'm saying, Brian?"

"Yes," Brian hissed, angry at himself for not seeing how right Craig was. He hated Craig, but that didn't mean that Craig wasn't right.

"You do it and I'll see what I can do to help him financially," Craig replied.

"He won't take any help you can give him!" Brian spat and hung up the phone. He didn't want to listen to Craig, but he'd done the right thing calling him.

Brian wasn't sure if he could do what was needed to cut Justin out of his life. He wouldn't be able to see Justin hurting, knowing that he had caused it. The only way he'd be able to hurt Justin was if Justin wasn't Justin. If he could think of him differently then Justin would be free of him.

Should have been easier by three
Our old friend fear and you and me
Glycerine
Glycerine

Justin's Point of View **Friday, October 18th 2007**

Don't let the days go by
Glycerine
Don't let the days go by
Ah, Glycerine
Glycerine
Oh, Glycerine
Glycerine

"Justin, I'm sorry," Brian whispers, wiping the sweat from face with a warm washcloth.

The moment Brian finished revealing the conversation he had with Craig I had to race into the bathroom and vomit. My entire insides had shaken with every new sentence out of his mouth and in the end my entire body was shaking as I tried to ward off the nausea.

"How could you have forgotten that?" I ask backing away from his attention.

"I honestly don't know, Justin. I've been remembering bits and pieces about it but it didn't make sense until I saw it all happening in my dream. It was like once I decided that I had to go through with it, I owned it so much that I forgot the true catalyst."

"You still think our love is wrong?" I ask, holding his eyes with my own.

"No. I just... I knew I had to tell you the whole truth. Please, Justin. Believe me. I love you and I hate what I did."

"You hate that we fucked when we younger?" I ask for clarification.

"No, no... I don't regret that. Not anymore, because I know that

everything we did back then was because I was in love with you. I was so in love with you and I wanted you. I wanted you more than I could let myself believe was okay to want you."

I step closer to him and place my hand over his cock, the warmth passing through his underwear to my hand, prompting me to give him a small squeeze. "Is it okay, now?"

He wraps his arms around me and leans his forehead against mine and whispers, "It was always okay. It was."

I put both of my hands on his waist and push him back a little bit. "You ruined my life, Brian. Not because I was in love with you. You ruined my life when you allowed your fears to separate us, to tear my soul out every time I had to bear your hatred. The only thing that kept me alive was Leighton."

"I know."

"My father did try to help me financially," I admit. "A little while after Griffin and I divorced he called me and offered me a job in New York, contingent on the promise that I never have anything to do with you again."

"You didn't tell me that," he gasps, running his hands through his hair and turning away from me.

"Yeah, well, you didn't tell me a lot of stuff, Brian. Besides, it didn't matter back then. I doubted that you cared about me at all."

"But you still said no to his offer?"

"Of course I still said no," I say, angry that he would question that. "I loved you. I always loved you, Brian. No one, not Craig and definitely not you, was or is going to stop that."

"So, you still love me?" Brian asks me in a tone reminiscent of one he used when we were kids and he asked me the same thing.

"I'm pissed at you, Brian," I say and see him wince. "Even though I know that Craig took advantage of your fears, I still am angry that you just didn't talk to me and tell me how you were feeling." I take his hand and place it over my heart. "But didn't you just hear what I said? I'm not going to ever stop loving you."

3rd Person Point of View Saturday, May 30, 1992

*Bad moon white again
Bad moon white again
And she falls around me
I needed you more
When you wanted us less
I could not kiss just regress*

It might just be clear, simple and plain
Well, that's just fine, that's just one of my names
Don't let the days go by
Could've been easier on you, you, you
Glycerine, Glycerine
Glycerine, Glycerine

"You did it," Brian said, hugging Justin and spinning him around.

Justin laughed and kicked the suite's door closed. "You think I would've accepted his offer?"

"Well, you did say you'd consider it when he told you over the phone," Brian reminded Justin. "That is why we came to New York."

Justin flopped onto the center of the king-sized bed and wiggled against the crisp white comforter. "This is why we came to New York." He spread his arms and legs out and let out a deep sigh. "A free trip to New York."

Brian's eyes zeroed in on Justin's hands, his long slender fingers gripped the white fabric and the innocent move aroused him. "The trip around Europe didn't tempt you at all?" Brian asked, turning his back on Justin and walking toward the wet bar.

"Nope."

Something about the way the word popped out of Justin's mouth vibrated into Brian's body, bringing forth both goosebumps and heated sparks which danced across his skin. He let out a deep breath and bent to retrieve a bottle of water from the mini-fridge, wishing there was something alcoholic within it. He was sure that when Craig had booked the hotel room for Justin he'd made sure that they take all the alcohol out of the room.

"Brian, you know what would really stick it to my dad?" Justin said mysteriously.

"What?" Brian asked after taking a long drink of water; he still couldn't face Justin.

"If we went out to a club and brought a guy home to fuck me."

Brian spun around. "What?"

Justin turned on his side and giggled. "You should see your face!"

Brian changed his expression to look completely non-affected, casually placed his water bottle on the dresser and launched himself on top of Justin.

"Oomf!" Justin's breath left his body as Brian's full weight clobbered him.

"You think it's funny to tease me?" Brian asked, maneuvering their bodies so he could straddle Justin's waist.

"Yes," Justin dared to reply, wiggling beneath Brian and trying to push him off his body.

Brian captured Justin's wrists and pinned them above his head. "You're lucky I don't take my belt off, tie you up and spank you."

"Really?" Justin asked in throaty taunt.

Brian gave Justin a barely perceptible nod but silently cursed his words and actions. He climbed off Justin and lay beside him on his back. "You weren't ever spanked," he said, trying to save them both. "You wouldn't be able to handle what I'd do to you."

Justin propped himself on his side, using his elbow to support his head, pressing their foreheads together. He smirked and said, "I can handle anything you can give me, Brian."

Brian sucked in a deep breath and closed his eyes. *Don't respond to him, he told himself. Apparently, you can't fucking talk one sentence that doesn't sound like a come-on, so just don't say a fucking word!*

Justin boldly placed his hand over Brian's erection. "Look at me, Brian," he coaxed the man.

Brian caught Justin's wrist and tried to move his hand away from his dick and refused to open his eyes as he spoke, "Stop."

"I don't want to," Justin spoke, leaning closer to Brian's face so his breath warmed Brian's lips. "Open your eyes."

Brian gave in and released Justin, brazenly arching into the hand fondling him. "Don't do this," he begged.

"Please," Justin begged back. "Look at me. See how much I want you."

The moment Brian opened his eyes he pushed Justin away from him and scrambled off the bed. "You don't want me. You're confused."

"I'm not," Justin replied and held out his hand to Brian.

"This situation you put me in is completely fucked, Justin!" Brian's aggravated words echoed around the room until all that was left was the sound of their heavy breathing.

The courage Justin had gained from turning down his father's offer for a car, college tuition and a trip around Europe was waning with every breath he took. He'd never seen Brian look at him with such animalist need crossed with flashing fear and apprehension. The moments of silence stretched between them like a rubber band begging to be plucked. Voice vibrating, shaking the string pulling them together, Justin spoke. "I don't want you to do anything you haven't always wanted to do, Brian."

Brian exploded, "What you're asking me will forever change who we are to one another! Don't you get that?"

Justin nodded vigorously and patted the bed beside him. "Sit down, you know I hate when you stand above me like this, it's intimidating and I can't think straight."

Brian obeyed Justin only because the look in Justin's eyes made him weak kneed and he wasn't sure how much longer he could stand. "You don't know what you're doing. This isn't a game," he warned the younger man.

Justin crawled behind Brian, placed his chin on his shoulder and whispered into his ear, "Brian, with everyone else that's what it'd be. I'd be a virgin prize. Another piece of boy ass. But that's not how I want my first lover to think of me. You don't think of me like that, do you?"

Brian's dick strained in his jeans, leaked into his briefs and throbbed so steadily for Justin he idly wondered if Justin had been put on the earth to torture him. He gulped a deep breath of resignation and answered Justin the only way could. "No."

Justin cupped Brian's chin and turned his face so their eyes met and their lips brushed together. "I want you to take my virginity, Brian. I've always wanted it to be you."

Brian couldn't escape the heat in Justin's eyes or the sinful lust beating in his own heart. It was up to him to be the adult; Justin was barely eighteen. It was up to him to stop them from reaching the place he'd been leading Justin to for years. It was up to him to stand up on his weak knees, grab his heart back from Justin's grasp and walk out of the hotel room. It was up to him to cap the sparks he'd ignited years ago and end their suffering.

"I can't take that from you," said Brian, invisible cotton invading his mouth as he rebuffed his best friend. "I can't." He turned his body and pushed Justin further away from him. "I won't do that to you." Justin's face turned pale white and it sickened Brian to see that he'd caused such a change in the blond's demeanor.

Justin closed his eyes to hold back the tears that sprung into them and in the split second that the world went dark a memory jumped into his mind, stopping his tears and binding hope to his request. He met Brian's eyes again, squared his shoulders and suggested his ultimate fantasy, "We could be equals and then it wouldn't be like you were taking anything away from me, Brian."

The amount of confusion encompassing Brian's mind and body in reaction to Justin's words was immeasurable. "What are you talking about?" The instant the question left his mouth he damned himself for continuing the conversation when he'd been so sure that he had ended it.

"When I asked you what it felt like to have sex, you only told me what it felt like to be inside someone, but not how it felt to have someone inside of you," Justin explained, smirking triumphantly at his thoughts. "You're still a virgin, Brian."

"I'm *not* a virgin," Brian denied, eyes wide at the insane assessment.

Justin cocked his head to the side and placed his hand on top of Brian's. "You know what I mean. Unless you've let someone fuck you in the last couple of weeks, then you're a bottom virgin."

Brian licked his lips as the dangerous understanding dawned upon him. "You want to fuck me?" he asked in a throaty whisper.

Justin nodded. "I want to, one day, if you'll let me. Then we're even. We've only taken the same thing that the other has given."

"That isn't..."

Justin pressed his mouth to Brian's, swallowing the brunet's protest with his need. His arms wound around Brian's body, his fingers dug themselves into hard muscle, daring the other man to pull away from him. He forced so much of himself into the kiss that he gasped in surprise when Brian began kissing him with unrestrained fervor. Attainment laced the smile he meshed against Brian's lips and he swore he tasted the same feeling upon Brian's tongue when it met his own.

Brian didn't want to think with his rational mind any longer. It was too hard to fight with Justin's reasoning when his body ached fiercely for the blond. He caved to the overflowing desire and shoved his hands under Justin's t-shirt, moaning into his mouth when the spark caught fire against his fingertips.

Justin spread his legs wide, pulled Brian down on top of his body and rutted against him, moved his hands to pull Brian's hair and nip on his bottom lip twice before holding his face a hairsbreadth away from his own. "I want to see you, I want to see you," he panted.

Brian surrendered silently, his admission of need composed of his body readily fulfilling Justin's request in earnest. Time slowed, their breaths slowed as he stepped out of his briefs and walked over to his suitcase. He retrieved a couple of condoms, threw one to Justin and placed the rest on the nightstand. He had to go into the bathroom to find his toiletry bag where he kept the bottle of lube, knowing that the single packet he had in his suitcase wasn't going to be enough for that night's activities.

Justin hurried out of his clothing and had just thrown his second sock to the floor when Brian reappeared, slick in one hand and stroking his huge hard cock with his other. Justin shivered from the tips of his toes to the top of his head and for a quick moment became unsure if he was strong enough to hold off from coming instantly. His body's reaction to Brian's naked body intensified as Brian stroked himself while sauntering back over to the bed.

Brian crawled in between Justin's legs as the blond spread them wide. Justin smiled with anticipation curving his full lips as Brian grabbed the condom and tore it open with his teeth. He allowed the blond to help guide the latex over his dick and shuddered when Justin took the lube from his hand and slicked it along his cock. He leaned back and watched

in amazement as Justin's eyes closed and his wet fingers searched for his hole, adding lubricant just to the outside of his entrance before pulling his hand away.

"You need more," Brian warned, grabbing for the lube but stopping his movement when Justin shook his head at him.

"I've been using a dildo for years," Justin whispered. "I want to feel you inside me. I want it to hurt."

"I don't want to hurt you," Brian replied, taking the lube in his hand and squirting some on his fingers.

Justin pulled his legs up toward his chest and hooked his arms under his knees, allowing Brian easy access to his asshole. He pushed down as Brian's long pointer finger pushed into him and heaved a breath of pain as he wiggled it around.

Brian expertly prepared Justin and filed away every moment of Justin's pleasure into his memory. After stretching Justin with three fingers and feeling how close the blond was to coming, he finally brought his fingers out of his ass and helped Justin move his legs up on to his shoulders. "You ready?" he asked, holding his cock against Justin's hole.

