Like It's Supposed to Be by Cindy

‘It’s only been a week and already I feel like I’m going to explode.’

Justin was pulled out of his thoughts by a feeling of warmth and looked down to find Ethan’s hand resting on his thigh. He followed the trail up along the attached arm slowly, as if in a daze and finally came to land on the deep, brown eyes of his boyfriend. He couldn’t help but return the smile that was plastered across Ethan’s face, but it wasn’t one of his best. He knew who received those and it wasn’t the man across from him.

Needing to break away, Justin turned to watch the scenery pass by and lost himself in his thoughts again, trying to ignore the feeling of the hand still on his leg. His mind drifted to the same place it always did. To the only man who his smile really did beam for. To the one that seemed to occupy his thoughts, no matter how hard he tried to steer them in another direction. It wasn’t any use and he’d given up trying. Brian was always going to be there.

He heard the loud whir of the engine and the squeak of the breaks and realized that they were there. He coughed slightly as a small amount of smoke that always accompanied the stop of the car seeped into the interior.

“Sorry,” Ethan said with an apologetic smile.

Turning towards the other man, waving his hand in front of his face, trying his best to clear the smoke from his path, Justin said, “I’ve told you a million times not to apologize.”

“I know, but I feel bad. I know that you’re not used to traveling in such style,” the musician said sarcastically, pleased to receive a soft laugh from his lover.

“Yeah, well, what can I say, I only go for the best.” Even though Justin was also being sarcastic, he couldn’t help but think about what the best really was. He knew that Ethan felt bad that he only had a shitty, beat up car that always broke down, seeming to draw a crowd of attention, which many times had included the fire department. But he knew what Ethan was talking about. How when Justin was with Brian he had only the best of everything. He knew that Ethan wished that he could give him the same, but the thing was, that Justin didn’t feel bad about it. Not for even a second.

He knew that when he was with Brian things were always top of the line and with Ethan they were usually bargain basement. But he didn’t think about it too much because truthfully, at the back of his mind, he knew that one day he would be back to the life that he was used to. With the man that he was meant for. A clear indication of this, to Justin, was the fact that he NEVER referred to Ethan as his lover. Not even in his mind. Ethan was his boyfriend and never went beyond that. Justin wasn’t exactly sure why he felt that way, but he had a pretty good idea and as he looked up, exiting his boyfriend’s shitbox, he saw the answer walking into the house just ahead of them.

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“Hey, baby, how’s everything?” Emmett gushed, pulling Justin into a warm hug as he passed through the door of Debbie’s house.

“Fine, good, great,” the blond said against the taller man’s shoulder. He smiled brightly at his friend, so happy that with everything that had happened in the past week, he hadn’t been deserted by his ‘family’. He was afraid that they would just toss him aside, after what he’d done to Brian, but that wasn’t the case. No one had picked sides. Well, no one except…

“What the fuck are YOU doing here?” Michael shouted from the kitchen.

Justin instantly felt his stomach clench and had to tell himself not to turn around and run out the front door.

“Michael!”

“No, Ma, he doesn’t deserve to be here with us. Not after what he did.” Michael turned back towards the living room, not finished with his assault. He pointed to the man, lurking behind Justin and said, “And how the fuck do you have the nerve to bring HIM here? To MY house when you know that Brian is going to be here?”

Debbie moved into the living room, placing herself an even distance from her son and Justin, then turned towards Michael and said in a voice that left no room for doubt, “Michael, this is MY house and Justin has every right to be here. He is part of this family, always, no matter what. He also has the right to bring whoever the fuck he wants to MY home, so I suggest that you just shut the fuck up about it.”

Michael was stunned that his mother would stand up for Justin like that. He couldn’t stop the rage that was coursing through him. He felt betrayed by his mother. She was supposed to stand up for HIM, not some blond twink that had wormed his way into his best friend’s life and made a permanent place for himself in HIS family. It just wasn’t supposed to be that way. HE was supposed to be the focus of everyone’s attention, not this little shit standing in front of him.

Pleased that Michael hadn’t said another word, Deb turned towards Justin, who looked even paler than normal, and smiled warmly. “Sunshine, get your ass in here. You know that we love you and you’re always welcome in MY home.”

“Thanks Deb,” Justin said with a genuine smile that almost reached his eyes.

“Now, who the hell is hiding behind your back?” the woman said with her usual flair.

