

Lead Me Home

By allie_quixotic

Time Frame: Post Season Two

Warnings: This story contains references to Ethan. It's semi-anti-Ethan, but not really. It's hard to explain. lol

Regardless, this story is not about Ethan and Justin, but rather Justin and Brian and teh love.

"I'm going to be late tonight." Ethan tells me as he picks up his violin case from the bed. I lay a thick line of crimson red across the page of my sketch book with a pastel stick. My hand tremors, but I ignore it. I set the red stick aside and pick up a black one. "Justin?" I scrub the black nub over the paper in long, hard strokes. The paper rips, but I keep going. "Justin?" Ethan's hand gently pulls mine away from the paper. I look up at him. "Did you hear me?" He asks softly.

I remove my hand from his, unable to tell him that I prefer if he didn't touch me just now. "I heard you." He nuzzles the side of my neck and I feel a cold wet panic bubbling under my skin. His arms wrap around my waist, making me feel trapped. I want to tell him that sometimes I don't like to be touched, but how do I explain that to someone who could never possibly understand the reasoning?

He places wet open mouth kisses on my neck as he says, "Tomorrow, we'll get a Christmas tree." Images of A Charlie Brown Christmas flash through my mind. I miss Christmases at home with my parents and Molly. We always had a tall pine spruce decorated in blue and silver with white twinkling lights. The smell of pine, of Christmas, would fill up the house and make us all dizzy with joy. "I love you." He says as he leans in to kiss my mouth. His lips lay against my mouth and I feel nothing. No heat, no fire, no joy. Just lips and nothing else.

When his lips leave mine I say, "You too." I'm amazed by my ability to sound sincere. I maneuver my way out of his embrace and go back to my drawing.

He runs a hand through my long blond locks, and that feeling of wanting to escape bears down on me. "See you tonight."

I turn to him and smile, grateful that he doesn't know me well enough to realize how fake it is. He kisses my cheek and I count the seconds as I wait for the door to close behind him. As soon as I am alone I rip the piece I was just working on out of my sketchbook, crumble it into a ball, and throw it across the room. I stand up and look around Ethan's shitty apartment. How did I get here? How did I come to be in this place? It's not even mine, but then again no place has ever been mine, has it? I stare at the shitty bed, a single mattress supported by moving crates and cinder blocks. I haven't had a decent nights sleep in months. Walking over to the window, I attempt to stare out into the night, but all I can see is my reflection staring back at me. I stand there for a long time. My breath fogs up the window and blurs my image.

I wonder when it happened. When did I lose myself? When did I become this person? How did I give up the one person I'd always wanted? How did he give up on me? I clench my jaw and swallow back the emotions that threaten to bleed out of me. Did I really ask for that much of him? Was I so needy? Was it wrong to want him to say he loved me? Was it so much to ask that he care enough about me to not make me feel like a convenient fuck? Was it too much for him to ask me to stay? I blink back tears as I try to push these thoughts away, but no such luck. I could be with a hundred other guys, I could live with them, they could love me, but they'll never be Brian. They'll never be him.

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I stand in front of the tree. Ethan wraps his arms around my waist and pulls me against him. The tree is pretty much how I'd imagined it would be. It's small, leaning to the left, decorated in cheap homemade ornaments and multi-colored lights that have a few bulbs missing. It smells like rotten food and pine scented air freshener. The skirt of the

tree is an old shirt of Ethan's. Underneath the tree two small boxes, pathetically wrapped with the comic section of the newspaper, are masquerading as gifts. Ethan came home with this tree last night, excited about the fact that someone had actually thrown it away. I don't know why he was surprised. I would have tossed it too. There really are no words to describe how depressing it is.

Ethan rests his chin on my shoulder. "It's beautiful, just like you." I wonder if he is seriously comparing me to his crappy little dumpster tree. That's really something that just makes me feel all warm and fuzzy inside. "This is our very first Christmas together." He kisses the side of my neck. "I know it isn't much, but someday we'll have a huge tree with expensive decorations and we'll curl up in front of the fire and make love all night long." He dreams big, but then again he always has. He seems to have this pinpoint focus on money. Like he thinks money equates happiness. Brian has money, is he happy? I close my eyes and try to clear my mind of those thoughts. When Ethan's hands push under my shirt I open my eyes and pull away from him. "What's wrong?"

I turn to him and smile. "Nothing." I force a yawn. "Just tired."

He smiles at me and I know what he wants. He holds out his hands for me as if the words, "I'm tired" are code for "let's fuck." Walking over to the door, I grab my coat and my scarf and put them on.

"Where are you going? I thought you were tired."

I look over at him and grab my messenger bag. "I...uh...have a project I need to finish." It sounds lame, even to me.