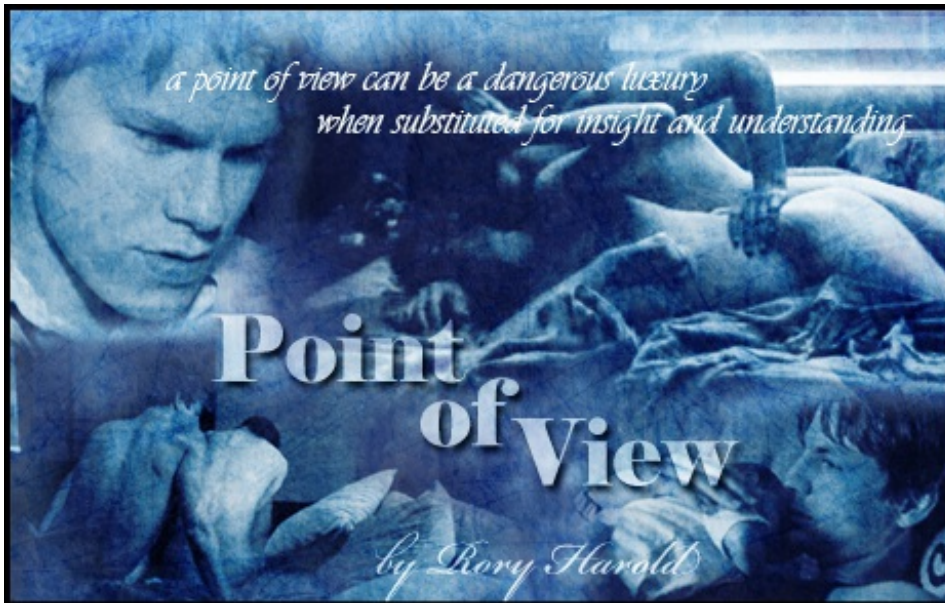
Justin nodded and placed his hands on Brian's hips, his whole body stretched, opened for Brian. He didn't feel pain when Brian pushed into him; his whimper was born from exquisite pleasure and satisfaction.

Brian had never felt anything as tight, so forbidden, so fucking fulfilling and hot as he did the moment his cock was completely surrounded by Justin's ass. He had to close his eyes tight and hold still, afraid of moving or seeing Justin's expression, sure it would make him come because he was so close to losing himself.

"Fuck me, Brian," Justin moaned, digging his finger nails into Brian's skin. "Fuck me." He raised his ass from the bed to encourage the man to move. "Please."

Brian opened his eyes and held Justin's gaze until his vision blurred as he kissed him, pulled out a fraction of an inch and thrust himself inside of him again.

Chapter Thirteen: "Mouth"



Point of View Chapter 13 "Mouth"

Brian's Point of View Friday, December 14, 2007

*We've been missing long before
Never found our way home
We've been missing long before
We will find our way*

It seems like as soon as Molly let everyone know she was pregnant, she began showing. On her second day at work she became everyone's personal good luck charm. Naturally, she hates it, which only makes it more fun for me to watch all my employees gushing and hovering over her. Given the opportunity, they rub her belly like she's a Buddha statue and give her tons of useless advice regarding childbirth and child rearing.

Molly takes it much better than Justin did the one time Sandra, from the art department, was bold enough to rub his stomach. Justin flipped out and told the woman he'd have her fired, which didn't happen once she apologized and he calmed down. His sister on the other hand, she takes all the mollycoddling, pretends like it doesn't bother her while it goes on and bitches about it later. Like she's doing right now. She stormed into my thankfully sound-proofed office a couple of minutes ago and started ranting about it and she hasn't stopped.

The fact that she's confiding in me, even if it is mostly bitching, shows that we've come a long way in our relationship. Working together has made us closer because we've found a lot of commonality we didn't know existed between us before. At work, Molly is a complete professional and has in-office accomplishments with ad campaign ideas that back up her education. Though she didn't go to school specifically for advertising,

her business expertise is a great asset to Kinnetik. For now, she is working as an assistant to one of my Junior Ad Executives and once Molly has more experience I'm sure I'll be promoting her and not because I'm giving her special treatment.

Wel...okay, perhaps I am giving her a little special treatment. If it were any of my other employees whining to me I'd probably fire them. But these little temper tantrums revolving around her pregnancy and its effect on my employees is actually quite entertaining.

"You should really stop bitching and go get one of those t-shirts that say something like, 'Don't fuck with my belly'. I'm sure the staff would stay away from you then," I tease.

She glares at me and smooths her hands down her tailored black skirt. "You would actually want me to wear something that hideous to work?"

"Obviously that was a joke, Mol. Seriously, why don't you just go ape-shit and tell them to fuck off?"

"I can't," she gasps. "That'd be rude!"

"So it isn't rude to have them invading your personal space?" I ask her.

She sits down on the sofa and buries her head in her hands. "Stop being practical, Brian."

Molly thinks she has me fooled, but she doesn't. I know the real reason why she doesn't tell any of the employees to stop making wishes on her baby bump. "You don't want to say anything because you want them to throw you a baby shower."

Her head pops up and I can tell she wants to deny it, but she doesn't. "I hate you, Brian."

"Seriously, Molly. If you want, I can make a more general statement at a staff meeting about remembering our fellow employee's boundaries or something?"

"How about you make a general statement about you..."

Justin's assigned rings starts going off on my cell, interrupting Molly. I answer it quickly, "Hey, Sunshine."

"Brian, how long do you think you're going to be at the office today?" he asks, his tone worried.

"What's going on? Are you okay? Are you in labor?"

"Is he? Is he?" Molly asks annoyingly.

"Shut up," I yell at Molly, covering the mouth piece.

"Brian!" Justin says my name impatiently.

"I'm here," I tell him. "Molly was just asking what I did, only over and

over.”

He laughs for a second but his tone is serious as he replies, “I don’t think I’m in labor, but I’m having really bad back pains and I don’t think I can drive. Can you pick up the kids after school?”

“Yeah, I’ll pick them up. Where’s Audrey?”

“Audrey’s here in the kitchen with me. She’s eating lunch and has mastered getting the spoon to her mouth, but most of the apple sauce falls off before it gets in. She’s getting very frustrated but won’t let me do it.”

I laugh at the thought of my daughter and I can picture the exact look of determination I know is on her face. “Tell her I said hi.”

“Audrey, Dada says hi,” Justin sing-songs. “Ooohhh shit,” he whispers and starts breathing heavily.

“I have been delegating most of the big accounts to others because I wanted to be sure that I didn’t have anything I was in the middle of working on if you went into labor early. Maybe I should come home now and take you to the doctor, Justin. I’m sure I can get Molly to pick up the kids.”

“Sure I can,” Molly assures me, loud enough so Justin can hear her too. “I can follow you out to your house and take care of Audrey too.”

“Brian, don’t freak out. I may not be in labor.”

“I’m not freaking out.” Okay, so I probably am since my voice just cracked. “How bad are your back pains? Isn’t that what contractions feel like?”

He snorts and laughs before replying, “Oh yeah, you’ve definitely never given birth. Back pains accompany contractions and labor.”

“Well maybe I’ll find out some day,” I tease him.

“Brian, we’re getting ready to have five children under the age of ten. Three of whom will be under one. I don’t even want to think about having another kid.”

“I was just joking.” One day in the future when things settle down it might be nice to think about it, but we have a long way to go before that time comes. “So you’re sure you aren’t having contractions?”

“No, I’m not sure.”

“Well I’m not waiting for the kids to get out of school before coming home and checking on you. Your water could break at any minute and then you could be having the babies minutes later.”

“Yeah, I wish it’d be that fast.”

“Don’t jinx yourself,” I warn. “Call Mom and tell her what’s going on.

Molly and I will be at the house within a half an hour."

"You're freaking out," he sighs. "I didn't want you to freak out."

"I just want to make sure you and the babies are safe."

"Well I'm going to feel stupid going to the birthing center if they tell me it's just back pains or something."

"You'll feel even stupider if you don't go and we have to call an ambulance to take you there."

"I guess you're right," he resigns himself.

"Of course I am. I'll be home soon. I love you."

"You too. Later."

"Later."

3rd Person Point of View **Friday, July 17, 1987**

"Can we get candy?" Molly asked, bouncing on her toes.

Brian looked down at his sister and considered telling her no because he'd already told her yes twice. He really wished Justin wasn't sick and had to also be forced to stand in line to get tickets to Snow White with him and Molly.

"And I want popcorn with lots of butter," Molly continued.

Brian was sure she had to have eaten lots of sugar already because she hadn't stopped bouncing for the last twenty minutes. "Yes," he resigned. "We'll get popcorn with lots of butter and candy if you promise you won't talk through the whole movie."

"I won't, I won't," Molly declared, spinning around and bumping into the people in front of them.

"Sorry," Brian told the couple in front of them and took Molly's hand. "Stand beside me and stop bouncing. You're worse than Justin was when he was your age."

"Am not, Brian."

"You are too."

"Am not."

"Are too."

"Am not."

Brian covered Molly's mouth with his hand. "Be quiet or we'll go home."

Molly rolled her eyes and muffled, "Okay."

Satisfied, Brian removed his hand from Molly's mouth and wiped her drool off on his pants. "Thank God!" he practically yelled when the line started moving at a steady pace until they were finally standing in front of the ticket window.

"I'm under twelve. Mom said I get a discount," Molly reminded Brian.

"I know," Brian said before handing over the money to the ticket tender and telling him their ages.

Once inside the cinema's doors Molly declared, "I've got to pee."

"Oh jeez," Brian groaned, wiping the sweat from his brow. "You go to the bathroom and I'll get the popcorn, candy and pop."

"But you have to wait for me outside the bathroom," Molly whined.

Brian wanted to die. "Molly, it's opening day and there's tons of people coming in to see the movie so you'd better hurry in there," he told her, walking them toward the bathrooms.

"I will," Molly promised and disappeared into the bathroom.

Brian was thankful that Molly didn't take very long and soon they had gotten their concessions and were sitting in the second row, waiting for the movie to start.

"Thanks for taking me, Brian," Molly praised. "You're the best big brother in the world."

"What about Justin?" Brian asked, grinning sheepishly.

"I think he was faking so he didn't have to come," Molly whispered. "Don't you?"

Brian hadn't even considered it. But Justin was sneaky. "Really? What makes you think that?"

"I just do," Molly said adamantly.

"Well, even if he did, he's still the best brother in the world."

Molly looked at Brian like he was crazy. "Why?"

"Justin's the one that taught me how to be a good brother," Brian replied.

"I thought you had a big sister once," Molly said innocently.

Brian nodded. "Yeah, but she didn't act like a real sister is supposed to act and we didn't get along."

"Did you love her?" Molly wondered.

Brian's stomach was twisting in knots but he managed to reply, "Not like I love you, Molly."

Brian's Point of View
Friday, December 14, 2007

You gave me this, made me give

I rush inside the house and stomp my snowy feet off at the door while taking my coat off. "How are you feeling?" I ask, seeing Justin gingerly walking down the stairs.

"I'm fine. Where's Molly?"

"She stopped to get some lunch; she'll be here in a few minutes." I take him in my arms and kiss him, coaxing him to relax against me. "Where's Audrey?"

"Down the hall taking a nap. Lucky girl," he chuckles. "She has such an easy life."

"Yeah, until the twins get here," I laugh. "Now what were you doing upstairs? You're not supposed to be going up and down them when no one is home."

"Brian, I can go up the stairs. It's not like it was doctor's orders. You just don't want me to. You told me to get ready, I got ready." He steps away from me and points to himself.

Justin looks ridiculous trying to wear any pants that aren't track suit pants or sweats these days so he being dressed consists of mostly the same clothing he would wear to bed if he didn't sleep naked. The bottom of his stomach pokes out under the sweater he's wearing and I can visibly tell how much the babies, or one of them, have dropped. I didn't notice this yesterday so it really makes me think that he's definitely in labor if it happened so quickly. "You look great," I tell him, placing my hand under his sweater so I can caress his stomach.

His head falls against my shoulder and he lets out a long sigh. "I want my body back, but I'm going to miss you doing this."

"Well, I can continue doing it even after you have the babies," I suggest.

"Yeah, I'm sure you'll love touching a jello stomach."

"Only if you'll let me lick it too." I give his cheek a lick and start kissing along his face.

"Brian, stop," he laughs, pulling me to sit down on a step beside him. I wrap my arm around him and he leans against me.

We sit in silence for a few minutes, enjoying just being next to one

another in the quiet peace before life picks up again.

Justin breaks the silence and whispers, "I've been thinking a lot today."

"About?" I prompt.

He looks down at his stomach and up into my eyes. "This might be the last day I have your baby inside of me."

"Two babies."

"Right. Your two babies. I love all the kids just the same, Brian, I do," he says, pleading with me to believe him.

"I know that," I tell him firmly. "That's one of the reasons why I love you so much, Justin. You love and forgive like no man I've ever known. You don't have to convince me that you love all of our kids. I've never had any doubt about that, how could I?"

"But this pregnancy, it's felt different this time because I know that I have life inside of me that you helped create. I don't want it to end. I like having them here in me, growing in a place where they are safe."

