

Justice Served

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/149238) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/149238>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Ice Men (2004)
Relationship:	Bryan/Vaughn
Characters:	Bryan Philips , Vaughn (Ice Men)
Additional Tags:	Established Relationship
Language:	English
Series:	Part 3 of Fire and Ice
Collections:	David Hewlett Fiction and Art
Stats:	Published: 2006-11-07 Words: 8,317 Chapters: 1/1

Justice Served

by [Tarlan](#)

Summary

What happens once justice is served and penance completed? Vaughn and Bryan find out together.

That first night in the hot tub Trev had remarked how, in twenty-three years, none of them had managed to make any new friends. The four of them had laughed it off because they were all certain that they had made new friends at work and in college over the years. In addition, Bryan had Heather, Steve had Jennifer and, until a few months earlier, Vaughn thought he had Renee.

Looking back almost three months later, Vaughn finally understood exactly what Trev had been trying to say. No one outside of the four of them had ever truly mattered. No one else had been anything more than acquaintances, not even their family, wives or girlfriends, whereas the four of them were special. They had chosen each other as children and, even though the intervening years had sent them in separate directions, Vaughn could not imagine calling anyone else his best friends other than Steve, Jon, and Bryan. Most especially Bryan. Oh, he had pulled up all of Bryan's shortcomings to Renee, calling him a dumb puppy, a loser and talentless. He'd even called Bryan a lousy songwriter and a crappy singer to his face, but he'd had equally uncomplimentary names for Jon and Steve, especially for Jon after he stepped out of the closet and revealed his homosexuality. Yet, none of that had changed the fact that these three men were the ones Vaughn wanted with him from childhood to the grave so it came as no surprise that neither Jon nor Steve batted an eyelid when Bryan moved in with Vaughn after that weekend. It did not seem to matter to them that Bryan had screwed Renee right under Vaughn's nose only a couple of days earlier, destroying both of their marriages in the process and damaging Vaughn's trust in him at the same time. As far as they were concerned, the harsh truths aired over that weekend followed by Trev's near-death experience out on the ice had shocked them all into acknowledging a greater truth. They needed each other, and they depended upon each other far more than they could have admitted before that weekend.

Bryan, especially, had needed him after that weekend. After letting Vaughn fuck him, he had called Heather and admitted to the affair with Renee, returning home to find his personal belongings on the front lawn, mostly in pieces, with DVDs and records scratched and his clothes sliced up, yet he accepted it all as just retribution from the other person wronged by his actions. Heather had filed for divorce immediately, jumping at the opportunity to make her escape from their loveless marriage, and Bryan made no attempt to reconcile. He allowed her to take everything but the clothes off his back, not contesting the house, car or even custody of the dog, leaving him with no money and no place left to go. As a lawyer, Vaughn could only be thankful that Heather had never given up her career and they'd had no kids as it meant a clean break for Bryan. He did not even have the fear of alimony hanging over his head as Heather had the higher paid job working as a Realtor.

Thirty-one days after the petition was lodged on account of Bryan's adultery with Renee, they were officially divorced and if Bryan had any regrets then it was not for the break-up of that marriage.

In hindsight, Vaughn wondered if Trev had seen something else that linked the four of them beyond a childhood bond for, around the same time, Steve casually mentioned that he had called off his wedding to Jennifer, moved out of Jennifer's apartment and in with Jon. According to Steve, there was nothing special between him and Jon, just occasional buddy

fucks, and yet as boys it had always been Jon and Stevie play fighting, and him and Bryan. That same dynamic echoed in the deeper relationships they had formed with each other since Bryan's disastrous 30th birthday.

Vaughn looked down at Bryan's quiet form stretched out face down on the rumpled sheets. Spilt semen glistened along his inner thigh, trickling from his well-used ass. No one else knew of the deal Vaughn had made with Bryan as penance for sleeping with Renee. No one else knew of Vaughn's nocturnal visits to Bryan's bed. Except after tonight, Vaughn had no right to do this again.

Forty-eight fucks.

Vaughn had worked out that Bryan owed him that many to cover the number of times he had slept with Renee. Forty-eight possessions, sinking into the tightness of Bryan's ass, and Vaughn had never expected it to be glorious. He had started this as a means of retribution, determined to see it through to the bitter end like any contract signed and sealed. He had not expected to enjoy it after a time, to yearn for it even.

No. Not yearn for it; to yearn for Bryan.

Over the past few weeks he had taken covert glances at other men, even at Jon and Steve as they sprawled on his couch while watching hockey or some film rented for the night, but he had felt no similar yearning for them in his arms; only for Bryan.

Vaughn reached for the damp washcloth sitting on top of the bedside cabinet and ran it over Bryan's firm and well-rounded ass, dipping between the cheeks before sweeping along the inner thighs to wipe away the sticky evidence of their...

He paused in thought.

Their what, exactly? What were they doing with each other? This had started off as a means of punishment, of taking revenge for Bryan's betrayal with Renee but it had not stayed that way. Slowly, this had turned from wanting revenge into wanting Bryan.