He crosses his arms over his chest, huffs, and stares at me. "It's almost midnight. It's Christmas Eve. School is out for winter break." It's like he has a list inside his head and for each statement he makes a little checkmark by each item.

I try not to glare at him as I say, "Don't give me any shit alright? Do I ever list off reasons for why you shouldn't go fucking practice?"

"That's different."

I raise my eyebrow at him. "How is it different?"

He narrows his eyes at me. "You're going to see him."

I laugh and roll my eyes. "I'm going to work on a project. Don't wait up."

"Justin, don't go." My hand is on the doorknob. My back is to him. "Stay."

His words come easy, like a hot knife through butter. They flow out of his mouth like water down a stream. He says all the right things and I wonder why I can no longer make them mean anything to me. Nothing has turned out like I thought it would. All the things I thought I wanted and needed are right here, but they don't mean anything. Ethan is just a man, and his words are just words. It suddenly hits me, and I grip the doorknob at the realization. My hand shakes, rattling the already loose knob. I never wanted words, or romance, or time and attention from just anyone. I wanted those things from Brian. I just thought...I just thought if I could find someone, anyone, who could say the things I wanted to hear, who could do the things I wanted to do, who could say they loved me, that I would be happy. That having those things would somehow make me feel complete, cared for, wanted, needed, loved. It could be Ethan saying and doing these things, or anyone else, but if it isn't Brian, if it couldn't be Brian, then it is all just superfluous.

"Why are you going back to him?"

I look over my shoulder. His anger is visible in the way he's holding his body. "I'm not. I told you I have a project to finish."

“What is it about Brian Kinney?” He goes on as if I didn’t say anything. “I know he’s beautiful and he’s rich, but he treated you like shit. He cheated on you. He used you. He...and he’ll never love you in the way that you want him to. He’ll never love you like I do.”

I turn to face him. “No, he won’t.” My voice is calmer than I feel. He won’t ever love me like anyone else will. Brian’s love is unique, original. It can’t be contained or duplicated.

“He’s a selfish shit who probably wouldn’t even care if you fucking died.” His cruelty cuts through me. It slices me in half, leaving me raw and bleeding all over his shitty floors.

I shake my head to clear away the images I can never grasp. “You don’t know...” The words barely make it over my lips.

He walks up to me and grabs my upper arms. I flinch at the sudden touch. “So tell me. Tell me what he can give you that I can’t? Is it money?”

I pull myself away from him. He doesn’t know Brian. Ethan knows about the prom and the bashing, but he doesn’t know Brian must have felt watching as I almost died right in front of his eyes. He doesn’t know how Brian took care of me after I left the hospital. How when I would wake up screaming in the middle of the night, he’d take me in his arms, and hold me until the terror subsided. He doesn’t know any of that.

I turn away from Ethan and open the door. He reaches out for me. His fingers, calloused from years of pressing against strings, wrap around my wrist. “Don’t go. Please don’t go. I’m sorry. I love you. I know you love me too. We can be so happy together.”

I shake my head and turn to him. I look at him for a long time. I feel the weight of his fingers on my skin. I could leave. I should leave. I don’t want to hurt Ethan. Just like I never wanted to hurt Brian...but he hurt me too. This couldn’t be all my fault. I may have driven the car down this freeway, but Brian’s the one that left me on the side of the road without any means to find my way home. How did I get so fucking lost? Is my sense of direction that fucking bad?

“Okay Ethan.” I drop my bag to the floor and give into something I never really wanted. “Okay.”

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The night twists and turns around me like the branches of an ancient oak tree. Cold slick fingers dance along my skin. The chill of their touch is absorbed into my blood stream. I feel like ice. A flicker of blue neon lights becomes visible in the distance. I am a lone boat on the ocean, and those flickering lights become my lighthouse. I shiver against the cold because I’m naked and wet, like a newborn child. Tiny shards of glass easily cut the bottom of my feet as I move much too slowly towards what feels like home. I ignore the burn, the sting, the fucking pain, because I know in the end getting to those lights means freedom. Love. Unspoken connections. Promises, protection, hope. Life. Each step I take forward moves my destination further away. It confuses me, so I take a step backward, hoping to draw the light toward me. It doesn’t work. Tears of frustration stain my cheeks. I just want to get there, be there, live there, love there. Be held there by a comfort so familiar I can fucking taste it.

I feel smooth silk against the tops of my feet. It snakes its way around my legs, up, up, around my waist, until it settles around my neck in a relaxed embrace. I thought it would be cold against my skin, but it’s hot. It’s pure fucking heat. The longer it stays on me the hotter it gets, the heavier it gets, the less smooth it gets. Its hot, heavy coarseness rubs the skin around my neck raw with each labored step I take towards a destination I can’t reach. I want to touch the scarf, to feel it, to know it’s really soft, and smooth, and light, but my arms feel glued to my sides. My hands are balled in fists, and no matter what I try they won’t unclench.