"The doctor said that they're healthy, Justin. They'll be safe out here too," I try to reassure him.

"I'm just afraid of all these changes, you know?"

"Yeah," I reply, nodding and squeezing him tighter. "I know."

"I like that Audrey sleeps through the night and we get time to ourselves. I like that we can all fit in my car when we want to go somewhere. I like reading to the kids at bedtime. I like that we have a system and can be out of the house an hour and a half after we wake up. I like drawing with Evvie, dancing with Audrey and listening to Leighton practice his guitar. I like waking up in the morning and feeling the babies wake up, feeling who wakes up first. I like that you give me extra special treatment because I'm pregnant. I love the way you look at me and stare at my belly with this amazed look on your face. All of that's going to change," he says, his voice shaky.

I know it's not just his over abundance of hormones that are causing him to feel like this. There's been so many changes in our lives this last year and we were just beginning to get into a comfortable place with one another. It's scary as hell knowing that every single thing is going to change and there is a possibility that things might not turn out well for Justin and me or our kids, once they do. But I can't let him think like that now, now is when he needs me to be strong, positive and hopeful that everything really will be okay.

"Justin, we'll be spending time together with our kids in the middle of the night. There are two of them so it's not like you can do it on your own. I will help you with everything. I promise you that it won't be like how it was with Audrey when she was first born, I won't let it be like that. We'll include the twins in the bedtime routine and we'll probably

have to take an extra hour to get ready to leave somewhere. We'll have to take the Acadia everywhere so that we can all fit in it to see Evvie's recitals or Leighton's soccer matches and whatever it is Audrey wants to do. But we'll make the time for everything else. We have your Mom and Frank, Daphne and Loren, Molly and even Leighton's friends' parents to give us a break every now and then."

"I'm selfish," he croaks, burying his face into my chest.

"You couldn't be more wrong, Justin. You're the most unselfish person in the world. You didn't know what was going to happen between us but you gave up your life in Chicago to help our kids, to make sure our kids had one another. You helped me even after I betrayed you because you put everyone else first. There isn't a selfish bone in your body, Justin. You're just scared and you're not alone in that because I am too. But I believe that everything is going to be okay."

"You promise?" he asks, lifting his head. He's got tears in his eyes but he's also smiling at me and I feel him relaxing as a peaceful expression over comes his features.

"I promise," I assure him, taking his face in my hands. "As for the way I look at you when you're carrying my children inside of you, you must miss the way I look at you when you carry them in your arms, Justin. You always amaze me and I swear to you that I'll give you as much special treatment as I possibly can after the twins are born."

"I love you," Justin tells me as he leans in to kiss me.

My lips and tongue speak the sentiment in return.

3rd Person Point of View Saturday, August 6th 1988

Your loaded smiles, pretty just desserts

"It's too hot," Brian groaned.

"No it's not," Justin sat up and took off his tank top.

Brian licked his lips and felt his cock get hard as Justin wiped the sweat off his chest with the shirt. He looked away right before Justin could catch him. "We should go inside."

"Do you really want to go inside with all of Molly's friends and be forced to participate in sleep over games?" Justin asked, taking off his shorts.

"No," Brian said lowly, annoyed with his reaction to seeing Justin's body. "I want to go inside where there is t.v. and air conditioning."

Justin threw his shorts at Brian's face. "Stop being grumpy. We do this every time Molly has her sleepovers unless it's winter."

Brian gave in and took his shirt off before lying on his back and

stretching his arms out. "I'm too big. I can practically touch all the corners of this tree house and it is way too hot out here."

Justin grinned evilly and grabbed his squirt bottle beside him and aimed it at Brian.

Brian yelped as the cold water shot out onto his face and chest. He sat up and wrestled Justin down to the wood floor and sat on top of him and easily retrieved the bottle from his hand. "Fuck you!"

Justin laughed. "You said a bad word, I'm telling Mom."

"Suuuure," Brian said doubtfully, squirting the rest of the water into Justin's face. "Take that, Asshole!"

Justin struggled but was able to push Brian off him and wiped his face off on his shirt. "You could've drowned me," he whined.

Brian snickered, "Oh well."

Justin glared and asked, "So you want me dead?"

"Maybe," Brian teased.

"Uh!" Justin put his hands on his hips and glared harder at Brian.

"Shut up, lay down and tell me a ghost story or I'm going inside."

"But now we don't have any water and my pillow is soaked."

"That's your fault," Brian replied. "Besides, it's so hot out here that it'll dry quickly."

Justin pouted but lay down on his pillow beside Brian. "I don't want to tell ghost stories. I want you to tell me something."

"Like what?" Brian asked, propping himself up on his side.

"Like what it's like to kiss," Justin said boldly.

"I'm not telling you that," Brian laughed. "No way!"

"So you did kiss your boyfriend?" Justin asked, his eyes wide with wonder. "What was it like?"

"Nick isn't my boyfriend and I haven't kissed him...yet."

"Why not? If I had a boyfriend I'd want to kiss him *all* the time."

Brian rolled his eyes. "You haven't even kissed anyone so you don't even know if you'd like it."

"Yeah, I do," Justin firmly spoke. "Why haven't you kissed him?"

Brian sighed and grumbled, "Because I haven't kissed anyone."

Justin gasped, "Really? But you're sixteen!"

"What's that got to do with anything?" Brian angrily asked.

"Sorry," Justin said quietly. "Why haven't you?"

"Because you can't just kiss when you don't know if you know how," Brian reasoned.

"Daphne wanted to try kissing with me, she said it'd be practice," Justin revealed.

"That's gross," Brian said, shuddering. "I'd never want to kiss a girl."

"Me neither," Justin agreed. "Maybe we can practice."

Brian felt chills race up his spine at the thought of kissing Justin's pink lips. "No way!"

"Why?" Justin asked, turning to face Brian. "I won't tell anyone."

Brian licked his lips. "No."

"Please?" Justin begged. "I promise I'll never tell anyone at all."

Tempted, Brian asked, "You won't tell Daphne?"

"No one," Justin swore.

"Okay. Close your eyes."

Justin wanted to keep his eyes open but he didn't want Brian to back out so he listened. "Okay."

"Open your mouth a little," Brian instructed.

Justin let his mouth hang open and waited, the speed of his heart picking up as he felt Brian moving closer to him.

Brian felt Justin's breath hit his mouth and almost put a stop to their experiment. But then, Justin's tongue poked out of his mouth for a split-second and Brian couldn't control the urge he had to put his tongue against Justin's and feel what the other boy's tongue felt like.

Their kiss was messy and clumsy but neither boy minded because both of their mouths went numb from the new pleasure.

Brian pulled his mouth away and whispered, "You can open your eyes now."

Justin's eyes opened to a whole new world as he looked at Brian's puffy lips inches away from his own. This time he kept his eyes open, locked on Brian's as he kissed him again.

Brian had to push Justin away from him because his body started to become too excited causing guilt to over power him. "I guess I can kiss Nick now," he said, lying back down.

Justin stared at Brian in disappointment. "Yeah," he said, trying to not sound like he wanted to cry at the thought of Brian kissing someone else. He lay beside Brian and closed his eyes, confusing thoughts running wild. He knew that if his Mom and Dad knew he'd kissed Brian, they'd be very angry. Brian was his brother; he wasn't supposed to want to kiss him. But Justin wanted to, badly.

"Are you going to tell a ghost story now?" Brian asked, needing to get his thoughts far away from kissing.

Justin felt the same way and immediately launched into telling Brian one of their favorite ghost stories.

Brian's Point of View

Friday, December 14, 2007

You gave me this

An hour after Justin got set up in his delivery room at the birthing center he was ready to begin pushing. Thankfully, both of the twins were in head down position so we didn't have to worry about Justin having to have a caesarean. He was so quiet and focused on giving birth that it freaked me out a little. The only sounds that came out of his mouth were small grunts and when the first of our twins was born, I could hardly believe that it happened so fast.

Justin held our healthy screaming baby boy for a few minutes before he felt the urge to begin pushing again. The nurses took the baby from him then, cleaned him off and wrapped him in a blanket before placing him in my arms. I held our son in my left arm and held Justin's hand with my right hand.

Mom was on the other side of Justin, holding his hand with one of hers and video taping me and our son with the other hand. It was wonderful having her there in the room with us, helping me to coach Justin, though he didn't seem to need it, and just being there to share in our excitement. She held back her emotions pretty well and didn't start balling and crying until Justin gave birth to our third son only minutes after giving birth to our second.

Dr. Landon handed Justin our second twin and I handed him the first. When he had both twins lying on his chest and his hands cradling them, their crying ceased. He smiled at me and I smiled back, tears falling down my face as quickly as his own tears fell. An unexplainable connection wound itself tightly around us, linking our past with the present and future.

A few minutes later, one of the nurses took our newest son to clean him, weigh him and wrap him up in a blanket before she handed him back to Justin. The nurse also placed small bracelets on their wrists labeling them 'Baby A' and 'Baby B', just as Dr. Landon had done with their ultrasound pictures. Mom followed the nurse around with 'baby b' as she had done with 'baby a', filming the whole thing. After Justin was

cleaned up, Dr. Landon and the nurses left and after Mom held both of her new grandchildren she excused herself to make phone calls and let Molly know that she could bring the kids to the hospital.

Justin and my eyes are locked on the twins and a nervous tension starts to build within me. "It's a good thing I brought you in, isn't it?" I ask, needing to break the silence with a little humor.

Justin nods and smiles tiredly. "It went really fast," he whispers, kissing our sons cheeks. "Before everyone gets here to visit, I want to see you hold both of them together."

"Okay," I say, but I'm apprehensive to hold both small babies.

"You'll do fine," Justin assures me, reading my mind. "You got the hang of holding Audrey and Evvie on each hip didn't you?"

"You're right," I say. "It's kind of crazy that Audrey came in the beginning of the year and these two came at the end."

"When you say that it's really overwhelming."

I reach out and take the first twin in my arms and it takes some maneuvering before I can comfortably and safely get my other son transferred from Justin's arms into mine. "They're so tiny," I observe needlessly.

"They didn't feel like that coming out," Justin groans. "Six pounds two ounces and seven pounds four ounces are pretty huge for twins."

"You were amazing, Justin. I swear the whole time I kept waiting for you to start screaming. I couldn't believe it when he came out and you'd barely said a word at all."

"It helped having you and my mom encouraging me and I'm much older than I was when I gave birth to Leighton. It was a totally different experience because I knew what to expect and I wasn't constantly thinking I was going to die if I had to push again."

"How do you feel?" I ask of both his physical and mental state.

"My body feels like I just gave birth. My head, I feel mellow and excited all at once." He laughs grabs the camera. "Smile for me, Dada."

I grin as he takes picture after picture. Once he places the camera down I ask, "What names did you finally decide upon?"

"They're both so calm, aren't they? I mean, Leighton was begging for me to feed him from the second he was born. These two seem really content. I don't know if the names I thought of fit them."

"Well what are they?"

"Raiden and Darien," he answers, scrunching his nose up.

"I like them," I admit. "They're anagrams, right?"

"Yeah. Is that lame?"

"It's clever," I say, slowly rocking them now that they've begun to fuss. "Do I get to choose their middle names then?"

"Of course," he answers. "I guess I should try feeding them while it's quiet."

"You're sure you don't want to give them a bottle?" I ask. "It's going to be twice the work."

"I'm sure, Brian," he says, opening his gown. "It'll be a hell of a lot harder making up bottles."

"You're probably right," I admit. I look at my sons and find inspiration for their names as I hand Justin our first born boy. "Raiden Myer," I name him and hand our other baby boy to Justin. "And Darien Remy."

"Those are anagrams too," Justin laughs, positioning the babies so they can feed.

"And artists," I tell him.

"You're very clever, Mr. Kinney."

"But not clever enough to figure out how we're going to tell them apart," I counter. "It's not like we can keep their hospital bracelets on all the time. Look at them; they're completely identical aren't they?"

"I think when they get older they'll have more distinguishing features," Justin says, stroking Darien's cheek. "But I honestly don't see a single thing different about them right now."

"I don't either," I tell him, putting my pointer finger in Raiden's tiny fist.

"Maybe we could color code them?"

"What?" I laugh.

"You know, we'll make sure that Raiden never wears blue and Darien always does, at least until we can tell them apart."

"Leave it to an artist to color-code his children," I tease. "Isn't that what you do with the laundry?"

"It works, doesn't it?" he says, grinning proudly.

"Yes, you're a genius," I tell him. "They look a lot like Leighton, don't they?"

"So much so that if we didn't get that letter from Griffin, I think I would've wanted to get a DNA test done this very minute. But they look even more like you."

"I think you're right. They have much darker hair and I think they might have my eyes."

"I think so too," Justin agrees. "I still remember the day you came to see Leighton and me at the hospital with perfect clarity. I was so scared when you were leaving, do you remember that?"