Admittedly, the first time had been fueled by anger and a desire to soothe his own hurt on Bryan's penitent flesh and he could still recall that first angry rut that had left streaks of Bryan's blood staining the washcloth. Looking back, Vaughn had not expected to take Bryan a second time, not believing Bryan would allow it but he had risked asking Jon all about penetration anyway....

Vaughn cleared his throat, trying to use his courtroom skills to prevent a flush of embarrassment rising on his face. "Have you ever done... it?" He winced at his inability to even say the words. Why could he speak so openly of these things in a court room and yet be so embarrassed here in his own cabin, in front of his own friend? His mind supplied a reason fast enough, that it was the intimacy of personal friendship that caused his reluctance to speak out, and the knowledge that what he had done to Bryan was so wrong even as it felt so right.

"Done what?"

"You know...anal sex."

Jon's pale skin above his beard took on a pinkish tinge that probably mirrored his own. "Yes."

"Doesn't it hurt having another guy's cock up your..?"

"No." Jon leapt in with his answer before Vaughn could finish. "Not if you do it properly... and use lots of lube."

At the time, Vaughn had simply nodded, dropping the subject much to Jon's obvious relief. Jon had never appeared to suspect Vaughn's true motive in asking, seeming to take his question at face value, perhaps accepting it as some kind of honest acknowledgement for the lifestyle Jon had chosen. Certainly, their earlier harsh words had been over Vaughn's continued silence since Jon had outed himself a few years back.

Two days later, Bryan moved into one of Vaughn's spare bedrooms. He made it perfectly clear that he was willing to uphold his end of the deal if it meant saving their friendship leaving Vaughn relieved that he had asked Jon what to do to minimize the pain for both of them.

After the fourth time, Bryan almost seemed to be enjoying the sex and the closeness. By the tenth time, he was participating, jacking himself off while Vaughn fucked him. By the time they reached the mid thirties, Vaughn knew this was no longer the barely-consensual sex that had started this aspect of their relationship. He saw the aborted gestures as Bryan reached for him like a lover before pulling back, his expression closing off. Vaughn felt an answering tenderness, barely resisting the urge to press heated kisses upon softly gasping lips, or run his hands over silken flesh, wanting to let his fingers card through the sweaty curls of light brown chest hairs. He wanted to tongue a small nipple, to taste the perspiring skin and feel it pucker beneath the onslaught. He wanted to trace the curve of Bryan's ribs and hip, and to grasp each asscheek so he could pull Bryan tight against his own straining flesh and then kiss him senseless afterwards.

Instead he held back because they never spoke during sex, never touched beyond what was necessary to get off. They never talked about it either, just wordless glances at the top of the stairs before Bryan stepped inside his own room, stripped and lay down naked on the bed, waiting for Vaughn.

At first, Vaughn had simply wanted to get it over and done with too, coming to Bryan's room each night, fucking him, cleaning him and then leaving him in the mess of dirty sheets as he made his way to his own clean bed. After a while, he realized he was looking forward to the nights, sometimes catching himself thinking about Bryan during the day; recalling his warm, solid body and the soft gasps that he could not hold back when Vaughn thrust deep inside him. As the number of times left decreased, Vaughn had started to hesitate, often letting days pass before the need to touch drew him to the threshold of Bryan's room. He started working late at the office, pretending to be too tired once he got home as he could think of no other

way to keep Bryan in his home, afraid that Bryan would leave once his penance was done. So Vaughn contented himself with slipping into Bryan's room while he slept and staring at the beautiful man sprawled naked on the bed with the sheets bundled around mid-thigh.

On the one occasion when Bryan awoke and caught him staring, Bryan had simply assumed Vaughn had come for fuck forty-three and had rolled over obligingly, unconsciously raising his ass in welcome. It had been so different from all the previous times because Bryan had been all warm and languid, his limbs and mind still heavy from sleep. It had almost been like making love, sinking into Bryan's accepting body, rocking against him and hearing the soft moans of pleasure fall from his sleep-softened lips. Vaughn had wanted to kiss him so desperately that night, had wanted to taste his lips, had wanted to slide into his mouth and coil possessively around his tongue. His fingers had itched to card through the long strands of dark hair that cascaded over his forehead, to outline the curve over the tip of an ear and caress the strong, lightly stubbled jaw. Instead he tried to draw out his own pleasure, slowly thrusting into the heat of Bryan's body, letting his orgasm build until it flowed over him rather than be ripped from his body. Afterwards, he completed the cleaning ritual and walked away, finding no pleasure in the coldness of his bed next door when all he wanted was to slip back into the bed beside Bryan and hold him through the remainder of the night.

After the forty-seventh time, Vaughn managed to find one excuse after another lasting almost two weeks before the desire to touch Bryan overwhelmed him once more. The bittersweet pleasure of thrusting deep inside Bryan for possibly the last time brought him sobbing to a climax, and he could only be grateful that Bryan made no attempt to push him away after his release. Vaughn wanted to stay buried inside of Bryan forever. He wanted the right to touch and hold him as a lover rather than as a debt owed but Bryan had remained as silent as always when Vaughn finally slipped from the tight sheath of his body. He stayed face down on the bed with his head turned away, unmoving as Vaughn cleaned him.