“Oh, Deb, this is Ethan. My, um, boyfriend,” the blond said with a little hesitation, which earned him a stern look from the musician.

“Hi, it’s nice to finally meet all of you,” Ethan said politely as his eyes scanned the occupants of the room.

“Well, aren’t you a cute, little thing,” Emmett gushed happily. He was glad that Justin had found what he was looking for. But, for some reason, he knew that it wasn’t what the blond thought it would be. He could tell by the way the younger man’s eyes didn’t seem to sparkle like they used to. And then there was the smile that the artist was so famous for. He had witnessed many times when the boy’s beaming face could cheer up even the most desperate of customers at the diner.

There had also been many occasions when Emmett had been so down that he’d thought that things would never be good again, but then Justin had sat down and talked to him, bringing his own brand of warmth and love, and that secret weapon of his that seemed to harbor the sun, and he felt like maybe things would be alright again. But now, he didn’t even see a trace of those things in the boy before him. He wondered for a moment where they had gone as he watched Justin listening to Deb. Then suddenly he felt a jolt of hope pass through him as something flashed inside those amazing blue eyes and he turned to see what it was that the boy had seen to cause the reaction and his gaze landed on Brian.

Luckily for everyone, especially Michael, Brian hadn’t heard a thing that had happened inside the house. As soon as he’d come in, he’d gone into the backyard for a cigarette and had missed the floorshow. Emmett watched the man walk in on the scene, taking it all in with his usual calm demeanor. He just hoped that Michael would keep his big mouth shut for the remainder of the evening and that Ethan’s presence wouldn’t make things too difficult for Brian. Emmett knew that the man let everyone believe that he was tough as nails and nothing ever got to him, but he knew the truth. Brian was just as vulnerable as everyone else, not matter how hard he tried to prove otherwise.

He’d seen it first hand when he’d stopped over at Brian’s a few days after Justin had left him for the musician. The man was beyond drunk and had let several things slip that he was sure that Brian had no intention of ever letting anyone know. Emmett had listened, trying his best not to cry at the sad sight of the usually strong, proud man who had turned into a tortured, heartbroken shell of the person he knew. He was shocked that Brian had allowed him to hold him as he cried then put him to bed. He wondered if the man remembered anything the next morning or had forgotten it all as the drunken haze faded away. He wouldn’t dare ask Brian. He wouldn’t put him in that position. He’d just live with the private knowledge of how deeply Brian had been affected by the beautiful blond and how he’d helped a friend in his time of need.

“What’s going on in here?” Brian asked with his usual attitude as his eyes moved between Michael, Debbie and Justin. He pretended not to know, but the truth was that he had heard every word. He was outside, trying to gain the courage to go inside, knowing that Justin was in there with the fucking banjo player. He’d seen them pulling up to the house in the dilapidated piece of shit that somewhat passed for a car as he’d been going through the front door. Quickly, he’d said his hellos and moved to the backyard, barely escaping the anxiety attack that threatened to overcome him with the thought of Justin and the fucker in the same vicinity.

“Nothing, everything’s fine,” Justin answered, surprising everyone with his calmness.

Brian just nodded and couldn’t help it as his eyes traveled to the side of the blond, taking in the greasy-haired man next to him. “Aren’t you going to introduce everyone to your boyfriend?” the older man asked, hoping that his last word hadn’t sounded as strained as he thought it did.

“I already did,” Justin said, his eyes staring straight into Brian’s. He couldn’t help the thrill that ran down his spine at being close enough to look into the eyes that he’d missed so much.

Brian felt a familiar thrill as Justin’s piercing blue eyes locked on his. On the outside he looked calm and held his usual disinterested demeanor, but on the inside, he was melting. He’d missed those eyes so fucking much. He’d missed everything about the blond and as hard as he tried to tell himself that it was just the incredible sex he missed, it was so much more. He missed holding Justin when they fell asleep. He missed waking up in the middle of the night and reaching over to find the boy’s soft, warm skin beneath his fingers. He missed the way Justin would never shut up, going on and on about the silliest things while Brian pretended to be bored and disinterested when he really couldn’t get enough.

But most of all, Brian missed the way he felt when they would have sex. Make love. He knew it was making love. He’d figured that out a long time ago, even though he would never admit it to anyone else. Since the boy had left him, he’d had plenty of sex, but nothing could compare. Nothing ever did. He wanted his golden boy. Wanted to argue with him, to eat with him, to shower with him, to watch cartoons with him on Saturday morning, to sleep with him and wake up with him, but most of all, he just wanted to feel him…beside him, beneath him, all around him.