"Yeah. But there's nothing to be afraid of now. I'm not going anywhere," I promise, softly kissing him.

Someone begins knocking on the door to Justin's room. The voices outside the door are muffled but I can tell by Audrey's low slaps on the door that it's the kids.

"Are you ready?" I ask him.

"Yeah, I think they've eaten their fill. Will you take Darien and burp him while I burp Raiden?"

"No problem," I reply, picking up my son as the knocking becomes louder. "Should I tell them to come in?" I ask Justin as he buttons his gown.

He nods. "I guess it's time for the boys to meet their family."

I get up from the bed, walk over to the door and open it. Molly, Leighton, Evelyn, Audrey. Mom, Frank, Daphne, Loren and Amelia are all in the hallway. "Well come in," I chuckle, walking back over to Justin. "The gang's all here."

The next hour is a rush of camera flashes, baby passes and multiple recounts of Justin's labor. Audrey is completely fascinated with her little brothers, Evelyn is glad she didn't get two more little sisters and Leighton is trying to decide if it's cool to like his brothers as much as I can tell he does.

Raiden and Darien take to the noise and commotion well, which is great since their lives will be filled with it when we go home. They have great patience and don't seem to care what is going on around them as long as they're being held. Darien had his first poop and Mom had the honor of changing his first diaper, during which Darien peed all over her arm. Even with the risk, Molly insisted on changing Raiden a few minutes later and was much luckier than Mom.

Audrey thinks the babies are dolls, no matter what we tell her she points to them and says, 'Dowwies'. I'm sure she'll get the picture soon that they aren't when they keep the house up at night. Evelyn was really cute holding both boys when we placed her beside Justin and he helped her hold them. Leighton held the twins all by himself while sitting in a chair beside the bed. He looked down at them so proudly and with such love in his eyes. Looking at him is like seeing a little preview of what our new sons will look like.

Before everyone left, Mom had a nurse come in and take a few pictures of all of us together. I sat by Justin, holding Raiden and Audrey while he held Darien and Leighton sat by his side holding Evvie on his lap. Mom, Frank and Molly stood beside them and Daphne held Amelia next to me with Loren beside her. I could barely hold back from crying like a baby

as I realized how loving and forgiving all the people surrounding me were. It hit me hard how fortunate I am to have such a great family.

When everyone left, the nurse checked on Justin and once he was given the all clear we placed the babies in their plastic bassinet, wrapped up like little burritos together.

"You might want to try and get some rest with me while you can," Justin whispers, coming out of the bathroom. He wraps his arm around me and joins me in staring at our boys.

I reluctantly pull my eyes away from them but they fall on Justin's face and I notice how exhausted he looks. "In case I haven't told you today, you're amazing."

"I can barely think to remember if you have, but thank you."

I walk him over to his bed and take my seat in the chair beside his bed that works like a skinny Lay Z Boy. "You've given me everything," I tell him, taking his hand. "Is there anything I can give you that might make a dent in repaying you?"

He shakes his head and his eyes water. "I just want you and our family, that's all."

"That's pretty simple," I tell him. "You've got us."

3rd Person Point of View

Sunday, December 25, 2005

"Here, Daddy." Leighton handed Justin another present to put in his pile beside him. "That's from me."

Justin smiled in surprise. "Oh? I didn't know Grandma took you shopping to get me something."

"She didn't," Leighton replied. "Dada Brian took me last night."

"Oh." Justin was shocked that Brian would brave the Christmas crowds with Leighton to get a present for him. "Did you buy stuff for Papa and Evelyn too?"

"Nope," Leighton answered. "Me and Grandma got gifts when we came for Thanksgiving. I told Dada Brian that I got you a present already but he said he wanted to get you one."

"So this is from him too?" Justin asked, trying to figure out what was in the large heavy rectangular box.

Leighton leaned in and whispered in Justin's ear, "Yes. But it's a secret. Don't tell."

Justin gave Leighton a hug and agreed, "Don't worry. I won't."

"Leighton, we need your help," Griffin called, kneeling beside the Christmas tree.

Leighton winked at Justin and ran back to his other father. "I know who that is for," Leighton declared, grabbing the gift bag from Griffin's hands. "I got that for Dada Brian."

Justin watched as his son took the gift over to Brian who sat on the sofa on the other side of the room. Brian smiled at Leighton and said something Justin couldn't hear over the Christmas music playing on the stereo. He forced himself to look away when Brian's loud laughter made its way to his ears and under his skin. He smoothed his hands down his arms, over unwanted goosebumps and brought his attention to his mother. She sat in a chair beside him, holding Evelyn who was amazingly sleeping through all the early morning activity. His mother looked so happy holding her granddaughter and Justin felt a surge of envy boil from his heart.

Tuesday, December 25, 2007

Justin's Point of View

It's a little after five a.m. on Christmas morning. Brian is downstairs stuffing stockings and putting presents under the tree. Raiden and Darien have been fed and now I'm changing them, putting matching baby Santa Clause outfits on them. Brian hates that I'm putting them in matching sleepers, not only because he hates when all his children are dressed like children... well he hates most kid clothing, but also because he has a hard time telling the babies apart when they're not "color coded".

I don't have any trouble telling Raiden and Darien apart now. After our first day home, when I was holding them eighteen out of the twenty-four hours, I got to notice all the tiny differences. I tried to point them out to Brian, but unless he's staring at them both together he never knows who he's holding if they're only in their diapers or if they are dressed alike. The biggest difference in them is that Darien's face is much fatter. The Pediatrician said it might take a little while before Raiden catches up with his brother but because neither of them were preemies we don't have to worry about their weight gain as often is the case with twins.

As expected, Raiden starts fussing the moment I put his hat on. "You're just fine," I whisper. "I know you don't like hats but you have to wear it until you grow more hair."

I hear soft footsteps in the hall and Leighton comes into the nursery a few moments later. I'm happy to see that he doesn't look distraught; this will make an entire month without him experiencing any nightmares. This is huge for him because it means that Leighton may finally be adjusting to all the changes in his life.

"Merry Christmas, Leighton." I give him a kiss on his cheek as he stands beside me in front of the changing table.

"Merry Christmas, Daddy," he says in a sleepy voice.

All dressed up and sleepy-warm in his plaid pajamas he looks like he's only five years-old, even if his height is going to over-take mine soon. "What are you doing up so early?"

"I heard the babies crying and I tried to sleep, but I'm too excited." His face brightens and he gives me a huge smile.

"Did you happen to see if your sisters were still sleeping?" I ask.

"I closed their door so they wouldn't wake up," he answers proudly.

"Thank you, Leighton. You're such a good helper and good big brother."

"Can I hold Raiden?" he asks, walking over to the glider and sitting down in it.

"Sure you can." I carefully hand Raiden to Leighton and it occurs to me that he knew exactly which little brother I was holding. "You can tell them apart?" I ask.

"Sure," he says as if it's easy.

I pick up Darien from his cradle and begin to change him.

"He's stinky," Leighton groans.

I look over my shoulder at him and laugh at his expression. "You smelled worse," I state, remembering it all too well. "Sometimes Papa and I would put clothespins on our noses while we changed you."

"Did Dada ever change my diapers?" he wonders in a hesitant voice.

"Yes, he changed lots of your diapers." I assure him. "But Papa and I didn't give him any clothespins. That was our secret."

"That's funny," Leighton laughs.

"What's so funny?" Brian asks, walking into the nursery.

"You had to smell my stinky diapers," Leighton informs him.

"Yes, unfortunately for me I did, Sonny-boy." Brian ruffles Leighton's hair. "Now what in the world are you doing awake?"

"I heard the babies crying so I came to help Daddy."

"I'm pretty sure that Santa knows what a good helper you've been to me and Daddy on your winter break. I was downstairs checking out the presents and I saw quite a few packages with your name on them."

"Cool," Leighton says, yawning. "When can we open presents, Dada?"

I give Brian a grin and ask, "When can we open presents, Dada?"

Brian kisses me soundly and whispers, "You'll get your present tonight."

Brian can't be inside of me yet, but that doesn't mean I can't top him. "Yes, I will," I say dreamily. It's been far too long since I've been able to be inside of Brian.

"What did Dad whisper, Daddy?" Leighton wonders. "What?"

I clear my throat, hand Darien over to Brian and change the subject as Brian laughs at our curious child. "We can open presents as soon as Evelyn and Audrey wake up," I tell Leighton.

"Can I go wake them up?" he begs. "Pleeeeeease?"

"I suppose we could all take naps before Mom comes over," Brian suggests.

"All right," I agree, taking Raiden from Leighton. "Go wake up your sisters."

"Whoohoo!" Leighton cheers before taking off out of the nursery.

"So who is this?" Brian asks, rocking Darien who slept through his changing.

"That's Darien," I tell him. "Their outfits do have a small difference," I say, trying to help him out for the rest of the morning.

"What's that?" Brian asks, clearly not believing me.

I touch the belt on Darien's outfit. "Darien's is a lighter black. Raiden's is a dark, deep black." I show him the difference on Raiden. "See?"

"I'll try to remember that." Brian kisses my forehead and runs his hand through my hair. "So do you think these two are too little to go to Grandma's tonight too?"

"There's no way my mother and Frank could do it," I tell him. "Besides, they have been sleeping six hours a night. If we take a nap later and then try to keep them awake until we go to bed we can get a few good hours of sleep tonight."

"Hopefully, you plan on doing something other than sleeping."

"Oh I do. After the kids open their presents. I'm not waiting to open my gift tonight, even if that means we miss out on a nap."

Brian follows me as we walk into the hallway and toward the girls' new room. I hear squeals of laughter coming from down the hall. We've moved the girls so they're both upstairs with us. Mom and Frank bought them 'big girl bunk beds' for Christmas and took them to pick out their bedding and accessories for their room. Audrey has to have flip-down bedrails on the bottom bunk so she doesn't fall out. It was a big change from her crib but I think she sleeps more soundly in the bunk under Evvie than she ever did before.

When Brian and I enter the girls' room I see Leighton is trading blowing

raspberries on Evvie's and Audrey's bellies. "So who wants to go see what Santa brought?" I ask, interrupting their game.

A chorus of 'I do's' rings out and they all clamber out of Audrey's bed.

"Let the madness begin," Brian jokes.

Yeah. It's going to be a crazy day, but it wouldn't be our family if it weren't...

Brian's Point of View

I don't know how Justin does it. He's moving around the room, taking pictures and handing out gifts all while holding Darien and running on only a few hours of sleep. He doesn't look like he hasn't slept. He looks refreshed and happy; he must have some secret adrenaline that I'd die to bottle right now because it's a struggle for me to keep my eyes open.

"Okay, all the gifts are out," Justin says, collapsing beside me on the couch. "And I set up the video camera and the camera to take stills every other minute so I don't have to."

"You want to hold Raiden too and I'll help Audrey open her gifts?" I ask Justin.

"I'll help her, Dada," Leighton offers. "I know you're tired."

"Thank you so much," I say, grateful that Leighton is so sweet and always wants to help. I really don't think most little boys are as kind as he is. If I were his age and was suddenly the full-time big brother to four brothers and sisters I don't think I'd be taking it as well as he is. He definitely earned the biggest present he has yet to see.

"This is Evelyn's big one," Justin whispers to me.

I watch as she tears the paper off the largest box in her pile and she jumps up from her spot on the floor and squeals, "Santa got it! Santa got it!"

Audrey and Leighton both stop tearing away at Audrey's gift to see what all Evvie's fuss is about.

"What'd you get?" Leighton asks.

"Get, get?" Audrey repeats, bouncing in Leighton's lap.

Evvie's face is filled with wonder and disbelief as she picks up the box that nearly weighs as much as she does and turns it so her brother and sister can see. "My Size Ballerina Barbie! I got her! I got her!"

"Cool," Leighton tries to say it enthusiastically before rolling his eyes and going back to helping Audrey open her gift.

"Thank you, Santa!" Evvie declares, looking up to the ceiling. "Thank you, Santa!"

Justin and I both laugh at her praise. "You do realize that you'll be the one that helps put that together," I tell him.

"Oh no," Justin insists. "I've decided that since I spend half of my day feeding the twins you can spend half of your day the next couple of weeks, putting together each and every toy Santa got them that needs to be put together." He smiles then adds, "And playing with them too."

"You don't play fair," I complain lightly. "If I could, I'd totally take feeding them over playing with a life-sized Barbie."

"Who wouldn't," Justin says, shrugging his shoulders. "But it is what it is."

I put my free arm around Justin and hold him close to me the rest of the time the kids open their presents. Audrey's big gift is the last to be opened and the twins have lulled Justin and me into a near sleep at this point.

"What is it?" Leighton asks Audrey once the wrapping paper is completely off the box.

"Rock! Rock!" Audrey yells, patting the large box with her hands. "Rock! Rock!"

"Yet another one you have to put together," Justin laughs evilly.

"After you open your stocking later I'll put it together for you," I tell Audrey, not that she really understands when later is or that the thing has to be assembled.