Thoughts whirled around Vaughn's head, unsure if he could bear the thought of Bryan living in his house, so close but no longer having the right to touch him, and yet he was just as unwilling to see him leave. There was far more to their life together than these almost silent fucks. Between the silent fucks they shared so much of their lives now, understanding what each other needed to unwind after work. They would invite the guys over, passing out beer as they watched the hockey, glorying in the victories and shouting obscenities at the dubious referee decisions.

They did all the things Vaughn could never have done with Renee, or Bryan with Heather. They would eat TV dinners and order in food when neither was in the mood to cook, sticking on bad movies and ridiculing the testosterone-fueled heroes and the corny plots.

Sometimes, Vaughn would arrive home quietly and unexpected, finally finding a reason for leaving work early when the opportunity arose rather than seeking out make-work to fill in the time. On those days he would catch Bryan playing the handmade guitar, silently regretting ever telling Bryan he was talentless because, as bad as he was, writing songs had meant so much to his friend. On those occasions, Vaughn would listen for a few minutes before stepping back outside and slamming the car door loudly, giving Bryan enough time to put away the guitar before he turned his key in the front door.

As if conjured up by his thoughts, Vaughn heard the unmistakable sound of a key in the door followed by light footsteps on the stairs and the familiar, but now so-unwanted voice of his estranged wife. Bryan tensed beside him, looking his way for the first time since Vaughn entered his room and, for once, Vaughn could not read his expression because of the myriad of emotions crossing his handsome face.

Only in that moment, as Vaughn told Renee that she was no longer welcome or wanted in his life, did he truly understand love and, only then did he realize another hard truth. Bryan had never been a substitute for Renee. She had always been the substitute for him, trying and failing to fill a void in Vaughn's life that Bryan had filled with such ease over these past few months.

As the door slammed shut behind Renee, Vaughn sank to the stairs, looking up when he felt Bryan's sheet-wrapped body sit down beside him. In that moment, he saw his love for Bryan mirrored in the haunted eyes of his lover.

This time, Vaughn led Bryan to his own room and made love to him on the clean, crisp sheets that warmed and rumped beneath their entwined bodies. This time they lay face to face, chest to chest, and groin to groin. This time, Vaughn gave into the heady desire and took the wide but oh-so-soft mouth in a deep and needy kiss, stroking his tongue over warm, kiss-swollen lips and into the heat of Bryan's mouth, knowing this was a greater intimacy than the anal sex they had shared for months. Strong arms wrapped around his torso, holding him between Bryan's spreading thighs, cocks lined up together, pressed between their bellies and sending delicious sensations coursing through his body with every tiny thrust and ripple of abdominal muscle. He felt Bryan's knees draw up, felt his cock slide down between Bryan's legs to the still loosened and sex-lubed hole. For the first time, Vaughn looked into Bryan's eyes as he pushed inside his body and he leaned down to meet Bryan halfway as Bryan reared up for another kiss. Someone was murmuring between the frantic kisses, begging for more, for harder, for deeper, and someone else was promising everything as the silence between them shattered beneath the weight of words and cries and moans of need and desire held back for so long.

When he came this time, every bone in his body seemed to melt as he gasped out a wordless cry of pleasure into the hot mouth covering his own. He collapsed sideways, his sated cock slipping from Bryan's body, his eyelids too heavy to hold open and his limbs boneless. Vaughn meant only to close his eyes for a moment but he awoke to morning sunlight filtering through the gaps in the curtains and to the weight of a heavy body draped partly over his. Bryan's head was tucked against Vaughn's shoulder, his lips parted in sleep, with one arm flung haphazardly over Vaughn's waist and a bony knee wedged between Vaughn's legs...and it was perfect.

The divorce should have been straightforward but Renee contested the pre-nuptial agreement by saying it was ill-advised at the time and that circumstances had changed between them since their marriage. Fortunately, the judge at the hearing took one look at the accusation of adultery on Renee's part, read all the evidence supporting it, and then sided with Vaughn after hearing Renee's acrimonious testimony against both her husband and her former lover.

As he walked from the hearing, Vaughn knew he ought to be feeling happy at the outcome but all he could think about was Bryan and the guilty look in his lover's eyes when he left their bed this morning. At least he could feel grateful that he had persuaded Bryan not to attend the hearing because Renee's accusations would have cut him deeply. Instead, Bryan met him in the café across from the court, his eyes dulled with guilt as he watched through the tinted window as Renee walk down the courthouse steps arm-in-arm with another man and hailed a cab. Vaughn watched for a moment too, and then she was gone, hopefully from his life forever.