The ground below my feet shifts from wet broken glass to rough cool concrete. The blue lights in the distance snap off and I am shoved into the black of the night by a gust of wind so strong it knocks me to my knees.

“Did you see the looks on their faces?”

I feel my lips move to form the words, but no sound escapes my throat. The heavy odor of exhaust fills my nose and chokes me. I am trapped on my knees, unable to move despite the overwhelming feeling that I should be running, running fast, and far, and not looking back. Never look back.

“Taylor.” One word spoken out of the mouth of a devil I can’t see. A phantom I can’t fight.

“Yeah, we gave them a prom they’ll never forget.”

His words curl around me like smoke. They are soft wispy nothings that flow around me, but not in me.

When his words end the music begins. It’s an old slow song that I want to remember, but can’t. My body involuntarily sways to the song. The scarf around my neck gets lighter, warmer, and becomes a bright beacon of light that blinds me.

“Don’t forget who’s taking you home, and in whose arms you’re gonna be...”

The scarf fades back into the darkness, and its heaviness returns like a shackle around my neck. It tilts my body forward.

“Even if it was ridiculously romantic.”

His words are whispered into my ear. I want to see him, call out to him, hold him, anything. I try to open my mouth, but it’s sealed shut. I have been silenced. I can’t move. I can’t breathe. I’m locked within my own body, unable to avoid whatever fate may bring.

The cold concrete bites into my knees as the weight around my neck increases. I feel myself being pulled down into something I can’t escape. “Tsk, Tsk Taylor.” I feel the sickness in my stomach rise to my throat. The air around me stills as bright florescent lights slowly flicker on above me. These light bring no comfort or hope. They bring fear and death. I feel the shadow of a boy fall over me. It’s so cold, like someone has attached an IV and is pumping ice straight into my veins. The heat of the scarf does little to warm me. The body the shadow belongs to gets closer. It reaches out, grabs my hair, snapping my head back. I want to close my eyes, but I can’t. “Taylor.” Chris Hobbs smiles down at me. His hand moves from my hair to my cheek. I want to scream, but I’m gagged. I want to fight, but I’m frozen. My eyes are wide and I feel the fear building up in me like a slow burning fire.

His hand slides along my cheek until I am free of his touch. A trail of fire burns my skin where his hand has been. “Don’t be scared Taylor.” He takes another step back and I see it, gripped tight in his hands. A baseball bat. He swings it over his shoulder and I flinch. He laughs and it echoes off the concrete wall, floor, and ceiling of the parking garage. “It won’t hurt Taylor. You won’t even remember it...or him.” He moves into position like he’s at home plate just waiting for the right ball to be thrown his way. He taps the bat against the soles of his shoes. His eyes never leave me. I can’t take my eyes off the bat. Thick, dark, blood seeps from the smooth grained surface. Hobbs brings the bat up. The blood drips down the length of the bat and stains his hands. He leers at me. Softly in the distance violin music begins to play.

“Justin!”

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I jolt awake, immediately reaching up and touching my head. I move slowly from the bed, trying to contain the sobs that gush from my lips. Ethan doesn’t hear me. Ethan never hears me. I think if a fucking bomb went off Ethan would sleep right through it. I crawl across the floor until I’m in the corner. I can’t stop shaking. They’ve been getting worse, these nightmares. I hadn’t had any in so long, and now they’re back. Maybe this is why I’ve felt the distance growing between Ethan and me. Maybe this is why I’ve been thinking too much about Brian. Even if Ethan

woke up, even if he held me, it wouldn't be enough. He wouldn't understand. He wouldn't get it. I need... I wipe my face with the back of my hand and push myself to my feet. The streetlights illuminate the apartment, and I use their faint glow to guide my way into getting dressed. I open the door, and, as quietly as I can, leave Ethan's apartment.

I forgot my coat, so when I step outside the cold air freezes the breath in my lungs. I feel a familiar sense of terror washing over me, that fear that someone is after me, that someone is going to get me. I don't think. I just run. I let my feet carry me down familiar streets, my breath ragged, tears streaming down my face, knowing that I won't feel safe until I get to him, because this dream was more terrifying than any that preceded it. It's been three months since I left him. Three months. Will he even see me? Will he let me in? Will he...what? What do I expect him to do? My mind wants to stop running, but my body refuses the request.