Seeing the way Brian and Justin’s eyes were locked on each other, Debbie said, “Well, now that everyone knows everyone, let’s eat.”

Everyone took their seats at the kitchen table. Michael and Ben sat at one end, purposely separated from Justin and Ethan by Mel and Lindsay. Brian took the only vacant seat, which just happened to be next to Ethan. Everyone looked around nervously, waiting for Brian’s reaction at having to be so close to the man he obviously detested, but there wasn’t one. The man was his usual aloof self.

“So, Ethan, Justin tells us that you play the violin,” Debbie began, wanting to make the young man feel as welcome as possible, even if she really just wanted him gone from all their lives. She watched the food being passed around the table as everyone filled their plates and listened intently for the man’s reply.

“Yes, I do. It’s my major, but it’s also my passion. I’ve been playing ever since I can remember,” Ethan said openly.

“Well, I hope that we get a chance to hear you play sometime,” Vic said, trying to follow in his sister’s footsteps in making the guest at ease.

“Maybe,” Ethan said with a nod of his head. He looked at his boyfriend, noticing that the man had been awfully quiet since they’d sat down to eat. He wondered if everything was okay. Placing his hand on Justin’s leg he gave a reassuring squeeze, receiving a weak smile in return. He wondered if coming had been a bad idea after all. He’d pressured Justin into bringing him, telling him that if he planned on being part of Justin’s life he needed to be a part of the whole thing, including his so-called extended family. The blond finally caved in and let him come, although reluctantly. Ethan wasn’t exactly sure why he didn’t want him to come, but as he sat there, eating and spending time with the others, he realized why. Brian. It was always about Brian. He wondered if they’d ever be able to move past him.

Justin suddenly stood up and everyone’s eyes focused on him, making him feel very self-conscious. “I’m going to the bathroom,” Justin found himself explaining.

“Oh, sweetie, use the one upstairs. We’re having a little problem with the one down here,” Debbie said, glaring at her son.

“Ma, I said I was sorry,” Michael whined.

“I know, I know, but I just don’t understand WHAT made you think that it was okay to flush a huge wad of Kleenex down the toilet like that? Why didn’t you just put it in the garbage can? And what the hell were you doing with that much Kleenex in the first place? You don’t have a cold.” Deb looked expectantly at her son.

Michael blushed beet red and his eyes cast downwards as his hands twisted nervously in his lap.

“Oh,” was the only thing Deb said, understanding completely what her son had been doing in the bathroom. “Well, next time, jerk off at your own house or use the trash can instead of the toilet.”

“Ma!” Michael shrieked as everyone around the table began to laugh.

No one noticed the blond head upstairs. Well, no one except Brian, who couldn’t handle the scene inside any longer so he got up and headed out the front door for a smoke. Everyone watched him go, then noticed Justin’s absence and looked at Ethan, not missing the conflicted look on his face. They all wondered just how long it would take before everything would be right again, and unfortunately for the musician, that meant having him out of the picture.

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Justin relieved himself and was washing his hands when he looked into the mirror and saw an unfamiliar pair of eyes looking back at him. ‘When did I get so sad?’ he wondered, not seeing even a trace of the familiar sparkle and joy in his own eyes. He knew what the answer was, and even though he tried not to think about it, it was very difficult with the temptation so close by downstairs. He shook his head, amazed at himself. “What the fuck was I thinking?” he said softly, a question that he seemed to ask himself at least a hundred times a day since he’d started the whole affair with Ethan. The problem was, he never really had an answer. At least not one that was worth anything.

Justin wanted the words. He wanted them so desperately that he was willing to accept them from someone else, fooling himself into thinking that even if they didn’t come from Brian, they meant something. But the truth was, that if they don’t come from the right person, the only person that you need to hear them from, they meant nothing. He hadn’t realized that Brian had said the words to him everyday. In the way that he helped him, cared for him, listened to him, was there for him…the words were there in everything he did. Justin was just too stupid to listen to them and now look at where he was. In a bathroom, staring at himself in the mirror, wondering how the fuck he’d gotten so lost.