"If I hadn't--"

Vaughn pursed his lips as he held up a finger to forestall the words he had heard too often. "If you hadn't... then someone else would have. I couldn't give her what she wanted so she lashed out in the only way she could, by hurting me through you. So cut out the guilt trip, Bry."

Bryan's soft blue eyes lowered to the coffee in front of him and Vaughn felt an almost overwhelming desire to cup his jaw and raise his eyes, wanting to lean forward and celebrate his newfound freedom with a kiss though, technically, he was still married to Renee for the divorce would not be final for another 31 days. He snorted softly, wondering how the judge might have acted had anyone revealed Vaughn's adultery with the same person who had committed it with Renee, giving credence to her accusations of conspiracy between the two of them. Fortunately, they had told no one of their relationship, not even Steve and Jon, though Vaughn suspected they knew there was more going on than two childhood friends sharing a house.

Vaughn made a silent promise that he would let Jon and Steve in on the secret once his marriage to Renee was legally over, not wanting to jeopardize that outcome before then in case Renee used his affair with Bryan to appeal the judge's decision regarding the split of their finances and possessions. As far as Vaughn was concerned, Renee had been awarded far more than she deserved considering the nature of her betrayal.

He had found a modicum of forgiveness for her when she admitted that she had only started the affair with Bryan just to hurt him but that, in the end, she had actually wanted to be with Bryan. Almost too late she discovered the gentleness and playfulness in Bryan that had drawn Vaughn to Bryan from the day they first met in school all those years ago. She discovered Bryan's generous nature as both a partner and as a lover, and eventually she admitted that she had come to the cabin that day purely to put Bryan into a position where they would be caught together, believing that this would be the lever she needed to force Bryan to leave Heather and follow her to Vancouver. She had never considered the third possibility, that he might leave both her and Heather, putting his friendship with Vaughn above both his wife and his mistress.

Over the past three months, Vaughn had worked through his anger over Bryan's stupidity and betrayal with Renee. Oh, he knew Bryan was weak willed but he never thought Bryan would have had the courage to risk so much on a few stolen minutes of sweaty sex with his best friend's wife. In truth, Vaughn had forgiven Bryan because he knew his friend too well. He knew Renee must have manipulated Bryan into the affair, using his loveless marriage and his

gentle nature against him. In hindsight, he recalled the strain in their friendship over the months prior to that cabin trip and if he had not been so wrapped up in his own problems then he might have noticed the guilt in Bryan's expressive eyes and in his voice. Bryan had been trying to tell him about Renee in his own terrified way for weeks, almost begging him with those puppy-dog eyes to sit up and take notice of what was going on around him; fear had kept him from telling him outright.

Vaughn sighed. Renee was the type of woman who knew how to get someone to do what she wanted; a true femme fatale. Even Vaughn had fallen for her charms and only his admittedly anal nature had prevented him from simply marrying her with no financial protection at all. If he had been as weak as Bryan then he might have lost everything he had worked for over the past few years, just as Bryan had lost everything. Only then did Vaughn realize that, although he had lost a portion of his personal wealth to Renee, he had managed to hold onto what he now knew was his most prized possession - his friendship with Bryan. The increasing depth of that friendship was more than he could ever have imagined, mostly because he had not realized that he wanted it and needed it before Renee tried to tear him and Bryan apart. It occurred to him then that even if he had forfeited all his worldly possessions in this divorce - just as Bryan had to Heather - then he would still be the winner as long as he had Bryan. Everything else could be rebuilt from scratch if necessary but his relationship with Bryan was both precious and unique.

When Bryan looked up from his coffee, with blue eyes huge, still expressing his sadness at the grief he had caused, Vaughn leaned across the table and punched him in the arm with just enough force to make Bryan wince.

"What d'you do that for?"

Vaughn gave him a flash of a deeper smile. "Why don't we grab something to eat here and go watch a movie or something?"

"Don't you have to get back to work? Don't I?"

Vaughn smile became broader at the perplexed expression. "I own my firm, Bryan. If I want to take the rest of the day off and spend it with you..?" He left the question hanging as a spark of pleasure brightened the blue eyes. "And nobody would give a shit if you didn't go back today. Not like your swimming in work at the bank."

Bryan stared at him for a moment and then that irrepressible boyish spirit peaked out in a mischievous, crooked grin.

"How about that new horror flick?"

Vaughn grinned because that was something else he could never share with Renee, and that was his love of truly awful and gory horror movies.

The next month past far quicker than Vaughn could believe. He turned the letter over in his hands before opening the envelope and taking out the contents, aware that this proved that his marriage to Renee was over. He was free to love someone else openly, to love Bryan openly.

Free to tell Jon and Steve about him and Bryan, knowing they would be surprised for a moment but totally accepting afterwards, especially now they had dropped any pretense of them being nothing more than fuck buddies. Silently, Vaughn handed the document across to Bryan, wanting to gauge his reaction and was not surprised when Bryan looked back up in trepidation.

