

# Astronaut

Ariel

**Rating:** PG, just for language.

**Author's Notes:** Inspired by a Terami Hirsch song and written for [ellandra](#).

**Summary:** *He thinks of running into Brian at a random club in New York, or at Babylon while he's visiting his mom. He thinks they'll look at each other, and maybe it'll be a little awkward but not really because that kind of thing always melts away when they're together.*  
(Brian/Justin, 2900 words.)

1.

Justin eats Chinese food from the carton with a fork. He uses his left hand because his right is busy with drops and lines: a smidgen of color, a smear, a wash. The power of digital technology, he thinks, it's a good thing he's used to Photoshop, Illustrator and Painter. There's no room for canvases here, but there's always space for a computer. Thank God he's ambidextrous.

(He thinks of running into Brian at a random club in New York, or at Babylon while he's visiting his mom. He thinks they'll look at each other, and maybe it'll be a little awkward but not really because that kind of thing always melts away when they're together.)

In the never-silence of Manhattan, the room is cold and dark because he doesn't always like to work with the lights on, and his roommate (Daph's friend, the straight-guy-who-totally-isn't-homophobic-or-anything-I-promise) isn't home to complain. Outside, the city lights glow, a thousand thousand windows lighting up the night like stars. New York isn't exactly what he expected, which is odd if he thinks about it too much because it isn't like he'd never been there before. There's a certain difference to the atmosphere between being a tourist and being at home. Even when it's been "home" for such a short time that he may as well be a tourist anyway. He's not sure he likes it.

(He thinks of walking into his first show with some hot guy on his arm, and finding Brian there, looking at his paintings. And Brian will be surprised at the guy, but Justin will laugh and say wait, it's just the gallery's curator. Standing there, smiling, Brian will try not to look relieved and fail in such a profound way that they'll both laugh.)

He checks his mail for the thousandth time, and still no answer. It's been two weeks.

(He thinks of Brian on a plane, coming to visit. It has to be that way – he isn't sure why, except that it seems fair after not answering e-mails for two fucking weeks. He thinks about Brian coming off the plane, him and his Armani suit and his suitcase dragging along behind him. He can't be there just for a weekend, not in this fantasy.)

Sometimes he can't decide whether he feels like he isn't actually in New York and he'll wake up at the loft one day mumbling, 'I had the strangest dream'... or if it's Pittsburgh, 22 years of his life, that was the dream. Maybe it was, he thinks as he smears Malachite across the skyline of his digital canvas. Maybe Brian was a dream, too.

In the quiet, Justin spins stories of how they'll find each other again.

(But mostly, he thinks of reloading his fucking inbox and getting a message with headers that read To: Justin Taylor, From: Brian Kinney. He thinks of his phone ringing, for once, without it being his mother.)

2.

*To: Justin Taylor (justinpaints@gmail.com)  
From: Brian Kinney (bkinney@kinnetik.com)  
Subject: Hey.*

*I'm going to be in New York next month. You can queen out about how I didn't answer your e-mails in person.*

*How are you?*

Staring at the words, rereading them for the third time, Justin has the bizarre and irrational fear that he'll go to the airport and Brian will have changed so much that he'll be somehow unrecognizable. He'll be taller, or shorter, with darker or lighter hair than Justin remembered. He'll be *different* in some profound way. ...it's a weird thought, and kind of paranoid but it refuses to leave him alone.

They talk on the phone to make arrangements. Justin isn't entirely out of LA money, but he knows there isn't enough of it left to support the kind of lifestyle Brian's used to, even for a week, so he doesn't argue that they shouldn't stay at The Four Seasons, and doesn't try to say he'll pay for half of the bill.

(A half hour into the conversation, Brian's voice softens and he says, "It's not that I haven't been thinking about you." Justin closes his eyes and says he knows. Actually, he'd started to wonder.)

Three and a half weeks later, Justin stands at the airport and Brian turns the corner. He isn't wearing Armani, just a pair of blue jeans and a loose t-shirt. His carry-on is slung over his shoulder, and Justin can pick out every gay man and straight woman in the crowd from the way they look at him. Even the airport at nearly midnight, tired and slightly bedraggled, Brian draws every eye.

