

**Bloodyrose82**

Pairing: Brian/Justin

Rating: R for cock being mentioned

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Sometimes there are people that walk into your life and make themselves so at home that you don't even realize how much they mean to you until they have gone. That's how it was for me, with Justin.

I never expected someone to walk into my life and make themselves such an integral part of the structure that makes up my day. What's more, I didn't want anyone to do that. I was happy with my life, or at least I thought I was. I had more money than I knew what to do with, a fantastic loft complete with the best Italian furniture I could get my hands on, a set of friends who made allowances for my lifestyle, whether they agreed with it or not.

I was satisfied with my existence, or at least as satisfied with it as someone like me could be. Love and relationships were things that happened to other people, nicer people, better people, people who didn't grow up in households with a crazy mother and a drunken father who liked to take out his worries on his son's body, turning him into a painting of blacks and blues.

But then, it didn't really matter, did it? Because I didn't believe love existed. Not really. I thought it was something that people made up to make themselves happy, to give them hope. People weaker than me. I thought I saw life for what it really was, without the soft padding of rose-tinted spectacles that everyone else wore. Or were they sunglasses, worn to keep away the glare of the sun, the harsh light of reality?

Maybe that's why I fell so hard under Sunshine's spell. Because I didn't believe love existed so therefore failed to take the proper precautions.

If I had known, I would have run away as fast as I could in the opposite direction; perhaps at the beginning, at least.

But now? Now I'm not sure how I ever survived before he stepped into my life. Twenty nine fucking years of living in the dark, of stalking around Babylon like a nocturnal predator, preying on those too weak to resist my charms.

I thought that was as good as it got; a different man every night. But they were all the same, really. I know that now. Different bodies, different faces, different names I could never remember and different lives each of them led, none of which I cared about.

And then there was Justin. Stupid, naïve, childish, innocent Justin, who had seen nothing, who knew nothing, but who, nonetheless, was already so much more of a man than I ever was, or could ever hope to be.

And he crept into my life like a fucking disease, infecting me with that blinding smile of his, and that simple, unwavering child-like belief in me that he had somehow held right from the start.

To Justin, my games were worthless. He had no idea of the rules, so he couldn't hope to play, which, in a fucked up way, allowed him to win anyway. He had never made a hobby out of wearing a mask, and thus rendered the one I wore as completely invisible.

Justin didn't see Brian, the promiscuous party boy who fucked his way through the queer faction of Pittsburgh. He didn't see Brian, the hot shot ad-exec who had everyone eating out of the palm of his hand. He just saw Brian Kinney, the man who was scared shitless of showing any emotion other than anger or lust. The man who went to elaborate pains to cover up any sort of gesture he made that even hinted at looking like he cared for anybody other than himself.

But more than that, he loved that man. He loved *me* with such god damn ease that it blew my mind.

There were no walls erected around Justin's heart, and it was as easy as watching some stranger walk up to him on a dark night, pick him up and take him home. He just fell into it, as he fell into anything else, and with such fucking grace too, that he made me feel ashamed.

Me, Brian Kinney, almost thirty, who had seen more of the ugliness life had to give than he cared to think about, and I felt ashamed because a seventeen year old high-school virgin seemed far more able to open up, to be himself, than I ever could.

So I let him into my home, into my life, and eventually into my heart, all three with much reluctance, I might add.

And I had the pleasure of watching him grow up, turning from a gorgeous boy into an even more gorgeous man. But contradicting what everyone else said about him, he was never truly a kid, not in any significant sense of the word. I was more of a child that he ever was, I suspect. A child trapped in a man's body, and through watching him grow, having the privilege of being right alongside him for a significant part of that journey, I managed to grow up a little too.

I would like to think that I didn't fuck up too much along the way, but I would be lying to myself if I did, and I try not to do that too much these days. It's one of the things I started doing for Justin's sake, but in a strange way I could see the benefit I gained from it, and thus started doing it for myself too.