Bryan's divorce from Heather had been traumatic even though Bryan could admit that his marriage had been over long before Renee made her moves on him but Bryan knew Vaughn had still wanted Renee that day in the cabin. Despite seeing her fucking Bryan, he had still wanted her back and would have gone with her to Vancouver if she had asked. Except she had not asked and, in truth, he would have had second thoughts long before he reached the airport.

"You okay with this?" Bryan offered back the document and Vaughn frowned at the stickiness from Bryan's fingers from where he'd been eating a breakfast of toast and jam.

"Yeah." Vaughn replied quietly and could not stop a smile from spreading across his face as he reached out with both hands and cupped Bryan's face, drawing him in for a soft and leisurely kiss. He pulled back, licking the sweet taste of jam off his lips.

"You really should have a decent breakfast each day." Vaughn eyed the toast, shaking his head in dismay as he spooned more oatmeal into his mouth.

Vaughn considered all the times when he had told Bryan it was okay between them, that he had come to his senses and realized that he no longer loved Renee. Perhaps he had never truly loved her, only loved what she represented in the form of a trophy wife that would increase his standing among his peers. Renee had been beautiful and intelligent, elegant and sociable. She had turned heads at social events, drawing men to her like moths to a flame, and making him the envy of every man in the room.

In contrast, Bryan was clumsy, a little rough, not so bright, and a man, but Vaughn knew he wouldn't change a thing about him. As far as Vaughn was concerned, he would still have the most beautiful person in the room on his arm but he knew most others would never see Bryan that way. But who cared what the others thought anyway? He was one of the best lawyers in Toronto, heading up his own legal firm with a slew of wealthy clients as well as people walking in off the street asking for his firm's services daily. He did not have to prove himself to anyone in this town.

As he considered this, he realized he had the answer to another problem that was causing him grief. Four days ago, he fired one of his junior associates, Matt Beddoes, because the man had underperformed consistently in an area of law that was important to the firm, causing problems for him and his partners. Instead of accepting this gracefully, along with what Vaughn believed to be a good pay settlement and a recommendation for employment in a firm dealing with family law, which was Beddoes only strength, Beddoes had chosen to sue Vaughn instead for unlawful dismissal. He accused Vaughn of firing him because he had admitted to being gay only a few days prior to his dismissal. The case would be heard in court this morning and Vaughn had agreed to meet up with counsel early to go over the facts.

Vaughn glanced across the breakfast table at Bryan, opened his mouth to tell Bryan all about the dismissal and the easy solution to Beddoes' claims that the firm was biased against gays, and then snapped it shut. He had no right to ask this of Bryan, or to use their relationship just to get his firm out of a minor inconvenience. What he was proposing would out both of them in an open courtroom, revealing their relationship to any news hack that happened to be scrounging for some hot gossip at the court house. He owed it to both of them to give them time to speak to their friends, colleagues and families before letting a whole bunch of strangers walk rough shod over their private life together.

"What?"

Vaughn shook his head. "It's nothing. Just wondering if you wanted to get a takeout tonight."

"The guys are coming over for the game...and bringing beer and pizza."

"Oh. Right." Vaughn indicated towards the divorce papers. "You want us to say anything now that's out of the way?"

Bryan gave a crooked smile, his eyes dancing in relief and Vaughn knew he'd made the right decision in suggesting they come out to their closest friends. "As long as you don't suggest partner swapping. I'm still not sharing a room with Jon, or Steve for that matter."

Vaughn leaned forward, catching Bryan's arm as he lifted it to take another bite of his toast. "I'm not one for sharing, Bryan."

Bryan's eyes darted away guiltily. "I know."

"If you ever want out of this then just...just say so, okay?" He waited for Bryan's twisted smile of agreement. "So? You want a ride into work this morning?"

Bryan grinned and pushed back from the table, quickly dumping his dirty plate in the dishwasher. "Ready when you are."

Bryan watched the world go by outside the car window as Vaughn drove them into the heart of the city knowing Vaughn must be heading straight to court this morning. Although both the bank and Vaughn's office was just a block away from the court house, Vaughn was usually an early starter, wanting to get to work to prepare case notes and ensure everyone else's work was running smoothly. Bryan accepted this as part of owning a law firm but, as importantly, as part of Vaughn's need to micro-manage everything. It didn't really bother him that they had such differing personalities in that respect; it was just the way they were.

In some respects, this should have been like any other day but today would be different because Bryan had a feeling that he would not have a job to go back to after today. He had not said anything to Vaughn, mostly because there was nothing Vaughn could do anyway, but it weighed on Bryan's mind that he was already living off Vaughn's goodwill, and contributing very little outside of the bedroom compared to Vaughn's wealth, but this would make him even more dependent on his best friend until he could get back on his feet. Perhaps

if he had contested his divorce sufficiently to gain even a small percentage of his and Heather's joint finances then he would not be in such a predicament but it had seemed fair then to let her take everything in compensation for his adultery and his feelings had not changed despite his current circumstances.