She nods her head at me and promptly takes a seat on the box.

"Don't worry," Justin says. "She'll like the rocking horse more than the box."

"I hope so," I say. "Take Darien, I'm going to get Leighton's gift," I whisper.

"That's Raiden," Justin corrects, laughing at my more than likely sheepish expression. "You called him the right name a few minutes ago."

"That was like an hour ago," I tell him, handing the baby to him. "My brain is barely running."

"Be careful and don't get lost behind the tree," Justin jokes as I get up.

I walk behind the tree and move the long drapes away from the hidden gift. "What's this?" I say mysteriously, slowly rolling it out from behind the tree. "It has Leighton's name on it."

"Oh my god!" Leighton yells. "A bike! I got a bike!"

"You did," I say, rolling it toward him. "Come look at it.

Leighton is shocked still and stares at me and then looks at Justin.

"Go see it," Justin encourages. "Go on."

Leighton is up and running toward me in two seconds flat. He hops up on the bike as I steady it for him. "This is the best Christmas ever!"

I look over at Justin and see him smiling as he kisses first Darien's and then Raiden's forehead before looking up and turning his delighted grin on me.

"Yes it is, Leighton," I agree, my chest feeling tight. "It really is."

Justin and I chose not to open our gifts or Darien and Raiden's until the afternoon. We're saving the stocking opening for later too because Justin and I didn't need the kids to get on a sugar high right before we wanted to nap, there's enough candy in their stockings to last them until Easter. We got no complaints out of Leighton, Evvie or Audrey; it seems the kids were as in desperate need of sleep as Justin and I are.

After Justin feeds the boys I help him quickly change their diapers. Though we normally keep them in their cradle in our room while we sleep, we turn the baby monitor on and leave them in their cradles in the nursery.

I practically carry Justin against my body as we walk into our bedroom. I know he wants to be with me now, and I ache to feel him inside me, but he's exhausted. "Justin, maybe we should wait until tonight?" I suggest, while turning on the baby monitor.

He shakes his head while lowering his pants abruptly, revealing his hard cock which bounces against his belly as he walks toward me. "I don't want to wait," he speaks in a husky tone, throwing off his shirt.

"You could practically keep yourself standing while we walked in here," I comment gently.

His naked body is suddenly pressed up against mine and his lips are nibbling on my shoulder and I hear him sniffing me. "I was rubbing myself against you, smelling you," he mumbles and then swipes his tongue up my throat. "I'm going to fuck you now."

"Okay," I answer in a needy tone I should be embarrassed of. I wonder how my body could ever allow me to physically, or mentally for that matter, be with anyone but Justin. My body barely feels like my own as I hurriedly take my clothes off and crawl onto the bed. I stay on my hands and knees and look over my shoulder at him as he grabs the supplies from the dresser. My dick throbs, leaking pre-come onto the duvet in time with the beat of my heart quickening heartbeat.

Justin gives me a wide, predatory smile and his fingers glide up my thigh, ass crack and up along my back, ending the movement as he cups

my chin. So quickly, so thoroughly I want him inside of me. I'm breathless and begging for him to hurry, abandoning myself to his pleasure. I guess my body isn't my own anymore, it's his. I am Justin's and I always have been.

Justin's P.O.V.
Sunday, December 25, 1994

*Nothing hurts like your mouth, mouth,
mouth
Your mouth mouth, mouth
Your mouth mouth, mouth
All your mental armor
All your mental armor
And your mouth
Mouth*

Oh my gaaahhhd!

Brian starts laughing at me and as a result his muscles squeeze and release around my cock in rapid succession. I almost lose it and to hold onto my control I fall forward on top of him completely.

"Does it feel good?" he whispers against my forehead, his hands sliding down from my back to grip my ass.

With great effort I lift my head and look at his face. He didn't show any signs of pain when I pushed inside his tight ring and not an ounce of discomfort as I slid inside to the hilt. I don't know how it's possible because I'm his first just as he was mine. Oh, fuck. I'm inside Brian. I'm inside Brian's no longer virgin ass and if I don't stop thinking about how great it is I'm going to be out of his ass before I've even begun to fuck him.

"So what's the verdict?" he asks, pulling my pelvis into him, making my balls press against his ass even tighter.

I clear my throat and answer, "I'm sure you can imagine. I personally know that you know exactly what it feels like to be inside a virgin."

He laughs again and releases my ass to reach his arms up above him, grabbing onto the iron headboard. "Am I tight?" he whispers, eyes fluttering closed as I move back onto my knees.

"Yes," I assure him and pull out to the tip of my dick. "It doesn't hurt?" I ask.

He shakes his head from side to side in answer and his eyes open to meet mine. "I'm not exactly a virgin, you know that."

Images of Brian playing with his ass, sticking his fingers inside of himself, pushing dildos, vibrators and butt plugs into his hole, start flashing behind my eyes. Fuck! I really don't need to fantasize about

anything. I have my greatest fantasy coming true right now. Here in my bed, underneath my body. If this isn't the greatest and most unexpected Christmas present I've ever gotten then I don't know what is! I suppose most of the fuckable guys are visiting their families and Brian is feeling adventurous or something, but I could care less about that. He's here with me!

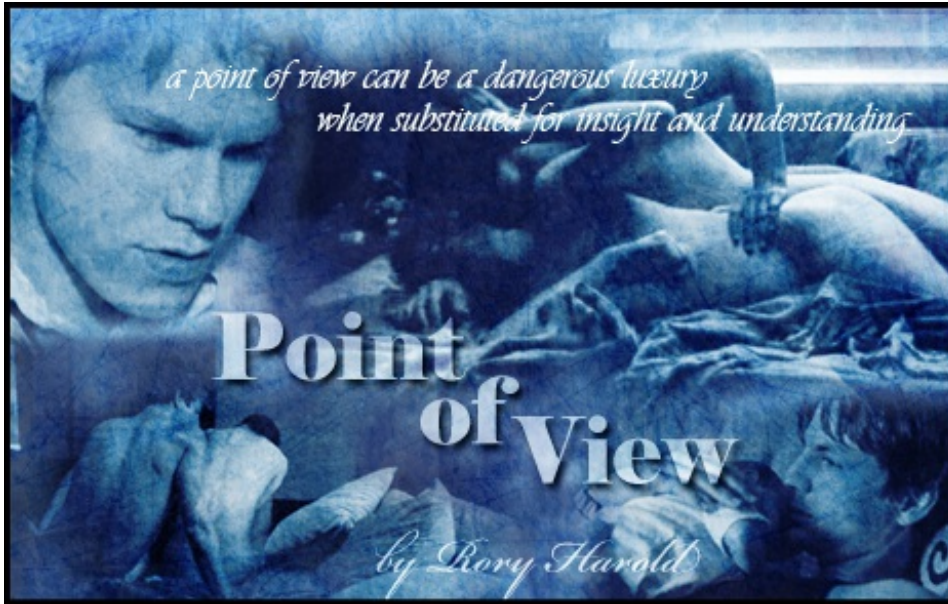
"Now fuck me," he grunts, squeezing around the crown of my cock and swiveling his hips.

I'm going to fuck Brian, but I'm going to make love to him too. I'm going to show him what he's never felt with anyone else.

I oblige his needy request and snap my hips forward, plunging deep into his ass. I find his prostate on my next stroke and swallow his surprised moan with my mouth, kissing him, tasting him, loving him like I never thought he'd allow me to do. His mouth is as enticing as his ass and I urgently need to feel his kiss as intensely as I want to feel him tighten around me and moan for me, telling me he understands that this is much more than a fuck. I know he knows it is; I have no doubt.

I realize though that Brian isn't ready for *us* yet. But one day he will be. I've spent most of my life breaking through his mental armor and he chose me to be the one that was first allowed to be inside of him. I know he feels the connection between us and I know that one day he'll realize that he won't have to put up any mental armor with me. One day Brian will know that we are meant to be one another's firsts and lasts.

Chapter Fourteen & Epilogue: "Breathe"



Point of View

Chapter 14 & Epilogue: "Breathe"

Wednesday, February 20, 1991

3rd Person Point of View

Brian gripped the passenger seat's ratty leather in his hands. "All right, let's go."

Justin elbowed Brian in the arm. "Would you stop? They wouldn't have given me this," he paused and held up his freshly laminated license, "if I wasn't a good driver."

"Are you serious?" Brian asked in exasperation. "They'll give *anyone* a driver's license!"

"Yeah, they gave *you* one didn't they?" Justin started the car and pumped the gas to get the engine to warm up and run.

"Fuck you." Brian groaned, adjusting himself so that his long legs could fit more easily in the floorboard.

Jennifer had bought the car for Justin from a lady she worked with for \$300 dollars. It was a steal because other than a few glitches the car ran great. He absolutely hated the dirty cream color and the hatchback, but he didn't complain, he left that up to Brian. When his father moved out Justin had given up all hope of getting a car for his sixteenth birthday, so he was thrilled with the 1985 Toyota Tercel.

Brian had worked delivering papers and moving lawns so that when he turned sixteen he'd bought himself a used Jeep. "We really should've taken my car."

"You won't let me drive your car," Justin reminded haughtily. "Besides, there's nothing wrong with my car."

"One: you're driving it. Two: it's too fucking small."

Justin pulled out onto the main street and when he stopped at a red light, he glanced over at Brian. "You realize that the lever to push the seat back is on this side, right?" Justin showed Brian the various buttons on the left side of the passenger seat.

"Why didn't you tell me that on the drive here? My legs were cramping the whole time."

"I was bottling it for the payback you deserve for insulting my driving."

Brian's seat swiftly moved backward as Justin stepped on the gas the same moment that he pressed the lever. "Thanks, Asshole."

"You know, you're not very nice to me. It's my birthday; you're supposed to be nice to me." Justin gave Brian a fake pouting look.

"Just get us home in one piece and I'll be nice to you there."

Justin laughed as he turned onto the road leading to their house. "For the record, Brian, I got a better score on my written and driven tests than you did."

"How the hell do you remember that?"

"I have a photographic memory," Justin stated, pulling the car into their driveway.

"Of my test scores? When did you even see them?"

"I didn't. I have a photographic memory of you freaking out when you thought that the guy who tested you wasn't going to pass you." Justin parked and shut off the engine. "Now get out of my car."

Brian glared at Justin as he untangled his long frame from the car. "Hurry up, or Mom will be home from work and we won't have time to play with the present I got you."

Justin was out of the car in a flash and bouncing on his heels behind Brian. "Brian, you didn't!"

"Didn't what?" Brian teased, unlocking the front door. He pushed Justin inside.

Justin raced into the living room where his mother had placed the wrapped gifts. "Where is it?"

"It's on your bed," Brian directed.

Justin ran past Brian and blushed as dirty thoughts filled his head, imagining what he'd really like him and Brian to play with in his room. As he reached his bedroom, he came upon a large rectangular box wrapped

with Christmas paper.

Brian nervously stood in the doorway. "Mom didn't have any birthday paper left."

"I don't care," Justin said, grinning at Brian. He waited for Brian to sit beside him on the bed before he tore at the paper on the box. "HOLY SHIT!"

"You like?" Brian asked.

"Oh my god, yes!" Justin cheered. "How did you get this? It isn't supposed to come out until August!"

"Julian's dad knew someone who knew someone that was testing them. There's only like two games for it but I'm sure it'll take you until August to beat them before more come out."

"This had to have cost a fortune."

"I did a favor for the guy," Brian said, grinning deviously.

Justin felt a little sick and his smile faded. "A favor?"

"Yeah, he wanted me to teach his kid some soccer moves." Brian knew what Justin had thought he meant and he laughed at the kid's sullen expression. "He's trying to make it onto his school's JV team."

"Oh, cool." Justin smiled once again. "This is amazing, Brian. Thank you!"

Brian's breath caught between the both of their lips as Justin leaned in close and their eyes met. A second later, they heard the front door opening, stopping them from tasting the desire both of them felt lingering between them.

"I still can't believe Mom agreed!" Justin fell back on Julian's bed, his arms spread wide. "You're a genius."

"Except now I'm going to have to figure out how to get something that looks like an adapter cable for your TV."

"Even though the family business is electronics, Mom knows nothing about them. She won't even notice."

Brian slapped Justin's thigh as hard as he could. "Get up, asshole. You've got to help me set this up."

Justin rubbed the sore spot on his leg but didn't complain about the fact that Brian had most likely just marked him. "It's a good thing Julian's riiiiich! He's got the most kick-ass TV!" Justin squatted in front of the large big screen and grabbed one of the cables from Brian. "Does he even know that we're using it?"

"I'm getting him back for fucking Brenda in my room."

"Too bad you can't fuck someone in here while he's gone tonight."

Brian really wished Justin wouldn't say things like that. He bit his lip and replied, "Well that doesn't mean that you can't jerk yourself off all over his sheets tonight."

"You're gonna make me sleep in here?" Justin whimpered, plugging the console in.

"Would you rather go home and actually have to go to school tomorrow?" Brian asked.