Waiting for mysteriously sluggish luggage to appear, Justin glances up. Brian's hair falls in his eyes when he turns his head; Justin wonders what Lindsay was on when she said that New York was the only place to be if he wanted to be an artist, and why the fuck he couldn't just paint in Pittsburgh.

Leaving, Justin offers to pay for the cab, but Brian won't let him. Maybe, he thinks, it's less that he needed to go to New York to paint than that he needed to go, to grow up.

Justin tries not to be awkward in the cab and tries not to gush when he looks around the hotel because doing that would be immensely lame, and besides it's not like he hasn't seen nice hotels before - it's just been a while. Brian kisses him in the hall just outside the door; a bellboy walks by and barely notices and hey, this really is New York. By the time Brian

unlocks the door, hands fumbling around behind him, they're on their third kiss, and Justin has already unbuttoned Brian's blue jeans. They nearly forget their bags in the hall, and only barely make it to the bed.

Brian's face is buried in Justin's shoulder, his hands unzipping Justin's pants, when he says "I've been thinking about fucking you for a month." His voice is a low rumble that sweeps over Justin's skin, raising goosebumps, making him hard. He parts his lips and almost says that he's been thinking about the same thing for even longer – that it's one of maybe three things he can't seem to stop thinking about. He almost says that he can't stop thinking about Brian, either. Not just the fucking, but everything about him: the plains and valleys of his body, the way his eyes lighten in the sun and darken by night, the velvety texture of his voice.

But it seems completely pathetic so he doesn't say it, even though he could, and all that emotion welling up at the tip of his tongue turns to, "Well, now you get to" as he pushes Brian onto his back. Brian's cock is already hard, but then it was in the hall, too. Justin takes the condom from between his fingers and tears it open; Brian's eyes are dark and intense as he watches. Justin straddles him as he slides a Beyond Seven down that so-familiar shaft, and God he's missed this. Below him, Brian grips his hips and guides him down. Always in control, even on his back.

This part is familiar too: that sharp pain of first penetration, and the slow slide of Brian inside him. Justin inhales, a sharp and jagged breath, and Brian's fingers dig into his hips, pulling him down even as Brian rolls his hips up.

Brian says something – it may be a curse, or a moan, but it's under his breath; the sounds of Brian's pleasure, every gasp and moan and curse and every jagged breath, are fire in Justin's veins and with every thrust his cock aches to be touched. Then Brian releases his hip, fingers closing around Justin's cock – sliding up and down in strokes that match the quickening pace of his thrusts.

If he could think, Justin would count strokes, count thrusts, just to see how little control he really has over himself when Brian is inside him and wrapped around him at the same time. Beneath him, another curse, louder this time, Brian's head pushed back into the pillows and his thrusts growing harder, sharper; Justin rides him, thrusts into his hand and tenses his muscles around Brian's cock.

And then, just over his own breath, he hears his name, muttered in that voice Brian has just before he comes – all thick and tight and strangled with want. Two syllables and Justin bites down on his bottom lip and comes, spilling over Brian's fingers, still stroking with every thrust. He's shuddering, still coming down, when Brian grips his hips again and cries out as his thrusts quicken and sharpen, then slow as his body relaxes.

Afterwards, in the darkness of the unlit hotel room, Justin lies next to Brian, watching his face. Like all places in New York, the room isn't quite dark – he can see the outline of Brian's features, colored blue and grey, and his chest rising and falling with every inhalation and exhalation.

Neither of them says the first things that come to mind, little three word sentences that shift the planets and change the world. But Brian says, eyes still closed, "A month and a half. What have I missed?" And Justin kisses his throat and runs fingers over his skin, memorizing the feel of him, before answering.

3.

Years are strange. The way the seasons appear and disappear, the way they pass by and there's nothing really left but memories and a few scattered leaves or a few unmelted lumps of snow. Dead dandelions littering the yard of Michael's house when Justin visits, and blooming flowers in the park when he walks there with Gus, who's taken to staying with Brian for a few weeks every summer.

Five months after Justin leaves he has his first show; one of the galleries that had been bothering Lindsay for his work just after Caswell's article. Lindsay comes to the opening, of course, visiting from Toronto, and so does his mother. Daphne shows up too. Brian, Justin knows, won't be coming – he's in London on business, and even if he weren't he wouldn't have come. Yet another argument, yet another drama, and God only knows what about. Justin stands by the wall-size canvas he considers his best work and smiles for the cameras and plays a gracious not-quite-host. Halfway through the show he retreats to the bathroom to get away because as much as he likes people, he also can't fucking stand them.