As the car approached Bryan's office building and pulled up to the sidewalk, Bryan straightened up his tie and raked a hand through his hair. He surprised his lover by leaning across and planting a swift kiss on one cheek before calling out a 'see you later' as he left the car. As he turned back to wave jauntily, he grinned at Vaughn's stunned delight and the hand raised to where the kiss had caught the corner of his mouth. Bryan's grin faded as Vaughn pulled away and he turned back to the building that had dominated his life for the past seven years. He hated the shitty job but dreaded having no job at all. Steeling himself for the inevitable, he walked in, sat at his desk and began working.

As the morning progressed, other staff received the call they were all dreading and took the short walk to the manager's office. Some returned looking relieved while others looked shell-shocked before they started packing away their desks into small boxes. Bryan knew which camp he would fall into because he had not been doing so well for most of this last year. A shitty marriage and a fucked-up affair with Renee had seen off the first half, and the turmoil in his life up until Vaughn's declaration of truly wanting him and not Renee had seen off the rest.

"Bryan?"

He nodded, gathered his dignity around him and walked to his manager's office, closing the door behind him. The grave look on Marshall's face told him all he needed to know so he saved the guy the job of having to spell it out.

"Can I leave straight away or do I have to finish the day?"

"I really am sorry, Bryan. You did good work last year but..."

Bryan offered a false laugh. "Always hated the job anyway."

Marshall gave a soft laugh and offered his hand. Knowing it wasn't really the guy's fault that half the department had to go, Bryan reached back.

"Good luck, Bryan...and if you need any personal references then..."

"Yeah, thanks."

Bryan did not bother to pack up anything as his only personal item was a crappy mug that Heather had bought several years earlier and a battered paperback that he'd never got around to throwing out. The rest belonged to the bank though Bryan noticed that this did not stop some of the other unfortunates from sticking pens, rulers and calculators into their small boxes.

Bryan grabbed his jacket from the back of his seat and headed out, stopping by several desks to say a last goodbye to close colleagues. Despite the situation, he took a deep breath as he

stepped out of the bank and felt a sense of relief settle around his shoulders. He had only taken the job in the first place to appease Heather, hating being tied to a desk day-in, day-out but willing to sacrifice his dreams to give her the material wealth she craved. Now, he wasn't certain what he wanted to do as Vaughn had made it pretty clear that he had no future as a songwriter, shattering that dream, and Bryan was unsure if he wanted to end up tied to another desk job. Perhaps he'd have a word with the guys tonight when they came over and see if anyone had any suggestions but, first, he ought to let Vaughn know. There had been too many secrets between them already for Bryan to spring this one on him tonight in front of Jon and Steve.

Bryan glanced up the street towards the court building, wondering if Vaughn might still be there. Perhaps he could catch him for lunch. Once inside the court house, he checked the board to see it would give any clue as to which courtroom he should try and was confused to see that Vaughn's firm was the named defendant. Vaughn's distraction over the past few days suddenly held greater relevance and, noticing that it was open to the public, Bryan slipped into the back of the courtroom in time to see Vaughn on the stand being questioned by Beddoes' lawyer.

"How long has Mr. Beddoes worked for you as a junior associate?"

"Eight months and four days."

The lawyer turned to the jury. "Eight months and four days." He turned back to Vaughn. "You stated during my client's dismissal that you had been unhappy with his work from the outset and yet you did nothing until two days after my client inadvertently disclosed his homosexuality. Coincidence?"

Vaughn's lawyer stood up. "Objection. The timing of the dismissal is irrelevant."

"On the contrary, your Honor, I believe the timing is relevant in this case and that my client was dismissed not for his perceived ability to perform his work but under prejudicial circumstances relating to his sexual orientation." The lawyer turned to the jury again. "He was fired because he is gay."

"Objection. There are no grounds to support this."

"Objection overruled. Please continue Mr. Samson."

"Your firm consists of three partners, four senior associates and ten junior associates along with administration support. That's... what? Thirty-two staff?"

"Thirty-one."

"Ah yes, because now there are only nine junior associates." The lawyer gave a wry smile to the jury to indicate where the tenth junior associate had gone.

"How many fall into the category of gay, lesbian, or bisexual?"

"I wouldn't know. It's none of my business."

"Isn't it true to say that in five years, not one single person has been known to be gay except for my client, who was then dismissed two days later?"

"I have no prejudice towards gays."

"The facts seem to disagree with you."

Bryan frowned as the lawyer continued to labor the point that Vaughn's firm had an implicit 'no gays allowed' policy, and that was ludicrous. Even if he had not been involved in a homosexual relationship with Vaughn for the past five months, Bryan would never believe Vaughn prejudiced against gays. If he was prejudiced then Jon would not be one of Vaughn's best friends, especially after having told Vaughn he was gay some time ago. Samson sat down saying he had no more questions but Bryan could see the damage he had caused by the way the jury now looked at Vaughn like he was a piece of slime. He watched as Vaughn's lawyer stood up and approached Vaughn.

"You stated that Mr. Beddoes had worked for you for eight months and four days."

"Yes."

"In that time, have you had cause to question the quality of the work being produced by Mr.-"

"Objection. Counsel is leading the witness."