Exiting the bathroom, Justin couldn’t stomach the idea of heading back downstairs just yet so he made a detour into his old room. Michael’s room. As he stepped through the doorway he was instantly bombarded with countless memories. Most of them were good, even great, with only a few bad ones scattered around which he quickly pushed aside. He moved around the room, not bothering to turn on the light, preferring the soft glow from the backyard lamps in the neighboring yard. He smiled as the thoughts flew through his mind with such clarity, like watching a favorite movie. Standing in front of the widow, he looked out onto the backyard and let the movie play out, stopping every so often to linger on a particular scene then letting it move along.

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Brian leaned against the side of the house smoking his second cigarette and looking out at the street in front of him. To anyone who was watching, they would have thought that he was engrossed in the happenings of the busy street, but that was far from the truth. His mind was completely focused elsewhere. On one particular blond that never seemed to leave his thoughts for very long.

Brian knew he had to escape his torturous confinement and knew he had his chance when everyone was focused on another one of Michael’s fuck ups. No one even noticed Justin leave the room and he was pretty sure they hadn’t noticed him. He knew they all meant well and were trying so hard to make things easy between him and Justin, but it wasn’t easy at all. At least not for him. Then there was the fucking fiddler. Throw him into the mix and it just blew everything out of the water. How the hell was he supposed to just sit there, next to the home-wrecker to boot, and pretend that all was right with the world when in fact, just about nothing was right with HIS world.

Everything had changed the second HIS boy had walked out on him. He put on a good show and let everyone think that things were the same. No excuses, no apologies, no regrets. That was his motto, his code-for-life, after all. But the truth was, that he was a fucking mess. He’d tried not to let anyone know and he thought he’d succeeded so far, but he didn’t know how much longer he could go on pretending, especially with the blond so close at hand.

He was sure that Emmett knew how he felt. He vaguely remembered a night when he was so drunk, trying desperately to numb the ache in his heart with way too much Jack Daniels, and the brave man had ventured over to his loft. Everyone else was so afraid to rouse him for fear of his wrath, but not Emmett. He knew that Brian was all bullshit and bravado and when the weepy, hazel-eyed man started baring his soul, and couldn’t stop, Emmett took it all in confidence and comforted him. He never even let on, not the next morning at the diner when the guys were together for breakfast, not later that day at the gym or even that evening at Woody’s and Babylon. And not in the many days that had passed since then had Emmett even hinted at the fragile state that he’d found Brian in. No, he’d held his tongue and remained loyal to a friend who was in need and Brian knew that he’d never forget that. In his life, he could only think of a few other people who had done that for him. The main one being the blond that was inside the house.

Tossing the butt to the ground and grinding it out beneath the toe of his boot, Brian took a deep breath, stealing himself for what lay ahead and walked back inside. He looked into the kitchen, watching everyone talk and laugh and instantly felt a warmth pass through him. He was lucky to have them. Everyone of them. Well, everyone except Ethan, who had infringed himself into the group of people. But he noticed that one person was missing. The only one that he really cared to see must still be upstairs. Realizing that no one had noticed his return he quietly made his way towards the stairs and headed up them.

Brian was unaware of the caring pair of blue eyes that discreetly followed his movements as a warm smile spread across Emmett’s face.

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Justin didn’t know how long he’d been upstairs and he really didn’t care. He was in no rush to rejoin the festivities downstairs when he felt so tortured inside. He knew it wasn’t fair, leaving Ethan alone with people that he didn’t even know, but that still didn’t give him enough motivation to move.

As if an electric shock had passed through the room, Justin straightened up as a pleasant buzz coursed through him. Brian. Brian had entered the room. No sooner had the thought crossed his mind, when he felt the man behind him. Brian’s body pressed closely against him and the man’s strong arms wrapped possessively around his waist. Justin sighed at the incredible feeling of being safe and let himself lean back into the embrace.

Brian didn’t know what had come over him and was a little surprised to feel himself in the familiar position that he was now in, but he also sighed and pressed his cheek against the softness of Justin’s silky hair. Rubbing it back and forth against the now longer strands, he wanted to imprint their scent and texture into his memory. Not that they weren’t already there. He knew every inch of the blond’s body and every scent that the man gave off by heart. He just needed more. Always more of HIS boy.

“What are you doing?” Justin asked hesitantly. He didn’t want to scare Brian off, but he needed to know why the man that hadn’t made the effort to keep him in his life, his home, his bed, was holding him now.

Deciding to be truthful, for once, Brian said, “I needed to feel you.”

