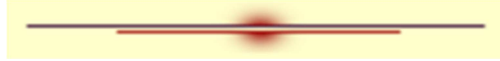


Apollo's End by rhiannonhero

WARNING: This fic contains character death.



Brian jerks awake to the sound of banging on the door of his loft. A quick check of his clock reveals that it's three in the morning, and he isn't expecting anyone.

Adrenaline pours through his system as he realizes that it must be an emergency for someone to be beating on his door at this time of the morning; immediately his mind turns to Michael who's on vacation with Ben in the Virgin Islands. Has there been an accident? Is Ben sick?

As he rolls out of bed, his feet hitting the hardwood floors, he thinks of Gus. His twenty year old son is a daredevil and Brian has heard all of the lectures from Gus' mommies about trying to convince his son to stop skydiving, parachuting, mountain climbing, and racing. But Brian always tells them, "What's the point of living if you're going to spend it dying?"

So Gus lives on the edge, courting disaster, and not quite kissing the lips of death. Brian isn't at all certain that when he opens the door he won't find a distraught Melanie, there to tell him that his son is dead.

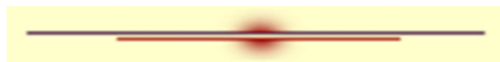
It's morbid the things one will think of when awakened in the middle of the night from a deep sleep.

He pulls on his sweat pants and walks to the door. Heart pounding, holding his breath, and preparing to lay into anyone who is standing there for any other reason than Michael or Gus is dead, he slides the door open, and his pounding heart stops.

Brian stares into the familiar blue eyes--the only thing that looks right. The person in the doorway is gaunt, and brittle, with hollow cheeks and dark shadows occupying the space under his eyes. He's weighed down under bags that look as though they are going to pull him to the floor; his hair is short, nearly gone, and there are dark red blotches on his face and scalp. Brian feels the floor give way under him.

"Hey. I was hoping you'd still be here," Justin whispers--if this skeleton in the door is really Justin. "You said that if I needed..." Justin trails off. "But if this is a bad time, or the offer no longer stands--"

"No. The offer stands." Brian relieves Justin of some of his bags. "Come in."



They'd spent twelve years together, until it had just been right to walk away. Justin had said that if they were going to be a forever thing, then they needed to spend some time apart. Brian had agreed because he always knew he'd have to let Justin go one day, and that thing they say about setting it free, and if it doesn't come back then it was never yours to begin with? Yeah. And now Brian sees that Justin is his, has been all along, and is returning to him to play out the last of his hours.

Justin stands in the middle of the loft, eyes racing over everything. "Not much has changed. A new coffee table, and that's about it."

"What can I say? My taste is timeless."

Justin laughs, runs a hand over his face, and asks, "Where...?"

"Here." Brian takes the rest of his bags, and leads the way to the bedroom. "We'll put them in here. You can unpack tomorrow."

Justin follows, his step nearly soundless, and Brian is startled when he turns, after placing the bags on the floor by the closet, and nearly knocks Justin over. He grasps Justin's arm to steady him, and asks, "Okay?"

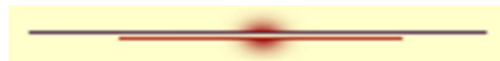
"Just tired, and a little clumsy." Justin runs his hands up and down Brian's arms, soothingly, just as he's done a million times before. Brian blinks rapidly. Justin is anything but clumsy.

"Want to shower?"

Justin shakes his head; he's trembling with exhaustion, and Brian doesn't ask any more questions, just helps him off with his shirt and jeans, and holds back the sheets for him to climb into bed.

Brian ditches his sweats and slides in beside Justin, following his instinct to curl up next to him, and he has to stop himself from gasping when his arms wrap around Justin's frame, finding it as frail as a bird's.

Brian doesn't believe in God, but if he did, the voice screaming in his head would be addressing him. "Why? Why Justin? Of all fucking people, why?"



As Brian makes breakfast he realizes that Justin just turned thirty-seven a few weeks ago, and he closes his eyes against the memories of Justin at seventeen, at twenty five, at thirty--the last time Brian had seen him.

Justin's voice is soft, and he stands with uncertain posture at the top step to the bedroom. "You don't have to let me stay. It was presumptuous of me to come. I should have called."

Brian turns back to the protein shake he's preparing, shakes his head, and says, "A deal's a deal." He looks back to Justin, and says words that would have been so hard once, but now

are just easy, because he's found as he's aged that truth is so much easier than lies. "And I want you here. You know that."

"If I'd known it was going to end up like this," Justin says, moving across the room to lean against the kitchen counter. "I'd have come back sooner. Hell, I never would have left."

Brian lets out a half-hearted laugh, and holds the top onto the blender, says quietly, "I know." And then snaps the blender on, any reply effectively halted by the screeching noise.