"Sustained."

Vaughn's lawyer gave a tight smile and turned back to Vaughn. "Perhaps you can tell us in your own words the actions that led up to you dismissing Mr. Beddoes."

Bryan listened as Vaughn gave a clear and concise report on Beddoes' failings, offering evidence to support his claims. It all seemed so reasonable and straightforward to Bryan because if the man had been hired to do a job and then proved incompetent at it then any employer ought to have the right to let that person go. He reiterated that his firm had no policy against gays whether implicit or explicit and counter-accused that Beddoes' disclosure of his homosexuality had been timed purely to gain this particular outcome as he had been warned some weeks back that his work was not considered good enough and that he was close to being dismissed. The judge glanced at his watch and decided that this was a good time to break for lunch, ordering the court to reconvene in one hour. Bryan watched as the jury was led away and waited while others filed out of the room, looking back towards the defense table to find Vaughn staring right at him.

"Bryan? What are you doing here?"

"Why didn't you tell me about this?"

Vaughn's lips tightened. "It's not like you could do anything, Bry."

"Why, at least, didn't you tell them about us?"

Vaughn flicked a glance towards his lawyer, whom Bryan recognized as one of the partners in his firm, Francois St. Piers. Vaughn grabbed Bryan's arm and tried to draw him a short distance away but Bryan held his ground because he could not see why both of them should have a shitty day.

"This has nothing to do with Beddoes being gay--"

"Then you should take a good look at the faces on the jury. They think it has everything to do with that. You can change that by letting them know about--"

"I know." Vaughn sighed in resignation. "I'm not ashamed of us but I'm not going to stand up there and tell a bunch of strangers about our private life when it really is no one else's business."

Francois stepped forward. "And even if Vaughn stated he is gay at this late stage, the jury is likely to see it as a ploy to deflect the accusation."

Bryan noticed the tense used and could feel the heat rising in his face. Francois knew about them already. Vaughn had probably told him out of professional courtesy because he was both a friend and a partner in the firm.

"I could stand up there and tell them."

Vaughn protested immediately but Francois place a hand on his forearm. "If Beddoes wins this case then it may cost us thousands of dollars in damages plus loss of future business opportunities."

"Are you sure you want to do this?"

"You said this morning that we were free to talk about it now."

Vaughn stared at him for a moment longer and the softness in his eyes made Bryan feel incredibly good inside, knowing he had made the right decision. An hour later, though, he was starting to have second thoughts as he stepped up to be sworn in as a character witness. Francois had used the recess to convince the judge that his client, Vaughn, had a right to rebut the accusations of prejudice as they had unfairly influenced the jury.

"How long have you known the defendant?"

"Since we were seven years old."

"That's twenty-three years."

"Yes."

"Can you describe your relationship with the defendant?"

Bryan took a breath and looked Vaughn straight in the eyes. "We're lovers." He smiled at the look of love and admiration that swept Vaughn's face at his public announcement. Although Samson tried to persuade the jury that this was just a trick, Bryan could see by their faces that

they were now considering the dismissal purely on Beddoes ability to do his job rather than on an unfair dismissal for being gay. When the jury retired, they took only twenty minutes to reach a consensus that exonerated Vaughn and his firm. Vaughn stood up immediately, seeking Bryan in the crowd behind him and grabbing into a hug before pulling back purely to cup his face in both hands and kiss him soundly and sweetly, no longer caring that people would see them together. The sounds of the court fell away as Bryan melted into the kiss, hands clutching at Vaughn's thousand dollar suit jacket, only coming back when Francois clapped both of them on the shoulder.

"Celebrate?"

"I lost my job today," he blurted. It was a non sequitur that threw Vaughn for a second before he recovered with a grin.

"You hated that shitty job."

Bryan snorted, leaning forward until his forehead touch with Vaughn's. "Yeah...but still it means--"

"You'll have time to concentrate on your songs now." Bryan pulled back in shock as Vaughn continued. "And when you're rolling in fame and royalties then I can be your kept man."

"Really?"

"Yeah. Really, Bry."

Epilogue:

The snow was deep and crisp as they trudged from the car to the cabin door, swiftly kicking off boots as soon as they crossed the threshold and pulling out 'manly' slippers instead of diving into the old box of moccasins and thick socks left behind from when Vaughn's dad had owned the cabin. Vaughn sniggered when he heard Bryan cursing after stepping into a cold patch of melting snow brought in on their boots, watching him hop around trying to pull off his wet sock. Between them they had managed to bring all their clothes and provisions into the cabin in just a few trips to and from the car, and without slipping once. Vaughn dropped his weekend bag onto the large bed in the main bedroom that had replaced the bed he had shared once or twice with Renee during their marriage. He had not told Bryan of the delivery, deciding to both surprise him and christen the new bed on the same day.