“Why?” the blond asked, trying desperately to hold back the tears that threatened to spill from his eyes. He wanted Brian to hold him and never let him go, but he knew that wasn’t going to happen. He wanted to savor the feeling of the man he loved so desperately pressed against him, but he needed answers and couldn’t just let it go.

“I…I…”

Turning around to face Brian, unable to hold his tears at bay any longer as a few slipped down his cheeks, he sniffed and asked again, “Why?”

Taking in the sight of the breathtaking man in front of him, seeing the tears run down the soft skin of his cheeks and wanting to do anything to make them stop, Brian leaned in and placed a gentle kiss to each of the boy’s eyes. “Please don’t cry,” he whispered.

Looking back up at Brian, his heart aching with the still so fresh pain of their breakup, Justin saw the unmistakable love in the man’s eyes and wondered how he could have been so blind as to not have seen it before. Still, he needed Brian to answer him. He realized now, after being with Ethan, that words weren’t everything, but sometimes, they still needed to be said. “Why?”

Sighing heavily, knowing that Justin wasn’t going to just let it go, Brian answered, “Because I…I miss you, Justin.”

Instantly, Justin’s smile lit the almost dark room with such brightness that it was practically blinding. Brian couldn’t help but smile in return. Even though his own smile couldn’t rival that of the blond’s it was, nonetheless, breathtaking.

“I missed you too, Brian,” the younger man finally said, after trying to calm his rapidly beating heart.

Brian pulled Justin even closer as their bodies meshed together, fitting perfectly like two pieces of the same puzzle. But before anything else could be said, they were torn out of their happiness by an intruding voice.

“Well, isn’t this a cozy sight?” Ethan said mockingly, trying to contain his burning anger.

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Meanwhile, downstairs while everyone was still busy eating and joking around, Debbie suddenly realized that three members of their dinner party were missing. She turned to Vic and asked quietly, “Did you see Brian come back in?”

Looking at the front door that was now completely shut, which he had noticed had been left slightly ajar when Brian had gone outside for a cigarette, Vic shifted his gaze towards the stairs and smiled. “Nope, but I think I know where he is, as well as the other two,” the older man said with a slightly satisfied smile. He knew that Brian wouldn’t let the gawky teenager that seemed to have enticed Justin into his life have HIS boy for long. Needing to make sure everything was okay, and quite frankly, not wanting to miss the show, Vic stood up and made his way towards the stairs.

“Hey, wait for me,” Deb said, rushing towards her brother after realizing what the hell was going on.

Looking at the pair heading upstairs, Ted asked the group still seated at the table, “What the hell is going on?”

“Well, sweetie, I think that someone is taking back what’s his,” Emmett said in a knowing voice, then stood up and headed to where the action was with a still confused but nosey Ted following close behind.

Lindsay and Mel just looked at each other, both shrugging their shoulders and got up to join the rest of the family that seemed to have gravitated upstairs. They were both happy that they’d decided to have an adult night and leave Gus with the babysitter, not really sure of the drama that they were about to witness and not wanting their two year old to be a part of it.

Michael looked at Ben and opened his mouth to say something but Ben just waved him off and stood up. “You coming?” he asked his sour-faced lover.

“Why the fuck would I want to see what’s going on up there?” Michael nodded towards the ceiling.

“Fine, suit yourself, but I don’t want to miss it. I hope that Brian has finally come to his senses and is going to get Justin back.”

“What the hell are you talking about?” Michael spat out and stood abruptly as if someone had slapped him in the face. Shaking his head in defiance, the whiny-little man droned on, “Brian doesn’t want that two-timing liar back. He…he…I…”

“Michael, you can believe whatever you need to in order to make it through the day, but know this,” Ben said, moving closer to his lover. “In the end, all that matters to Brian is Justin. You’re his friend, so be his friend and do what’s right for him.” Ben moved out of the kitchen, towards the stairs, then turned back and added, “ Oh, and get the fuck over yourself. It’s time to grow up Michael and decide what and who you really want. I’m tired of waiting around for you, so you’d better hurry up.” And with that, Ben headed upstairs.

“Well, I…he…Brian…urrghhhhhh.” Michael was at a loss for words. He thought that Ben understood about him and Brian, but maybe he was wrong. Maybe he had to rethink about what HE wanted. He knew he loved Ben, but was he settling for someone else when who he really wanted, had always wanted was within his grasp? His frown deepened when he thought about what his lover had said, about Brian wanting Justin back. Could that be true? God, he didn’t want it to be true. He hated Justin for pushing away the one thing that he’d always wanted. How could the blond be so stupid? He would give anything for the chance that the boy had just thrown away. Sighing loudly, Michael realized that he’d better head upstairs to see what the outcome was. He wondered if he even stood a chance against Justin or were his dreams just that - dreams.

