

Remiss

by vedaprophet

Summary: A series of drabbles and double drabbles about a future where Justin's been living in New York for ten years and comes back to Pittsburgh after receiving bad news.

Warning: Major character death and heavy angst.

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I. Arriving

Justin digs out his spare key, puts it into the lock and slides the loft door open for the first time in two years. He doesn't think about how long it's been though, doesn't think about anything except taking a few steps inside and shutting the door.

He spots Michael, taping up a cardboard box in the living room. Justin has the vague thought that now, *now* is the moment when he should start to feel something. Instead, he watches Michael make his way across the room and into his arms without a word.

Michael's sobs echo in the loft.

II. The Motions

Remembering the details never seems important at times like these, Justin thinks, so he lets them go. He watches himself do the tasks required. Stripping the sheets off the bed. Throwing out a half-used tube of Brian's toothpaste and some expensive French facial scrub, but saving Brian's shampoo for himself, quickly tucking it into his suitcase. Taking it out again later because that's just fucking crazy, and throwing it away with the rest. Sorting everything into piles for Lindsay or Deb or Michael or charity or fucking auction. Taping boxes closed and marking each one with a big black Sharpie.

III. Drinking Games

In Woody's at ten pm, Justin gets drunk and tries to avoid thinking. But, since he knows trying not to think is a complete waste of energy that he doesn't even *have* at the moment, he decides to think about the fact that he hasn't slept since he got the call, two--or was it three?--days ago. He wonders if he'll bother to get some sleep before the funeral.

He picks at some lint on his sweater sleeve and sighs.

Anger would be a decent next step, and probably preferable to the Nothing that's settled painfully in his chest.

IV. Mementos

There is an old box in Brian's closet. It is this discovery that causes Michael to vomit gracelessly into Brian's toilet. Later, Justin will feel a brief stab of guilt when he remembers finding the box and not even noticing that Michael was no longer there, beside him for several minutes.

Justin finally remembers to breathe.

Inside, he finds a picture of Brian's mother in a tacky brass frame. A ticket stub from some concert—*The Cure; July 17, 1992*. A picture of himself and Michael dressed up for one of his Gallery openings in New York City last year. A framed drawing he had done of Brian, one he'd thought was bought by some unknown admirer at the GLC art show years ago.

Justin stares at the drawing, feeling suddenly ashamed of how crude it seems now. He wishes it showed Brian the way he really was, wishes his seventeen-year-old self would have captured Brian the way he knows he could now, if he had the chance to try again.

Then Justin notices, in the bottom of the box, a tiny hospital ID bracelet. *Peterson, Lindsay. Baby boy. 90479.*

He closes his eyes and slips it into his pocket.

V. Gift

Gus remembers the day he realized he wanted to be a writer. He was in the fifth grade and had an assignment to write an essay about his hero. It was the easiest paper he'd ever written. He got a good grade, too, and he'd shown it to his dad the following Saturday over breakfast. And that's when he knew that if he could spend the rest of his life writing things that could effect even a few people the way his essay effected his dad that day, he'd be happy. That afternoon his dad bought him his first computer.

VI. Real Time

Justin shivers. It's probably too cold to snow.

Brian would have hated this.

Justin stands by the coffin, looking around at the grim faces of their friends. He notices Gus, standing near Lindsay. Gus blinks back tears and looks away and Justin has the first glimmer of something like a feeling in days. He balls his hands into fists, riding it out.

He thinks he really fucking hates Brian for this. This is totally fucking wrong. It doesn't even seem real. He wonders when he lost track of time, of his life.

Of Brian's.

Church bells ring in the distance.

VII. Notes

Two days after Brian's funeral, Justin lays chain smoking on the cheap linoleum floor of the furnished apartment he's renting in Pittsburgh and tries to figure out what he's going to say to Gus when he sees him tomorrow. He needs to tell him...everything. All the things he's sure Brian wanted Gus to know. He needs to make sure Gus is okay.

Paper. He needs a list. Or notes. Something to jog his memory tomorrow when he's sitting face to face with Brian's son and telling him...something. He sits up and reaches for the tablet and pencil on the floor nearby.

Justin stares at his blank list, notes, memory jogging page. He sketches something absently, while he considers his speech.

Something stirs in Justin's chest, a panicky feeling, about the end of irrational anger. It was a nice next step, while it lasted. Brian would probably know what comes next, but he would say it involved eye rolling.

Justin wonders how he's ever *not* been sitting on a linoleum floor, chain smoking and freaking out.

Brian's eyes stare up at him. He tears out the page, crumples it up and throws it across the room.

Anger's still on the clock.

VIII. Minced

"Your Dad loved you. A lot. He was really proud of you, you know?" Justin shifts uncomfortably.

"Yeah, I know. Why wouldn't I?" Gus asks as he scribbles words across a page.

Justin stares.

He tries again. "Well, I just thought we could..."

"Listen," Gus says intently, as he pauses his writing to look up. "My Dad and I were golden. It fucking sucks he's gone. But if you came here to give me a therapy session, you should know two things first. One. I'm a writer. I'm dealing. It's a process. And, two. I live with *three* women. Therapy is my middle name and birthright." He smirks and looks back down at his notebook.

Justin blinks Brian's smirk out of his eyes and watches Gus, writing longhand at the kitchen table. He imagines the strokes of his brush capturing Gus' shadowed face, the long legs sprawled carelessly in trademark teenage fashion, the concentration lines between his eyes.

"Oh, and I never thanked you for the name thing." Gus looks up and smiles again. "I really

dodged a bullet on that whole Abraham thing. Thanks, man. Mind if I put you in my book, if I ever write about that?”

IX. Parting

“I’m going home today. I saw Gus a couple days ago, he’s doing great. God, he’s fucking gorgeous and brilliant. Like you. He’ll take the world by storm someday. He makes me really proud of you, Brian.”

Justin pauses, placing the rose on Brian’s headstone and wiping tears he’s just noticed. Well, at least he’s finally crying now.

“I’m going to paint him. Can’t wait to start on it. He just glows. I really just needed to say I love you. I always fucking will. I’m watching him now. For you. For Me.”

He tries to smile.

“I miss you.”

X. Later

Sometimes Justin still thinks about the last time he saw Brian. They’d fucked hard and fast on the floor of the loft for the first time in ten months. They hadn’t even talked afterwards; Justin had a plane to catch to Chicago. Brian had sighed and said, “later,” standing in jeans and nothing else in the middle of his kitchen. He’d looked...lonely. Justin had tricked himself into believing it was just his imagination.

He knows the truth now. And he knows he was lonely, too.

There was never a time when Justin hadn’t predicted ending up with Brian. He’d always just known that they would be together in the end, sometime. Later. In the future. He’d pictured Brian showing up at his door in the middle of the night or himself going home and the loft door being open for him when he got there.

Sometimes he sort of hates Brian for dying. For not leaving that door open. But mostly he just loves him.

Still.

There was no miraculous goodbye. Justin hadn’t known it was goodbye. He hadn’t known that was the last time he’d ever see Brian, the last time Brian would ever fuck him.

Later is bullshit.

The End