The truth is, I fucked up a lot. I had, and maybe still have, a horrible habit of shooting myself in the foot, and somehow manage to blow off everyone else's heads in the process.

But I think now that maybe it wasn't such a bad thing. It's a struggle to be perfect all of the time, and however much I hate to admit it, I'm not so sure anymore that I ever was really perfect in the first place.

A perfect asshole, perhaps, but nothing more.

If there's one thing I have taken away from my life with Justin, and in all honesty, I couldn't even begin to recount all of the things he has taught me about myself, then it's the fact that it's okay to make mistakes.

I'm not infallible; I know that now. Life is so fucking tenacious, and it can be snatched away in the blink of an eye, be it through the swing of a baseball bat, a bomb, or a fucking bunch of cancerous cells. In a fucked up way, Justin says it makes us stronger, more determined to cling onto life.

And cling on I do. It's been a year since he left to find himself in New York, and still I have this stupid little seed of hope that one day, somehow, in some way, he will come back to me. He's too important to me for it not to happen, and yes, I know how selfish that sounds.

But who the fuck would I be if I wasn't selfish? Not god damn Brian Kinney, that's for sure. I may have learned a lot of things but I'm not a fucking dyke, not like Mikey and Ben, who think that even though they are fags, they can have everything heterosexual couples can.

They can't, and I don't think that has to be a bad thing. I have no pressing need to mold myself into somebody else's shape.

I have regrets though, sure. Plenty of fucking regrets. Not that I'd admit it to anyone if they asked. I'd have to be tortured first, have my cock threatened. Maybe then I would tell. Maybe.

What's my biggest regret? Not that I let Justin go, like some people might think. I don't regret that because it wasn't my place to ask him to stay. And it certainly wasn't my place to go with him. I couldn't do that to him, not when I'd burdened him enough already.

My biggest regret, the one thing I would wish for if I conjured up a genie when I rubbed my bottle of Beam, is that I could find a way to make it work, before it got to all that.

Stupid I know. It's an idealist's dream and one I'm not proud of by any means. Nothing new there, I guess. If I thought about it realistically, I would admit to myself that we were always destined to end that way, with him flying off into the sunset and leaving me behind with my demons, and quite possibly a good share of his.

He was too young to be chained down, and I was too idiotic. But that doesn't mean I don't wish it could have played out in a different way, like one of those weird foreign art-house movies with the alternative endings, or perhaps one of those adventure books Mikey used to read when we were kids. The kind where you roll a dice and let the number determine the page you turn to next, and in turn you get a different plot with a different ending.

But life isn't like that, is it? It doesn't always go the way we want it to, and love doesn't always mean a happy ever after. Especially not for me.

So, here I am now, almost another year older, not any the wiser, and it feels like nothing has changed.

Outwardly, at least, my life is in stasis. I go to work, boss people around, pick on Theodore for doing the damn good job he always has done, go and grab lunch at the diner and get a lecture from Deb, work some more, meet the boys for a few drinks at Woody's, and finally, end the night as I do every night - back at Babylon, letting the headache-inducing pound of

the music lull me into a false sense of security. If I close my eyes and lean back, a drink or nine inside of me, I can pretend it's just like the old days, and Justin will walk in the door at any moment and pull me into the backroom.

But I stalk through the blue lights alone these days, tricking like I always have, but caring even less, not even bothering to pretend that it's the most important thing in my life anymore. Because it isn't.

Nothing is important anymore, not really. Not that I'm depressed or anything like that. Far from it. There just isn't that little blonde something to look forward to going home to every night, and however much I thought the empty space where he used to be wouldn't matter, it does.

The silence is so loud sometimes that I even go so far as to visiting Deb and Emmett so their chatter can drag me back down towards a sense of calm.

Sometimes I wonder if maybe it would be easier if Justin and I cut all ties between us, but I could never bring myself to do that. We email each other, mostly. Phone calls are too hard, and it takes too much out of me to hear his voice yet not be able to see him. I never realized how much you could tell about a person just by the tone of their voice; it's mind-blowing, really.