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“Ethan,” Justin gasped in surprise.

“Sorry, am I interrupting something? Is this a bad time? Maybe I should come back after you finish fucking MY lover?” Ethan lashed out, staring at Brian and letting his anger get the best of him.

Justin put his hand on Brian’s chest, stopping the man from rushing forward and keeping him silent. “Ethan,” Justin whispered, not sure exactly what to say. Just then, he noticed the group of people standing in the doorway behind Ethan. For a second, his mind wondered just how eight people could squish themselves into such a small space, but then he quickly let the question slip from his mind and focused back on the matter at hand. Ethan. God, he really didn’t want to do this with an audience. He smiled weakly at the on-lookers and motioned with his head for them to leave, but they all just smiled back and shook their heads. He sighed heavily, knowing that he didn’t have a hope in hell that the group of drama queens and people who were always butting into his life would pass up a chance at seeing the moment play out in full color.

Justin moved to the side, easing out of Brian’s embrace, needing to stand alone to face his irate boyfriend.

Brian had turned slightly at Ethan’s interruption and stayed that way. His eyes kept moving back and forth between Justin and the fiddler, watching to see who would make the next move. He couldn’t help but feel a little betrayed that Justin had left his side and chose to stand alone instead of face the onslaught together. He hoped it wasn’t an indication of what was to come.

“That’s all you have to say. My fucking name?” the fiddler shouted.

“No, I…I just…I’m sorry,” Justin said weakly.

“Exactly what the fuck are you sorry for?” Ethan asked heatedly, moving dangerously closer to the blond.

Not able to keep still another second, seeing the grease ball move in on Justin, Brian sprang forward, putting himself in between the two younger men. He stood at his full height, wanting to impend himself over the musician. He glared down at him and growled, “Don’t you fucking touch him.”

“Don’t YOU tell me what the hell I can do, he’s MY lover, not yours,” Ethan ground out, not letting Brian intimidate him.

“The fuck he is. You may think that he’s yours, but let me tell you something, you fucking little slime ball, he’s MINE. He’ll always be MINE. He could fuck you until the earth stops spinning and he’ll still be MINE.”

Everyone’s head turned when they heard a loud gasp come from Michael. The stricken look on his face was pitiful, but not worthy of their attention for long as they quickly returned to the main attraction.

“The Goddamned piece of shit whore that you are will never love him, never give him what he needs. Why do you think he came to me? Because YOU weren’t enough. YOU could never be enough”

“I may not have been able to tell him the sweet, little sentiments that you have, but I’ve shown him, over and over how I feel,” Brian said defensively. He was so furious that he completely forgot where he was and that he had an audience hanging on his every word. He couldn’t believe the nerve of this little shit, telling him what Justin wanted, what he needed. Who the fuck did he think he was?

“Yeah, and look where that got you. Alone. Just like you’ll always be because no one would EVER want you. You’re nothing but a selfish overgrown child, always looking out for yourself and taking what you want from others, not caring about how it affects them or what they need,” Ethan spit out. He was well aware of Brian’s reputation and had learned quite a few things from Justin first hand.

“Well, I may be selfish, but you’re a home-wrecking, greasy-haired, chin-ratted, spineless, dickless, gutless fucker who will still be begging on the street for spare change when he’s old and ALONE because no one will EVER be able to put up with your holier than thou attitude – especially Justin because he doesn’t love you. He never loved you. He fucking loves ME. Period.” Brian was beyond furious. He felt the veins in his temples throb and heard his voice growing louder and louder with every word directed at the bug in front of him that he intended to squash beyond recognition.

Still trying to recover from Brian’s tongue-lashing, but not wanting to let the older man think for a second that he had him, he said in a superior tone, “He loves ME, not you.” Then he turned towards Justin, who hadn’t moved or said a word since his and Brian’s feud had begun and asked, “Don’t you, Justin?”

“No,” the blond whispered, mostly to himself.

“What?” Everyone yelled together and the group that was still squished into the entranceway blushed all at once, having realized that they’d said the word out loud.