Justin pulls up a stool and sits down, cradling his head in his hands, and covering his ears to block out the sound. Brian snaps the blender off when its contents are thoroughly pulverized, then pulls down two glasses, before asking, "Who's been caring for you?"

Justin shakes his head. "No one. I should have come home before now, but I was ashamed. And I thought you might not want me." Brian shoots him a look, and Justin ducks his head in a nearly shy gesture. "Silly, I know."

"Have you been getting adequate medical attention?"

"I hear they have some pretty good doctors at Cedar Sinai," Justin's eyes twinkle as he teases. "Yes, of course."

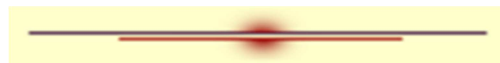
"And you've come home because...?"

Justin's eyes grow sad, and very old. "I wanted to be with you when I die. Call me a selfish bastard, but that's what I want. And when I realized that, I thought that I had nothing to lose, and I caught the next flight here."

Brian nods. He knows that Justin would have come to him anyway, but it also isn't as though he has anywhere else to turn. His mother died a few years ago of breast cancer, and his sister is overwhelmed with several small children. And his father...well, some rifts will never heal.

"I was stupid, Brian. I thought we'd have more time."

Brian pours the protein shake and puts Justin's down in front of him. "Drink it. It's got all your vitamins and minerals."



Rows of medicine bottles decorate his nightstand now, and Brian doesn't mind the clutter, what he minds is how sick Justin looks. When Justin had first come home, Brian had hoped that his talk of death had been melodrama, but since then he has attended every doctor's appointment, and understands that AIDS related cancer is eating Justin alive.

He sometimes leaves the loft, gets into his car, and drives for miles, screaming and screaming and screaming. Because this should have been anyone but Justin--it should have been him.

They cling to each other tightly at night, and they make love with some frequency. Justin urges Brian to fuck him harder, but he seems so small, so tiny and frail, that Brian can't bring

himself to lose control like he used to, so he drives Justin wild with tenderness, and holds him for a long time after they come.

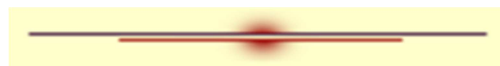
When Ben and Michael come to visit, Brian has to contain his rage that Ben is still healthy after all these years. It's unseemly for a man to yell at his best friend's lover that he should be the one dying, not the brightest star in the fucking universe. So of course, Brian refrains.

Gus actually cries the first time he sees Justin. They grew up together, and Justin has always been Gus' favorite. Brian has to leave the room when his son lets his head fall into Justin's lap, small, gasping sobs wracking his body.

There are days when Justin is so angry that Brian is afraid that he'll lose his temper, too. If he did that, he knows he'd never forgive himself, so he bites his tongue, and sometimes leaves the loft, rather than engage Justin in a fight over whose fault it had been that Justin decided to walk away eight years ago, or whether or not Brian had ever loved him.

Justin is contrite when Brian returns; rubbing his hands up and down Brian's arms, or petting his chest, saying, "I know you loved me."

And Brian, who's learned about time and how it takes things faster than he'd ever imagined possible, leans close and whispers in Justin's ear, "I do love you."

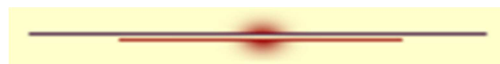


The final days are the worst. Brian has never known so much pain in his life, but he holds on tight, and Michael is there to keep him together when he's falling apart.

When Justin dies, Brian is asleep in the chair beside the bed, and he's awakened by the nurses coming in, and he knows before they can say a word, before he even notices the lack of blip on the monitors.

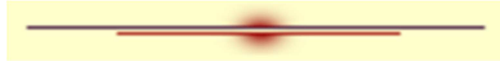
He gets up, walks out the door, and stops by the waiting area to tell Molly. He says, "He's gone." And he keeps on walking, out of the hospital where he brought Justin that first night, and where his son was born, down the street, and further, on and on, until darkness falls.

He sits down on a bench, puts his head in his hands, and cries. Michael finds him there hours later, calm and staring into the distance. And they sit together in silence, because there are no words to encompass this.



He packs up Justin's things, looks around the loft, sits on the edge of their bed, and turns off the light. The sheets still smell of him, and Brian buries his face in them.

He dreams of summer smiles, and sweet lips, and he wakes to the ache of loss. If Brian believed in a God, the voice in his head would be addressing him, "Fuck you. Fuck you forever, you fucking piece of shit."



Brian is old--that much he knows--and he vaguely understands that this is a bad thing. He feels too at peace, though, to care, and the soft pull of his son's voice is not nearly enough to distract his attention away from the light ahead, the brightest of lights. It's like sunshine is pouring into him, and he's smiling because it's Justin.

THE END