If he chatters on and on then I know he had a good day, and that's okay, but it's the stretches of silence I can't stand. The single word answers spoken in a monotone. When I heard those it took all of my strength, and a half-bottle of Beam, not to hop on the next plane and fly out to him on some sort of rescue attempt.

But I know he has to rescue himself these days, so we email each other instead. It's quick, it's simple, we both get to think over our words before we expose the other to them. And in a strange way it makes everything that is said seem so much more important. Because the words aren't just used on a whim. At least, mine aren't.

**From: Brian [Kinney BKinney@Kinnetik.com](mailto:KinneyBKinney@Kinnetik.com)**

**Subject: Not checking up on you, but...**

**I haven't heard from you in a few days. Does this mean the show went well, or have you been too busy drowning your sorrows to check your email?**

**Brian.**

**From: Justin [Jtaylor@NYISP.net](mailto:Jtaylor@NYISP.net)**

**Subject: Brian Kinney is worried?**

**The show was great! You should have been there. Wine flowed freely and there were plenty of artistic, beautiful men around. Sold four paintings, which is a start.**

**Been busy, hence the lack of e-mail. Worried, were you?**

**How are things in the Pitts?**

**J**

**xox**

**From: Brian [BKinney@Kinnetik.com](mailto:BKinney@Kinnetik.com)**

**Subject: I don't do worried.**

**Of course I wasn't worried, Sunshine. Just checking to see if everything went well, and to get Debbie off my back. You know how she is.**

**Four paintings? Right little fucking Picasso, aren't you?**

**The Pitts are the same. Trying to convince Emmett that I don't want him to plan a fucking party for me. Why celebrate birthdays? Fucking fags. Talking of which, you didn't help matters, you little shit!**

**Later.**

**Brian.**

**P.S. 381**

**From: Justin [Jtaylor@NYCISP.net](mailto:Jtaylor@NYCISP.net)**

**Subject: You're soooo old...**

**You should let Emm plan the party; never know when you will get to have another! It wasn't my fault, so don't blame me. I just told him how much fun it would be to throw a party for someone like you. Someone chic, classy...**

**Picasso, right! If only my paintings fetched as much as his do.**

**What the hell does 381 mean? Is that the amount of days I've been gone for? I wasn't keeping track.**

**Sentimental ass.**

**J**

**xoxo**

**From: Justin [Jtaylor@NYCISP.net](mailto:Jtaylor@NYCISP.net)**

**Subject: Hello?**

**Brian, why haven't you replied? Not still mad that I encouraged Emmett, are you? Or about the sentimental ass comment?**

**Not that I'm concerned or anything...**

**Just call me, okay?**

**J**

**xox**

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**I couldn't bring myself to answer his email. God, I was so fucking stupid, telling him something like that, revealing myself in that way...**

**Even if he didn't understand it.**

**Emmett and Mikey are still going on about my birthday. I don't see the big fucking deal. I've never thought it a good idea to celebrate; what's the point? It only means I'm yet another year older. Not something I want to be reminded of. Who in their right mind would? I don't like to think about my own mortality, especially when...well....he's not here with me.**

**Stupid really. I coped fine without him before. But things change, don't they? However much I try and dig my heels in and pretend that they haven't.**

**I'm tempted to get on a plane and fly somewhere exotic. That way, I can spend my birthday on a beach somewhere hot, drinking the hours away until it's safe to come back here again.**

**But I can't really motivate myself to do it. These days I'm finding it hard to make myself believe that out of sight is out of mind.**

**Besides, it's too late now anyway. I suppose I could just go to the airport and get on the next available flight, but it's pointless, just like everything else. I can run, but I can't hide anymore. Not from myself. And I would only have to put up with the arguments when I got back home.**

**So instead, I'm spending the day at the office. I've locked myself in my room, refusing to take any calls. It's been quiet so far, eerily so. It makes me wonder what the fuck everyone is up to. As long as it involves drinking and dancing, maybe a little sex, it won't be all that bad. Just as long as they don't bring out a cake in the middle of Babylon and expect me to blow out a few dozen candles.**

**Now, blowing something else, that wouldn't be so bad.**

I wait until it's past six and then tentatively open the door as quietly as I can. It's fucking ridiculous, since it's my building, my business, and here I am sneaking around like I've done something wrong.