I'm a complete fucking mess when I reach the loft. I quickly enter the code on the front door and run up the steps two at a time. This is fucking insane. I know it is. He's probably not home, and if he is I doubt he's alone. I just need to see him. If I can just see his face and know he's alright, that will be enough. I arrive at the metal door and pound on it without even stopping to think about what I'm doing here. The only clear thought I'm capable of is, Brian be here, be here, be here.

The loft door slides open. "Brian." I struggle to get his name past my lips.

"Jesus Justin, what the fuck are you-" I shake my head and start to back away from him. He's here. He's okay. I can go. I can leave. "Justin." My name rolls off his tongue in an all too familiar echo. I close my eyes tighter and try to tell myself to just breathe. Just breathe. I feel his hand grip the front of my shirt as he brings me forward. I want to tell him that he doesn't have to do that. I'm fine. I just had to see him and... He wraps his arms around me and presses his lips to my ear. "He's not here. You're safe."

My arms are pressed between us. My hands lay flat against his bare chest. My breath catches in my throat at his words. Those same words he would whisper to me night after night when I'd wake up screaming. I shake my head. "Sorry. Sorry. So sorry." I hear myself saying, only I don't know if I'm sorry that I'm here or sorry that I ever left him in the first place.

"Come on." He pulls me with him as we walk backward into the loft. He lets me go for a fraction of a second to close the door. Then his arms are back around me, leading me into the loft, until we reach the couch. Our moves become automatic as he sits down on the couch and I lay beside him, my head on his lap. I drape my arm over his legs as he runs his fingers through my hair. I close my eyes, sucking up this comfort, this familiar sense of security that only Brian can provide. I shouldn't be here and we both know it. I left him. I have no right to ask for this, but I miss it, miss him. I feel selfish, confused, and lonely.

I take a deep breath and curl my knees up to my chest. "I just needed to see you. I needed to make sure." His hand stills in my hair.

"How long?" His voice is rough. I don't ask what he means because I know. I want to say, since I left, but I can't answer him. I can't admit it or say it because then I will feel it. I will feel the weight of everything that has happened from the first night I met him until this very moment. "Justin?"

I don't speak. I just begin to cry. Big silent tears seep from my eyes, glide over the bridge of my nose and are soaked up by his jeans. As it turns out, not vocalizing it didn't stop the weight of it from crushing me. He pulls me up until I'm straddling his lap. His arms wrap around me in a way that I know I no longer deserve. I shouldn't need this or him. I shouldn't want it, but Brian lives and breathes inside me. I cling to him because no matter who I'm with, no matter where I go, he'll always be there, in me.

I press my face into his neck, my hands resting against his bare chest. "Brian. Brian. Why?" I don't expect an answer because I don't even know what I'm asking. His hands are strong as they move up and down my back. He doesn't know what to say to me. He doesn't know what to do. He doesn't know why I'm here, but I know he wants me to be. He can act all he wants, he can push, and pull, and fucking shove, but I know him. I fucking know him, even though I tried to convince myself I didn't. I can't stop the words that come out of my mouth, just like I couldn't

stop my feet from bringing me here tonight. "Tell me you don't love me. Tell me you don't care that I left. Tell me all the things you hate about me Brian. Love me or let me go." I slide my hands up his chest, over his shoulders, and dig my nails into his back. "Tell me." I cling to him. I press every part of my body against his. "Tell me. Tell me. Tell me." I beg, I plead...I bleed.

His arms tighten around me and I almost can't breathe. I feel his hot breath against my face. I can't see it, but I feel it, the mask slips, the fortress walls crumble, and liquid heat from his eyes burns my skin. "No." One word, forced out beyond lips sealed tight. One word, that spreads across pages to write an epic. One word, he would rather say than the thousand words he wouldn't.

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I'm laid out against the cool sheets. My body is worshipped with warm lips, hot breath, and strong hands. He claims me in the middle of the night. He frees me from burdens I can no longer bear. His body enters mine, pulsing with heat, throbbing with promise. He moves in me, through, over me, like I'm the only thing that matters to him, like I'm the only thing that ever will. My hands, mouth, body, eyes, soak up everything like soil after a thirty year drought. His eyes never leave mine. His entire focus is on me. All of this is just for me...and for him...mostly for us.

We move together to a beat that only we can hear. Our bodies seeking out what has been missing for so long. We made mistakes, each of us. We are both at fault for what happened, but we are both responsible for fixing it. I feel his love vibrate through me like the best piece of music I've ever heard. I return it to him measure for measure. We come together, arms wrapped around each other, breath hot and heavy, skin slick with sweat. He starts to pull out, but I wrap my legs around him. Stay. We don't need words, and I'm sorry I ever forgot that.

My eyes grow heavy with exhaustion. The blue lights shine down on our naked bodies, and I know this is home, and Brian is everything.

~the end~