Justin frowned. "It'd be weird sleeping in here alone."

"You sleep at home alone all the time."

"And it sucks."

"Stop pouting and put in the game," Brian ordered, grabbing his controller. "I'm going to kick your ass."

"As if," Justin retorted, nudging Brian's chest with his shoulder. "You couldn't even make it past the fourth level in Super Mario Brothers 3!"

Brian groaned and rolled over, buried his face into his pillow and muttered, "Go away."

Justin, clad only in his underwear stepped softly over to Brian's bedside. "I had a nightmare."

Brian laughed and turned toward Justin. "You've been in there for like five minutes."

Justin glanced at the alarm clock on Brian's nightstand. "Actually, it's been more like twelve minutes."

Brian rolled his eyes and lifted the covers. "Get in. But be quiet. You may get to ditch school tomorrow, but I can't. I've got to take a test at nine a.m. and I need sleep."

Justin felt awkward the moment he slid in beside Brian's warm body and immediately regretted his actions. He fought the erection that wanted to spring the second Brian's arm brushed his own. "Goodnight," he whispered, turning on his side.

Brian turned on his side too and draped his arm over Justin's waist. He gave into temptation and scooted closer. "Happy Sweet 16, Justin."

"Thanks, Brian," Justin yawned, pushing his back against Brian's chest. "Goodnight."

Brian gulped and couldn't reply the same; his throat was tight with forbidden longing.

Tuesday, January 1, 2008

Justin's Point of View

Brian falls forward, squishing his come between us, his mouth open, his teeth still biting my shoulder. I'm going to have a huge mark there when he finally moves his mouth, but I could care less, that delicious sucking bite is what had me climaxing harder than I think I ever have before. Being inside Brian is the most amazing feeling in the world, but he makes it even better when he's straddling my lap, working himself up and down, taking the pleasure my cock gives him. Seeing him come like that is so fucking hot!

He finally finds the strength to reach behind him and holds the condom onto my cock as he slides away, separating our joined bodies and rolling onto his back. He looks at me, a shy but also satisfied smile on his lips. "I needed that."

I smile too; even bigger than I was already smiling because damn... hearing him actually admit to that makes me feel like I won the lottery. "Me too."

He turns onto his side and nuzzles my sweaty neck. "I need to be inside you too," he growls.

"Soon," I tell him, stroking his arms. I pull him on top of me and we kiss slowly, savoring the desire we share for one another.

A cry pierces through our bedroom, heard through the baby monitor. I reluctantly pull away from Brian and look toward the clock. "Raider, right on time."

A second cry joins the first and Brian laughs while saying, "Darren, right on time."

It's hard to find the strength to untangle myself from Brian completely but I manage to do so and grab my robe. "Let's just hope that Audrey isn't 'right on time', tonight."

"I'll second that," Brian says, pulling on his robe too.

I make my way to the nursery, trying to stay as quiet as possible. It's a few minutes until 2 a.m. and the twins want fed. Unfortunately, the last week, Audrey has been waking up at 3 a.m. wanting to have a bottle too. She slept through the night for months, so this change has been tough for Brian and me.

Normally, we feed the twins pre-made bottles, change their diapers and by 2:30 they're back asleep and so are we. But Audrey insists on Brian feeding her, me rocking her to sleep and it's 4 a.m. before she'll lie back down in her bed, only to wake up two hours later, insisting she's had enough sleep. This has resulted in her being crappy through-out the day. The therapist warned us that she may start to feel jealous of the twins and we prepared for that, but I'd give anything to have her be

jealous of them during the day than at three in the morning.

Brian and I part at the stairs and he goes down to warm the bottles while I go into the nursery. The moment I open the door both of their cries lower to whimpers. They're so smart to already recognize that the creek of the door means that someone is about to 'rescue' them.

"Hi, Raiden," I whisper, walking over to his crib. Tonight it's his turn to be picked up first, that's the only way I've learned to do it so that I don't feel guilty about letting one of my sons cry longer than his brother.

Once Raiden is in my arms, I carefully maneuver myself to pick Darien up too. They're so small but I know the day will come that it will be very hard to carry them both in my arms. "You're such good boys," I say, praising their silence, "waiting patiently for your Dad to bring you your food."

I walk over to the rocker and slowly ease myself into the seat, hoping they don't protest the motion. Darien starts to make a fuss, whining softly but as soon as I begin to rock back and forth, he calms down and closes his eyes. I close my eyes too and hum 'Alien' by Bush. I listened to a lot of their music while I was pregnant and the tune of any one of their songs calms them both. I think that even without the actual music and lyrics, they must recognize the songs.

"Justin?"

I open my eyes halfway through the song and see Brian standing in the doorway, the light coming in from the hallway making him a shadow. He walks closer to us and I see his face, smiling at us with such tenderness I should probably pinch myself to be sure, it isn't a dream. "Hey."

"You were almost asleep," he comments, placing the bottles on the small table between the two rocking chairs.

"They're like little teddy bears."

"And zanex," he adds, making me laugh.

"You're Raiden tonight," I whisper.

Brian collects Raiden from my arms, hands me one of the bottles and takes one for Raiden before sitting in the spare rocker. "It'll be nice to see Julian and Brenda tomorrow. It's been a long time."

"Oh, I forgot to tell you they sent me an email. They decided to fly into Philly yesterday instead of trying to get a flight tomorrow, or I guess that's actually today. Anyway, they're getting here a little earlier, around 1:00."

"Well that'll work out better, all the kids will be napping except Leighton. It'll give us some time to catch up before we start running around non-stop."

"Is it weird that I'd rather catch up on sleep tomorrow instead of going out with them?" Seriously, I know it'd do Brian and me good to have an

'adult' night out but I would rather stay in and be with Brian alone.

"Once Molly has her baby, we're not going to have too many opportunities to go out alone. Not only will we be losing a babysitter for a while, but Mom will have another grandchild she'll surely be asked to watch. Once she and Frank are married we can count on her babysitting Amelia too."

"My poor mother," I joke.

"She's never been happier."

"Neither have I."

Thursday, July 7, 1994

3rd Person Point of View

Brian took the apartment stairs two at a time and quickly unlocked the front door. "Justin?" he yelled, slamming the door closed.

Justin appeared in the hallway, having nearly had a heart attack from Brian's loud entrance when he'd been quietly studying in their room. "What's wrong?" he asked, taking a few steps down the hall.

Brian rushed toward Justin. "Nothing's wrong! I got the fucking job!"

"Holy shit!" Justin launched himself into Brian's arms. "That's great! I knew you would get it. That Gardener guy would be an idiot not to hire you." He pulled out of their embrace and grabbed Brian's hand, leading them into their bedroom. "Come on, get out of that suit. We have to find something fabulous to wear. We've got to go out and celebrate!"

Brian felt high on life and as Justin began to strip, revealing his body to him, he couldn't help himself. "We can celebrate here," he said gruffly. His eyes devoured every bit of flesh Justin revealed as he got down to his ugly striped boxers. Justin was slightly bent sorting through his drawers and throwing clothes around, his round ass teasing him.

"We can't have a fucking party here on a school night," Justin admonished. "Griffin will flip if we do that again. Last time he went ape shit when you fucked that guy in the bathroom and had him moaning so loud it kept him awake all night."

Brian shut and locked their bedroom door before grabbing Justin and hauling him up against his chest. "We don't need to have a fucking party. We're the *fucking* party."

Justin felt like his bones melted as Brian pressed their mouths together. He could hardly breathe as Brian's tongue eagerly swept through his mouth at the same time as his Brian roughly pushed him against the door.

"I'm going to fuck you so hard," Brian whispered. "God, you want it, don't you?"

Justin nodded and moaned as Brian's lips attacked his neck. He wasn't gentle as he pushed Brian's suit jacket off him and then practically tore his shirt away. "Yes. Push your pants down. I want you to fuck me like I'm..."

"My whore?" Brian asked, stepping away slightly to undo his belt buckle and grab a condom from his pocket.

"Uhuh." Justin's mouth watered as Brian's erection came into view. "Come on, Mr. Kinney." Justin loved nothing more than playing these games with Brian. It was easier to suppress his real feelings this way.

"Jesus," Brian groaned, stepping closer to Justin as he donned the lubed condom.

Justin wrapped his arms around Brian's neck and lifted himself up, wrapping his legs around Brian's waist. "Fuck me."

Brian placed two of his fingers in Justin's mouth and had him suck on them before shoving them between their bodies and awkwardly fucking Justin's hole with them. All the while Justin's mouth was doing damage on his chest, his neck and the little spot behind his ear, driving him insane with need. "You ready?"

"Mmmhmm." Justin gripped Brian's hair in his hands as he felt Brian's cock nudge his entrance.

Brian pressed Justin tight against the door as he slid slowly inside Justin's ass. He rested for a moment, waiting for Justin's labored breaths to normalize before he started pounding him, bouncing Justin on his cock and losing touch with reality.

Tuesday, January 1, 2008

Justin's Point of View

"I can't believe you two have so many kids," Julian whispers to me, coming into the kitchen.

I find myself laughing. "It's not a dirty secret."

His face reddens and he stutters, "That's... that's n...not what I meant."

I laugh and give him a 'gotcha' expression. "I know."

"It's just shocking."

"It is? I thought you had some sort of sixth sense about Brian and me."

"I did. That's not to say I didn't actually think he loved Griffin."

"He *did* love Griffin." God, this will never be more uncomfortable. "He and Griff's marriage was much different than mine with Griffin. They shared something I'd never understand."

"Yes, but you two... you've always been in love." Julian grabs the box of dish soap and pours it into the tray in the dishwasher. This surprises me because the man has a butler and half a dozen housekeepers so I didn't think he even knew where the soap went. "When he told me that he was with Griffin, that he was in love with him, I believed him."

Jesus. This is why the past should stay in the past. "He did love Griffin."

"I think he made himself believe that. I think he was in love with the idea that he could love someone that was so much like him."

I almost drop the plate I'm placing in the drawer. "Griffin was nothing like Brian."

"You didn't think so, which probably made him appealing to you."

"Julian," I give him a stern look, "I'd rather not talk about this."

"I know, it's just that I..." he sighs sadly.

I get it. I do. "You're trying to soothe a burn you're in no position to tend to. But I appreciate that you care enough to try."

"You two were always good to me and Brenda but I feel like I really fucked things up for both of you. If I would've..."

"No one's to blame but me and Brian. We didn't listen to anyone, not even ourselves." I take a deep breath and assure him. "It still hurts, but that hurt will remind us that we can't take one another for granted."

"You're a lot more optimistic than you were the last time I saw you."

"The last time we got together I was in Chicago, miles away from my mother, alone with my child and far away from the man I loathed and loved." Saying that aloud really makes me sound crazy, but Julian doesn't seem to look shocked, he just looks sad. "Cheer up, Julian. Brian and I are together and we're in love. That's the way it's going to stay."

"But don't you wish you could just turn back time and..."

"I can't think that way," I say, stopping him. "Julian, I love Audrey and Evelyn. They're part of Brian and I love them just as much as I love my biological children. I would rather suffer a life without Brian forever than ever wish to have them not exist. Because they wouldn't, not if Brian and I had listened to ourselves from the beginning."

Julian gives me a huge smile. "You're one of a kind, Justin."

I smirk. "I know."

"Dad! Dad!" Evelyn comes running into the kitchen and barrels into my legs, shaking with sobs. "My finger is bleeding! My finger is bleeding."

I pick her up and set her on the island so I can inspect it. "What happened?" I ask of the tiny cut that is barely bleeding at all.

"It's a paper cut!" she cries, burying her face against my shoulder. "Am I going to die?"

I take a deep breath at her words and look over at Julian. "Could you tell Brian I need him?"

"Yeah, sure," he replies and leaves the kitchen quickly.

When he's gone, I tilt Evvie's chin up and look her in the eyes. "Evvie, you aren't going to die. It's just a tiny cut. We'll wash it off, put a band-aid on it and you'll be just fine."

"I don't wanna have to go to the hipstable," she whimpers. "They'll make me go away!"

For a child who didn't have a parent die a year before, it would seem like they were just being overly dramatic, but that's not the case with Evelyn. A few days ago, she overheard a conversation between Brian and Leighton regarding the fact that we're coming up on the one-year anniversary of Griffin's death. Since then she's been terrified that she's going to die or someone else she loves will.

The only person that can calm her down when she's like this is Brian. I move her over to the sink and rinse her cut before putting a bandage on it. "You're not going to be taken away, not even if you went to the hospital because you're hurt," I try to assure her.

"But I'm dying! It hurts and I'm dying!" Evvie insists, squeezing me tightly while she shakes fiercely in my arms.

"I'm sorry it hurts sweetie, but I promise you, you're not dying. No one is going to take you away."

"What's the matter Ev?" Brian asks softly, walking into the kitchen and rounding the island to stand beside me.

"Dada, I'm dying!" Evvie yells, leaping into Brian's arms. "It hurts to die. It does," she says in a knowing whisper that sends chills down my spine.