It's dead, thank fuck. Cynthia is sitting in reception, her nose buried in some sort of trashy style magazine for heteros, and I sneak past her, making it to the exit with a sigh of relief. Maybe I can make it back to the loft, lock myself in, and turn off the phone. Maybe that way I can escape the day without having to hear a single 'happy birthday.' There's nothing happy about this day, and certainly not the event it is supposedly meant to celebrate: the day I was born.

I step out of the elevator and go to put my key in the lock.

It won't turn.

I'm automatically on edge, cursing myself for giving Mikey a god damn copy of the key, giving in to his claims that somebody should have one in case of an emergency. I consider bolting for the stairs, but this is *my* fucking home and I can just kick the lot of them out.

I pull open the door, expecting a few dozen of my supposed nearest and dearest to jump out of the shadows, yelling 'surprise!', but everything is silent and dark.

I turn on the lights, bracing myself.

Nothing.

Everything looks the same as how it did when I left the loft this morning, and I automatically chastise myself. Maybe my friends have finally caught on to the fact I don't fucking want to do anything special on my birthday.

I feel almost disappointed, and mentally berate myself. I don't *want* them to be here, and I *would* chuck them out if they were, but I can't help but feel a little twinge of something because nobody bothered.

I drop my briefcase down on the countertop and pull off my tie, heading into the kitchen for a glass. I pour myself a finger's worth of Beam and down it in one before walking across the loft and up the stairs into the bedroom.

Where I pause. And blink. Twice.

"Hello, birthday boy."

I rub a hand over my face, wondering if I've been drinking too much lately, perhaps working too hard. I must be seeing things.

He laughs from his position on my bed.

"You didn't return my e-mails so I thought I would fly over and talk to you face to face. Then I remembered it was your birthday and I thought I would give you a special gift..."

I narrow my eyes at his wicked grin, and then let them trail down his body, taking him in. He's naked apart from one of my shirts, loosely buttoned, hanging off one of his shoulders. The hardness of his cock is evident through the material that stops at the top of his thighs.

I don't think I have ever seen anything more beautiful.

"Aren't you going to unwrap your gift?" he asks, and raises one eyebrow.

I lick my lips and take a step towards him, but he continues speaking, forcing me to pause in my tracks.

"I spoke to Linds at the weekend," he tells me. "She put Gus on the phone..."

"That's nice," I murmur, wishing he would shut up.

I crawl onto the bed and straddle his hips, reaching out to undo the bottom button of the shirt he's wearing. My shirt. God, that's such a fucking turn on.

"He told me something," Justin continues. "I'd heard it before but couldn't place where. I asked him what it meant..."

"Uh huh..." I undo a couple more buttons, running my fingers up over the skin of his stomach underneath my shirt.

"Three words, eight letters, one meaning," he says, and I freeze, looking down at him.

I knew that typing those three fucking numbers was a mistake.

"Then I remembered where I had heard it before," Justin says, his eyes on me, and he reaches up, undoing the remaining few buttons for himself, pushing the material to the side to reveal his chest.

I glance down at his skin and suck in a shaky breath.

"Your email, Brian," he whispers, his gaze intent on my face. "That's where I had seen it."

There on his chest, in some sort of red paint, he has delicately written, with his usual precision, three numbers, the point of the third number brushing against his right nipple.

"381, Brian," Justin whispers, his fingers tugging on my hair, and pulls me down for a searing kiss, before breathing out against my lips. "I love you."

Maybe birthdays aren't so bad after all.

-end-