"Oh cool!" Bryan dropped his bag on the floor beside the door and leapt towards the bed, testing the bounce before grinning back up at Vaughn. "Definitely not sharing with Jon this weekend." With a lecherous grin, he grabbed Vaughn and dragged him down onto the bed on top of him, his flailing arms and legs stilling as he was swept into a bone-melting kiss that had Vaughn hard and moaning in seconds. His moan of passion changed to frustration when he heard the front door open and Steve calling out from the main room.

"Get your cock out his ass, Vaughn, and get out here."

Bryan wiggled his hips, dragging his groin against Vaughn's as he offered an impish grin. "Later," he promised before rolling Vaughn off him and bouncing out of the room to greet their friends.

Vaughn gave a soft laugh of pleasure as he heard the happy voices outside. He pushed to his feet and paused on the threshold, staring at the group of men huddled around the kitchen counter. Steve had pulled a pile of DVDs out of his bag and was letting Bryan sort through them, grinning at the small exclamations of admiration at his choices.

"Dog Soldiers, Blade...Cool. It's all horror."

"And I brought along something to play them on," stated Jon, indicating towards the laptop case sitting beside his camera equipment.

Steve looked across at Vaughn with a big smile plastered across his handsome face. "Want me to crank up the hot tub?"

"Sure. Go ahead."

"What room should I dump these in?" Jon indicated towards his and Steve's bags.

"Same as last time." Vaughn watched as Jon carried the bags to the second largest bedroom on the other side of the cabin, waiting to hear his exclamation.

"Hey! You got a new bed in here."

"Just don't break it."

Later, pleasantly drunk and totally relaxed after soaking in the hot tub, Vaughn climbed into bed beside Bryan and snuggled up against his lover's warm and naked body. Hot fingers began to trace patterns over his skin, igniting his senses and he moaned softly, luxuriating in the soothing fingertips that brushed across a nipple before a blunt nail scored down across his belly to his groin. Those agile fingers, supple from playing the guitar, toyed with Vaughn, curling through pubic hair before wrapping around Vaughn's swiftly hardening cock. Several long, almost torturously slow pulls had Vaughn breathing hard and heavy. He raised his own hand to caress the side of Bryan's face, his thumb brushing over the parted lips before he leaned in to nip at the soft fleshy lower lip. A swipe of his tongue eased the sting before he plundered the softly gasping mouth, letting Bryan swallow Vaughn's moan of pleasure.

Vaughn pulled back with a hiss of frustration when Bryan's busy fingers stopped stroking him, his breath catching in his throat when Bryan spread his legs, drawing Vaughn between them before pulling his knees back. Fumbling for the lube left on the cupboard, Vaughn squirted a generous amount on to his fingers before seeking the tiny yet so-familiar entrance to Bryan's body, eyes widening when he realized Bryan had already prepared himself. Trembling with desire and need, Vaughn planted a hard kiss on the softly yielding lips before pushing into Bryan, closing his eyes at the rush of sensations as the heat and tightness of Bryan's body enveloped him. As he plowed into the beautiful body, Vaughn could feel his climax building, his hand wrapping over Bryan's fingers as Bryan sought his own pleasure. All too soon, he felt the heat radiating out, rolling over him in waves of heat and mindless

pleasure as he buried himself deeper into Bryan once, twice and then a third time, the intensity leaving his body limp and boneless as he cried out hoarsely, their cries mingling. He collapsed over his lover's heaving body, barely aware of the sticky heat of Bryan's release between their bellies.

After several small insistent pushes, Vaughn rolled off his lover.

"Fuck."

He heard Bryan's snort of a laugh and playfully hit him, slapping one strong thigh before pushing off the bed to retrieve a damp washcloth. Vaughn cleaned them both up quickly and then collapsed back on the bed beside Bryan, drawing his lover into his arms. He heard Bryan hiss softly.

"You okay?"

"Sore ass."

"Sorry."

"You can kiss it better later... much later," came the sleepy response with words almost lost within a huge yawn.

Vaughn hugged Bryan tighter in agreement and let his own tired eyes drift shut, falling into a sated, drunken sleep almost immediately. When he opened his eyes again, he could hear the sound of movement in the main room next door with the rattle of pots and pans giving away the location of either Jon or Steve, or both. Bryan was still curled up close by Vaughn's side and Vaughn spent a moment staring at his best friend who was now his lover.

A year ago, the cabin had seemed cold and empty despite Jon, Steve, Bryan and Trev's presence but, this time, the whole place seemed warmed through by the friendships re-forged in ice and fire. The memory reminded Vaughn of something very important and he leaned up on one elbow to glance at the clock on the bedside cupboard. The digital display read 09:25.

Vaughn leaned over Bryan and pressed a heated kiss upon lips that were smiling softly even in sleep, waiting for Bryan to respond to his kiss before drawing back slightly to watch the incredible blue eyes slowly flutter open. Bryan stared up at Vaughn for a moment before his smile widened, his eyes sparkling in happiness where, last year, they had been dulled by emotional pain and guilt, and partially blackened by Vaughn's fist. He leaned in again and kissed his smiling lips.

"Happy birthday, Bry."

THE END

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!