Brian gives me a painful expression as he rubs his hands through Evvie's hair. "You're okay, Ev. You're not going to die," he lifts up her finger and inspects it, "especially not from a little cut. You didn't even need a big bandage."

"You sure?" she asks, looking from Brian and then to me and back again. "I don't want to die."

"I'm positive," Brian says firmly, looking her in the eyes. "You *will* be okay."

Evelyn stops her sobbing and starts hiccupping, still watching Brian with wide eyes. "Papa, papa died."

"Yes, he did. But that was because Papa was very sick. He had cancer, remember we talked about this and Mira explained this to you too?" Brian's voice is wobbly, I can tell he's close to breaking down, but he's

fighting it.

"Yes, I 'member what she said."

"I love you, Evvie," Brian tells her, tears ready to fall from his eyes.
"You're such a smart little girl."

She smiles a tiny bit and looks over at me. "Justin...*Dad* you love me too?"

"Of course I love you," I assure her. I put my arm around Brian; kiss his cheek and then Evelyn's. "Why don't you go get the two dollies you want to take over to Daphne and Loren's house? She'll be here soon to pick you up."

"Oh... okay," she relents, still looking glum.

Brian places her on the floor and she slowly walks out of the kitchen, turning to look back at us once before disappearing down the hall. Brian practically collapses into my arms, squeezing me so close it's hard for me to breathe, but I endure it until his grip lessens. "Do you think she'll be okay?"

"I think we'll make it as okay as it can be," I answer. I think that's all we can do with all parts of life, really. We just have to make it as good as possible.

Brian shakes himself as he steps out of my arms. "Do you need any help?" he asks.

"I'm about finished," I tell him while packing the cooler to take to my mother's house. "Go hang out with Julian and Brenda."

"Don't you need to get ready?" he asks.

"Have we ever decided where we're going? I won't know what to wear until we decide that." Brian is wearing a black short sleeved ribbed sweater and a pair of jeans, it's an outfit that will be appropriate no matter where we go, but I'm still carrying my pregnancy weight and depending on where we're going I'm going to have to find just the right clothing to hide the belly I still have.

"Well, Brenda is all for going to Babylon but Julian isn't completely convinced."

"Then go work your ad man magic and get him convinced," I say. If I'm going to go out tonight, I'm going to have the best time I can and that most definitely means us going dancing at a gay bar. "I might fall asleep if we have to go to a straight bar or something."

Brian kisses my nose and grins. "I'll do my best."

1995

3rd Person Point of View

The party was going on full blast at Brenda's house. It was better than any sorority bash or all-night fraternity kegger that Daphne had ever

attended. Rich gorgeous men hit on her all night. But even the hottest guy, Loren, who she'd given her number to, couldn't distract her from her worrying. She wasn't spying, she was waiting to use the bathroom, or so she told herself. It's not as if they would know that the other ten bathrooms were not occupied.

When her beer was half-gone, the bathroom door creaked and Daphne came face to face with a 'fucked-silly' Justin and Brian. She grabbed Justin's arm as he shyly tried slip past her and led him into the sex-smelly bathroom. "Come with me while I pee," she ordered.

Justin groaned but allowed himself to be pulled ~~away from Brian~~ back into the bathroom. "Why do girls always need someone to go pee with them?" he asked.

"Because it's where we gossip." Daphne thrust her beer into Justin's hand and took the opportunity to relive herself.

"You have gossip?" Justin asked, sitting on the countertop. The image of Brian fucking him on it ran through his mind and he smiled.

"Yeah. Guess who it's about?"

Justin hopped off the counter to let Daphne wash her hands as he thought. "Julian? Becca? September?"

"Nope. It's about you and Brian."

Justin laughed and rolled his eyes. "People are *always* gossiping about us."

"Yeah, and for some reason none of your friends but me actually know that you two fuck."

Justin had the nerve to blush. "What does that matter?"

"It's just weird. Everyone thinks you two are star-crossed lovers that have been hit by a stupid ray."

Justin laughed hard, partly because of how ridiculous that seemed and partly because he was drunk off beer and Brian's cock. "Uhhh... what?"

"How is it that you two manage to fuck in practically plain view of all your friends and yet no one realizes it, but yet they totally realize that you two are in love with one another?"

"We're not in love with one another, Daphne." Justin was only half-lying. Of course, he'd been in love with Brian since he met the boy but that didn't mean Brian was in love with him. He wasn't stupid, he knew that what they did together was for fun and that was all it was.

"Well it's getting preposterous, Justin!" Daphne grabbed her beer back and took a long swig before explaining, "I've been designated to get you two together."

"That's never going to happen."

"Yeah, that's what I said. Except, I actually know that you two have been sleeping together for what, at least two years now?"

"You've been keeping track?"

"Shut up," Daphne muttered. "You two don't realize it, but you're really fucking up your relationship."

"Uhuh... right."

"You are and you know it. You're in love with him, Justin."

Justin bit his lips and shrugged. "So?"

"So? So what? Are you going to just let Brian use you and..."

"He doesn't use me!" Justin interrupted, angry at the accusation. "I'm not a naïve idiot. Brian doesn't use me and he doesn't take advantage of me, which is what I know you're suggesting."

"I think you both are taking advantage of each other, which is probably worse."

"I really don't know why our sex life is any of your business," Justin huffed. "Because it's really not."

"It is because I don't want to see you get hurt. If you and Brian would be in a relationship then maybe it wouldn't seem so weird that you two carry on a secret *fucking* relationship behind everyone's backs."

"I don't give a shit if it's weird to you or to our friends, Daphne." Justin turned and opened the bathroom door.

"Justin, wait I just don't want you to get hurt. You've got to stop..."

"Drop it," Justin begged angrily. "Just drop it."

"I can't," Daphne pleaded, "I care about what happens to you two."

"Well so do I and I know what we're doing!" Justin practically fled down the hall.

As Daphne stepped out and saw Justin, her heart sank. Griffin was trying to engage Justin in a conversation, his eyes were sparkling as he talked to Justin but Justin's attention wasn't on him, it was on Brian, who was busy talking to a hunk that had given Daphne his number. She watched Griffin and realized that he was oblivious to what Brian and Justin shared. If he knew, then he probably wouldn't be so obvious in his love and admiration for Justin. Daphne shook her head and drank the rest of her beer, realizing that she'd said as much as she could. Brian and Justin were in a mess she couldn't help get them out of and hoped that they would wise up before it was too late.

Saturday, June 14, 2008

Brian's Point of View

In January, when Julian and Brenda came to visit they put out the idea that our family should plan a trip to visit them in Hawaii. With the twins just having been born neither, Justin or I could imagine going on a vacation. At the time, our household had little structure as we were all trying to adjust to all the changes that had taken place in the last year. In the six months since that time, life has become much easier.

We all still go to family therapy and the children's therapist, Mira, has helped immensely. Evvie's 'freak outs' about life and death dissipated a few months ago and Leighton's anger toward me and Justin has become nonexistent. Audrey is thriving, walking, talking and learning from Evvie how to be a good big sister.

Letters from Griffin come about every other month for the children. Leighton reads his by himself and unless he wants to share something with us, he usually keeps it to himself. He also reads Evvie's letters to her and they share their bond with Griffin together while doing so. I trust that whatever Griffin has written them doesn't make them sad, as they're usually happy after they've read them. Besides the letter we received on Audrey's first birthday, we don't have another one for her but I often read her the poetry he wrote for her as we look at pictures of him. I don't know how much she understands about Griffin but I think she knows that he is someone special to all of us.

Mom and Frank are the reason we decided to take a vacation. They planned to be married in Florida, but when I mentioned that to Julian, he insisted that if she was going to have a 'destination' wedding that it had to be in Hawaii. They worked out all the details together about the ceremony, which is taking place at 'Ohana, the newest and most beautiful of all the hotel and resorts Julian and Brenda own.

This vacation is truly a dream for everyone. Our whole family has come to Hawaii to see Mom and Frank tie the knot. They've decided not to have anyone in the wedding but the two of them because if they appointed spots they wouldn't have anyone there that wasn't in the wedding party.

I knock on the door to Mom's suite and call, "Five minutes until we need to start walking down to the beach."

"We'll be out in a minute," Justin calls back from behind the door. "Mom lost her earring."

Even though there isn't anyone in the wedding party, she has asked Justin and me to walk with her down the 'aisle'. She didn't want to leave Molly out, but Molly assured her that it was fine with her and that one day when she meets the man of her dreams she'll probably be asking the same thing of us.

Molly gave birth to Mabry Gabrielle almost three months ago. Her pregnancy was very healthy so she remained working at Kinnetik until only a few weeks before her due date. She wanted to save as much money as she could and with my mother's help, she ended up moving into a small two-bedroom house not far from where Justin and I live. She

only had a few days to go before Mabry was born when she moved so Justin and I spent any free time we had going to her house with the kids and helping her get set-up for the baby. Once we were done, the baby had a beautiful nursery and from the baby shower and Mom's insane spending, she had everything possible she'd need for the baby.

However, the only things Molly had in the place for her use was a café table with two chairs she found at a garage sale, a television, a recliner and two standing lamps. Naturally, I couldn't stand to see my little sister living like that so while she was in the hospital I arranged to have her home decorated. Justin has insisted that I stop renovating and re-styling our house for at least another five years, so it was fun to do Molly's little house for her. She of course loved it and insisted that I dock her pay to once she returns to Kinnetik, but that's definitely not going to happen. She's going to need every penny she earns to raise Mabry alone.

We tried our best to help Molly find a way to locate Mabry's father but we reached dead end after dead end. Molly even called the hotel to see if they still had security footage of the date she was there with him, but they'd already deleted it. Really, I don't know what she would've done had they still had the tape. So now, she is completely on her own and the birth certificate had to list the father as unknown. It's going to be tough once Mabry gets older and asks about her father, maybe tougher than it will be for my kids.

It's also very worrisome to know nothing about the father's genetic health. But I'm not too sure Mabry got much from her father, she is a spitting image of her mother but also looks a lot like Raiden, Darien and Leighton when we compare them at the same ages. Justin thinks that he doesn't look like our children, but when Mabry is beside them, I see his likeness in them even more.

Finally, the suite door opens, revealing Mom and Justin who both have tear-filled eyes. I'd guess that there never was a lost earring, they were both probably trying to get their emotions in check and didn't want me making fun of them for being the total saps that they are.

"We're ready," Mom announces, smiling.

"You look beautiful," I tell her and give her a kiss on her cheek.

"What about me?" Justin teases, straightening his suit.

I kiss his lips quickly and reply, "You look gorgeous."

"Come on, you two," she says when we start to kiss a little more heavily. "This isn't your wedding."

We both start cracking up laughing, happy to see so much excitement from her. "No," I admit, "but this is our honeymoon."

Wednesday, April 30, 2003

"She has a crush on you," Griffin innocently commented to Justin as he took Evelyn from Justin's arms.

Justin forced himself to smile up at his ex husband and joked, "Who could blame her?"

"Who could?" Griffin whispered and turned to put her in the highchair.

Justin felt his cheeks flaming in reaction to Griffin's words and the pent-up tension within him. He still couldn't believe he'd agreed to fly back to Pittsburgh for Evelyn's birthday.

"Having fun?" Brian asked from beside Justin.

Justin cut Brian a quick glance but only nodded in answer. It was a lie, they both knew it, and just as they both knew that Brian had asked a pointless question. Justin was miserable. He had planned to stay at his mother's house, have her take Leighton to Evvie's 1st birthday party herself, but then Leighton got clingy and began to cry. He had begged for him to also go and Justin couldn't say no. So here he was, watching Griffin and Brian together playing happy family.

He wanted to die.

"Can I have the elephant, Papa?" Leighton asked, following Griffin out of the kitchen to the dining room.

Griffin placed the large zoo themed cake on the table. "Sure, buddy." He looked over to Brian and asked, "Can you get Evvie's little cake?"

"Yup." Brian slipped past Justin and went into the kitchen.

Evelyn was trying to tear her pink 'I'm 1' bib off her neck. "All done!" she announced, then slapped the tray with her hands. "All done!"

"Don't you want to blow out your candles?" Griffin asked his daughter.

Evvie really didn't have any idea what that would entail so she shook her head 'no' and slapped the tray once again. "All done."

Brian reappeared with a tiny round pink cake that had a number 1 candle placed in the middle of it. "Where should I put it?"

"Light the candle on the table and then I'll hold her hands so she doesn't go after the flame once you place it on her tray."

"I wanna help blow the candle out!" Leighton declared, pulling on the bottom of Griffin's shirt. "Can I? Can I?"

"Let your sister try to do it first," Griffin told the boy.

"Okay, Papa." Leighton walked over beside Evelyn's high chair and spoke softly to her. "You try your best Evvie. But if you can't do it, I'll help. Big brothers help their little sisters ya' know."

"You're right about that," Brian said, ruffling Leighton's hair.