Justin looked at his ‘family’, then at Brian who’s eyes were so intense that he felt like they were burning into him, then over to Ethan who seemed to be hanging on the edge, waiting for his answer in desperation. “No,” he said a little louder in answer to everyone’s question and watched as the musician’s brown eyes fell.

“What?” Ethan asked sadly, all evidence of his anger gone. He stepped back from Brian, who was still hovering over him, even though his head was turned towards Justin, and looked hopelessly at his lover.

“I’m sorry, but, just like Brian said, I’m his. I always have been. I just didn’t realize it until it was too late. I didn’t mean to hurt you. I just…I needed Brian to say the words, but I was too blind to realize that he was saying them, I just wasn’t listening.” Justin’s eyes shifted from Ethan to Brian and he was floored by the warmth and happiness he found in the older man’s beautiful, hazel eyes.

Ethan’s anger instantly returned and he lunged forward and grabbed the blond’s arms harshly. “What the fuck do you mean you’re sorry? You’re my lover, mine, not his,” the man growled.

Justin saw Brian move quickly towards them, but he shook his head at the man, his eyes glaring at him to stay back. He needed to take care of it by himself. He broke free of the musician’s grip and ground out, “I’m not your lover, I’ve never been your lover. It was a mistake, that’s all, a stupid mistake that took me too long to figure out. Now get the fuck away from me.” He knew he was being harsh, but he wouldn’t tolerate Ethan trying to hurt him.

The warning look in the piercing blue eyes was overwhelming and sent chills down Ethan’s spine. He was heartbroken and devastated. Doing the only thing he could think of, he lashed out at the blond. A look of distain came over him as his eyes harshly traveled the length of Justin’s body. “Fine. You deserve each other. A whore and slut. I can’t believe I wasted my time on you.” Turning towards the captivated audience he laughed and said, “You all deserve each other. You’re nothing but lowly trash.”

That was it. He respected Justin’s right to take care of himself but he’d had enough. Brian moved towards Ethan and grabbed him by the collar, moving his face only inches from the musician’s then said in a controlled voice that radiated anger, “You wanna see trash? Well then I suggest you take a good look in your rear-view mirror as you’re pulling away from here to see a real piece of trash.” And with that, Brian spun Ethan around, still holding onto his collar and pulled him towards the doorway, watching as the group of friends quickly moved apart to let them pass. He pulled him down the stairs, towards the front door and then opened it with his free hand and shoved the musician outside. Smiling mockingly, Brian said, “Have a nice life, you fucking piece of shit.” Then he slammed the door in Ethan’s stunned face.

Turning around, Brian was faced with a room full of shocked faces. Searching amongst them for the only one he needed to see, but not finding him, he rushed back upstairs. “Justin,” he said softly as he entered the room to find the blond lying on the bed crying.

“I’m sorry,” Justin sobbed, not able to hold back the emotions that were overwhelming him. He felt the bed shift behind him then Brian’s long body press against him and the man’s strong arms wrap around his shoulders, pulling him back into a comforting embrace.

“I…I’m sorry too,” Brian whispered against the blond’s ear then pressed a gentle kiss just under it. He felt the man stiffen in his arms in reaction to his words. He knew what he was thinking. “I know I say that sorry’s bullshit, and it usually is, but not this time. I should have never let you go.” Brian felt bare, completely exposed and vulnerable. He tightened his grip, crossing his hands over Justin’s chest to keep himself from giving into his fear and running away.

Brian hated that the Justin got to him, caused him to do and say things that he was sure he never would have before, but he also knew he had no choice. He knew it from the moment that he’d laid eyes on the fresh, eager kid standing under the lamppost. He knew right then and there that his life had changed, and no matter how hard he fought to keep it the same, it never was. But the truth was, that even though he was terrified, he couldn’t think of anything he wanted more than the man in his arms. He never wanted to lose him again.

Laughing through his tears, Justin said, “Well, I guess I’m homeless again.”

Smiling against the soft skin of the blond’s cheek, Brian replied with confidence, “No you’re not. You’re coming home with me where you belong.” Laughing softly, Brian added, “And they lived happily ever after.”

Turning in Brian’s arms, Justin smiled and asked, “Isn’t this the part where they seal their fate with a kiss?”

“Oh, yeah,” the older man whispered, then captured his lover’s mouth in a soul-shaking, heart-stopping, toe-curling kiss that left both men dazed and sure that no matter what the future held in store, they would always come through it and be together…just like it’s supposed to be.