Justin bit his lip and looked away from Brian and Leighton. For fifteen years, Brian had been his big brother, always looking out for him, always

helping when he needed it, even if at times Brian hadn't wanted to. A painful wave of nostalgia encompassed him and he could barely find his voice to join everyone as they began to sing, "Happy Birthday" to Evelyn.

Saturday, August 9, 2008

Brian's Point of View

"No way," Leighton places his hands on hips and shakes his head, "I can't wear *that* to school Dad!"

I almost break out in laughter when I see the expression on Justin's face but manage to quell it.

Justin waves the Batman t-shirt in the air and asks, "Why not? I thought you loved Batman. Just two years ago you had a Batman back pack!"

"That was like a *long* time ago, Dad. I can't go to junior high in that. I'll get my butt kicked!"

"Brian, will you please tell your son that Batman is cool no matter how old you are?" Justin demands.

Shit. I'm in major shit here. There's no way I can tell my kid that. He's probably right. He probably will get his ass kicked if he shows up to school in that. Before I can say anything, Justin reads my expression.

"Fine," he huffs, hanging the shirt back up on the rack. "You take Evvie, Audrey and Leighton. Pick out clothes for Leighton and Evelyn since I obviously have no idea what is cool for 'big' kids. I'm going to take the boys with me and I'll shop for Audrey too. They won't complain about what I pick out."

I almost tell him that he shouldn't be so sure about Audrey; she's been picking out what she wants to wear for months now. "All right."

"But Daddy, I wanna go with you and the babies," Evvie cries, pulling on Justin's pant leg. "I want you to pick out my clothes!"

Justin looks like he's about to lose it. Sure, Leighton has been meticulous today, but going to Junior High is a big deal and Leighton has a good fashion sense now, I don't want to hinder that with character shirts and cargo pants. Evvie however doesn't care what she wears, as long as it's girly, so she'll be easy. "You're staying with me, sweetie," I tell her. "You've always liked shopping with me."

"I don't wanna," she huffs, crossing her arms and glaring at me.

"Evvie, Dada will get you pretty clothes," Justin tries to assure her.

Justin has Darien and Raiden in a twin stroller, thankfully, they are sleeping peacefully, but I have Audrey in the shopping cart that I'm pushing and she begins to whine too, always imitating her big sister. It looks like we're two seconds from a meltdown if I don't stop it fast. "How about we save Evvie's shopping for tomorrow and you two can go out

together alone? I'll stay home with the boys. Audrey you and Dad can have a day to yourselves. How does that sound?"

"Okay!" Evvie says her mood a complete change. She looks at Justin who also looks to be calming down. "Just me and you?"

Justin smiles at her and agrees, "Yup, just you and me."

Audrey starts to relax now too and looks up at me and parrots, "Jus you n' me."

I kiss her nose and nod. "And Leighton and Evvie, "I tell her.

Crisis averted.

"Now this, this is cool!" Leighton declares, holding up a blue shirt with a skateboard on the front.

Okay, so perhaps this fashion thing is going to take some work.

Tuesday, January 4, 2005

3rd Person Point of View

"I was so stupid!" Griffin yelled, slamming Brian's office door behind him.

Brian bolted up from his chair and quickly walked around his desk toward Griffin. "What happened?"

Griffin pushed Brian away from him and paced before him. "I didn't want to tell you, I kept thinking it'd be okay. If I didn't tell you, it'd be okay."

"What?" Brian had never seen Griffin so freaked out. He was usually calm and level headed, but now he looked like he was about to jump out of his skin. "What didn't you want to tell me?"

"I was at an appointment with a doctor, Brian."

"What do you mean?" Brian asked worriedly. "I thought you were having lunch with Raymond Miller."

"I wasn't ever supposed to have lunch with Miller."

Brian put his hands on Griffin's shoulders and stopped him from pacing. "Tell me what's going on? Why the fuck did you see a doctor? You're scaring the shit out of me."

Griffin looked at Brian's chin, unable to meet his eyes. "I was feeling like shit at the end of October and I went to see the doctor then, too. I'd been so tired, nauseas and..." Griffin stepped back and away from Brian, but now looked into his eyes. "We haven't been careful, not every time. After my miscarriage last May, you said you wanted to try again when I was ready. I figured if it happened it'd be okay even if we weren't thinking about it all the time."

Brian smiled softly, feeling joy and relief replace his worry. "It is okay," he promised.

A sob escaped and Griffin took a deep breath to stifle any more while wiping his eyes. "It isn't, okay."

Brian gulped down his disappointment. "Well it doesn't have to happen now. Your body probably needs more time to recover."

"I'm not going to recover," Griffin whispered. "I wasn't pregnant. I may not ever be able to get pregnant again."

Brian moved once again to take Griffin into his arms and this time his husband let him hold him. "That's okay, Griffin. We have Evelyn and Leighton, they're enough."

"You don't understand," Griffin wept, "there's more to it than that." He looked into Brian's eyes and spoke through his weeping, "They've been running tests on me and today they confirmed it."

"Confirmed what?" Brian asked hesitantly.

Griffin's entire body shook as he sagged against Brian. "I was so stupid. It wasn't a fucking baby making me sick. God I wish it was and now I might not ever have that chance again."

"You never know," Brian countered. "There's so many procedures they can do now. I don't care how much IVF costs. We can try that if you want to be pregnant otherwise maybe I..."

"No, Brian," Griffin interrupted. "You don't understand. It was cancer! Cancer was making me sick. I have cancer and it's... it's aggressive. They found a..."

Brian zoned out then. He didn't mean to, but the painful ringing in his ears drowned out Griffin's voice.

Thursday, November 27, 2008

Justin's Point of View

I don't breathe another lover

I'm practically frozen, but the kids don't seem to notice how cold it is outside. I swear they're invincible when it comes to hot or cold weather, they'll play outside in it until they're at risk of heatstroke or frostbite.

Audrey, Leighton and Evelyn are helping me build a snowman, which is going to end up being taller than me. We're definitely going to need Brian's help if we're going to get the head on. The three of them are rolling it toward me from the other end of the backyard. The sight is one of the most hilarious sights I've seen in a long time and I have to laugh at them, quietly of course or Leighton would get mad, he's *hates* feeling embarrassed. They all have heavy-duty snowsuits on, which makes the task harder because they can hardly move in them. Thick scarves wrapped around their faces muffle their grunts of exertion and Leighton's directions of how to keep the ball packed together.

I hear a click from the garage's back door and soon I see Brian pulling a sled behind him. The only things visible I can see of the twins are their eyes and for the first time they are completely indistinguishable to me. Not only has Brian put them in their snowsuits, ski masks, boots, scarves, hats and mittens, but I think they must have two sets of clothes on underneath it all. They look so fat and wobbly but manage to hold their balance sitting in the sled as he pulls it toward me.

"Don't give me that look," Brian says in a playful defensive tone, "it's freezing out here."

It's a struggle to stand up from ground with all the layers I have on so I grab onto Brian's leg for support and he gets the hint and helps to pull me up. "You're right, I am freezing. Thankfully we're almost done." I remove the scarf from around my mouth and kiss his still warm cheek.

"Well, we could just call it the headless snowman," he teases.

"Yeah right," I reply. "Look at them out there working hard. They'd kill us if we told them it was time to go in."

Both of the boys start babbling loudly and I look down to watch them as they look up at the sky. It's been snowing on and off for two weeks now, but I guess they haven't gotten to actually experience the snowflakes falling.

Brian and I both kneel down in front of them and I watch as Brian moves his hands in the air, wiggling his fingers and signing to the twins. "Snow," he tells them aloud. Their eyes follow his movements and he says it again, "Snow."

"Who is who?" I ask. Everything they are wearing was bought by my mother and she bought everything the same so there really is no way of telling.

"I don't know," Brian laughs, "I really don't know."

I start laughing too and the boys stare at me, obviously thinking I'm crazy. "We're horrible parents," I jokingly tell them. "We have no idea who you are."

"I think this is Darien," Brian guesses, handing our son closest to him a tiny ball of snow.

The baby immediately tries to put it to his mouth but the mask stops his attempt, so instead he tries to smash it between his hands. Our other son starts grunts and does his best to mimic the sign for 'snow' while wearing mittens, so I hand him some too.

"We should just ask Leighton, apparently he always knows," I suggest as the three 'big' kids roll the huge ball of snow to us.

"Ask me what?" Leighton says breathlessly.

"The babies look so cute!" Evvie wails, sitting down beside me. "You are

so cute!"

Audrey tumbles into Brian's lap and points at the big ball of snow they rolled to us. "His head," she tells him.

"Your dad forgot who is who," I tell Leighton, "and I can't tell either."

Leighton erupts into laughter and kneels down beside me, inspecting the babies. He points to his brother closest to me. "That's Darien," he says confidently and pointing to his other brother, "that's Raiden."

"You're sure?" I ask, impressed.

"Yup. Darien has a little freckle that you can barely see on his eyelid. Look."

Me and Brian look and I immediately see it. "You were wrong, Dad."

Brian shrugs, "Yeah, well you didn't even know a freckle existed."

I roll my eyes and push Evvie up. "Come on; let's have Dad put the head on."

"Yes!" Evvie shouts. "Then we can decorate him."

"This isn't a Christmas tree," Leighton says all-knowingly.

"Eyes," Audrey says.

"Uhuh, he needs some eyes doesn't he?" Brian asks her. "All right, everyone back up and let me see if I can lift this thing."

I grab the pull on the sled and slide the twins out of the way in case he drops it and Leighton, Audrey and Evvie come to stand near me too.

"You can do it, Dad," Leighton encourages after Brian practically drops the thing.

I cross my fingers inside my mittens, hoping that Brian doesn't drop it as he struggles to get the head onto the body. Finally, he accomplishes it and we all cheer for him.

"I get to do the nose!" Leighton calls out, grabbing the frozen carrot sitting in the snow. Brian has to lift him up so he can reach the face and he jams it into the center.

"Good job," Brian tells him, letting him down. "Who's next?"

"Eyes!" Audrey exclaims, running over to grab the two large black buttons. Brian picks her up and helps her put them into the snowman's head. They're a little lopsided, but we all tell her she did a great job.

"Me now!" Evvie declares, grabbing the five small red buttons. Brian lifts her up and waits as she makes a smile on the snowman.

"Now that's a snowman," I say, "but he's missing something."

"He needs arms," Leighton says, taking off running. "Come on guys, let's go find sticks."

Audrey tries to run as fast as she can after him but seeing she's having trouble Leighton comes back and picks her up, keeping pace with Evvie.

"He's missing something else," Brian tells me, unwrapping his scarf from around his neck.

"You're going to freeze, and that thing is Armani!" I say, trying to stop him. I just know he's going to bitch about it all winter if he does this.

"Well we can't have a horribly dressed snowman in our yard, can we?" Brian smirks at me and wraps the black and red striped scarf around the snowman's neck. "There."

Raiden and Darien start gabbing loudly, looking at the snowman, apparently they like it. "Our snowman really doesn't have to have designer clothing," I tell the twins as if they can understand me. "And neither do you."

Brian puts his arm around me and starts kissing my nose and then my eyelids and I start to warm up from the inside out. "I love you, even if you have no taste."

I just laugh against his mouth and open mine so I can taste him. "I beg to differ," I murmur. It doesn't matter how much clothing we have separating our bodies, I can tell that just from tasting my mouth he's hot for me and loves my taste just as much as I love his.

Today's Thanksgiving and soon, we'll be back inside, rushing to get all seven of us ready to head to my mother's house for a fabulous feast. The day will be over before I know it, probably before I can think about what I'm thankful for.

I break apart from Brian and grab the pull for the sled, his hand covers mine and we walk backward in the snow. The twins start laughing as we both tumble backward and land on our backs, staring up at the snow falling and then facing each other. I hear Leighton, Evvie and Audrey's laughter further away, and the twins are laughing even harder, pleased with our sudden drop to the ground. I start laughing too and then Brian starts laughing and we stare at each other, laughing so hard we can barely catch our breath.

I notice that Brian's hand is still wrapped over mine and when I look back at him I feel like my heart might burst if I loved him any more than I do now. I *know* he feels the same way about me and that just makes my heart beat even faster.

These simple moments, this laughter and love I feel for Brian, for my kids, and the love I get in return from them, it's what I'm most thankful for. Every moment that led to this, to us being who we are right at this moment, they may not have all been good, but we're here, lying on a pillow of snow, smiling at one another and feeling lighter than air. I'll remember times like this stronger than I'll remember past hurts. I know

that there were points we had to make it to, things that had to happen; all of it had to go perfectly, just so I could be here beside him, with our children's laughter as our soundtrack to this moment. This moment in which I feel so thankful for everything given to me.

Maybe other people would look at my life differently and wonder how I could be so happy. I guess I don't have any defense except to say, that's their point of view and this mine. I'm the happiest man alive because when I was five I met my best friend and soul mate and when the time was right, we fell in love forever. I guess since then, I've slowly become a bit of an optimist, but I'm proud to say, that's my point of view.

THE END

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