Or maybe a little because the evening is completely wrong without Brian there.

So once he's splashed water on his face, taken several deep, calming breaths and rejoined the party, he can't repress his smile at the sight of Brian, standing by the painting Justin loves so much, with a wine glass in hand. He turns around, and says "Your painting is fucking hot," and with that the war ends.

Four years after Justin leaves, he has contacts in the industry and a portfolio that ranges from concept work for art films to a commissioned mural in the lobby of a five star hotel. And maybe he isn't sure he wants to spend his life dashing off commissions, but between jobs he sits in his studio, *his* studio paid for with *his* money, and works on his personal projects and knows that without these little compromises he wouldn't have the freedom he has now.

Five years after Justin leaves, he paints to pass the time as he waits for morning to bring Brian back to New York for yet another in a series of occasional weekends. He smears Vermilion across the shadows and wonders why he hasn't gone home yet.

Two weeks later, he steps off a plane into Pittsburgh and this time all his things are following him by truck. Brian is waiting for him at the other end of the ramp.

4.

Brian has little grey hairs on his temple, but Justin doesn't want to tell him that. Instead, he presses his face into the crook of his shoulder and his hand against Brian's chest. He knows this feeling very well: the wanting to say something, knowing he shouldn't. It's gotten familiar, that feeling.

It's dark in the loft, but his fingertips, Justin feels Brian's heartbeat. He feels Brian's chest rumble when he says, "Justin."

"Yeah?"

"Was it everything you wanted?" Brian's voice, soft as velvet now. Soft, and a little scared.

Justin closes his eyes, wondering how long he's wanted to know and how long he's bit back his questions. How long he's feared the answer.

"At first," he says, "It was horrible. I fucking hated it. It was loud and bright and chaotic and... I like cities, but it was too much city at one time. I totally slept with a pillow over my ear."

(Beneath him, Brian shifts. Justin doesn't open his eyes; he doesn't know if he can keep talking, if he does.)

"And then it was incredible. It was so beautiful it hurt sometimes, and I couldn't get all of it out regardless of how much time I spent in front of my computer, or painting. The lights, the traffic, the noise, it was exciting, it was hot, it was... It was better than LA. I'd walk down the street and see movies being filmed, and remember LA, and I'd just be glad to be in New York instead. I saw a million plays, mostly musicals. The culture, oh my God, Brian: the museums, the theaters. Horse drawn carriages are pretty fucking cool."

(Brian's heart, beating faster.)

"It was amazing, and the clubs, God, the clubs. You'd love them. Full of hot guys. I didn't go often, but when I did..." His voice trails off, and he remembers the lights, and heat. "It was something else," he says. "Now all the quiet is kind of freaking me out to be honest."

"So," Brian says, "Why the fuck did you come back here?"

Justin feels Brian's muscles firm under his fingers. "Every time I saw something new," he says, "I thought about you. Whether you would like it. What you would think of it. *Shit, Brian would hate this play*, and *Brian would fucking love that statue*. I don't know. I thought about you a lot, because everything made me think of you."

Close to him, pressed against him, Brian says, "That's a piss poor excuse to come back to the Pitts."

"Yeah, maybe. But I don't think so." Justin traces Brian's ribs with his fingers. "I loved New York," he says, "But not as much as I loved everything I left behind."

5.

It seems like most of Justin's life has happened at night. It was night when he stood beneath a lamp post and stared across the street at the hottest guy he'd ever seen, thinking *That's him. He's the one*.

It was night when his father told him to come home now, or never again, and on a night he doesn't quite remember, he lost that cocksure sense of self he once had, replaced by a scar that never quite faded. It was night when he left with Ethan, and night when he came home. His flight to New York, 10pm. His return flight five years later, 9:42.

It's night when Brian stands in front of the oversized windows at the loft, staring out at the streets of Pittsburgh. Justin watches him from the sofa for a minute, silhouetted by the moonlight and the weak glare of street lamps and windows, then joins him. They're both half-dressed or maybe a quarter dressed would be more appropriate terminology: underwear, no

socks.

Even in silhouette, framed by the haze of smoke drifting around him from his cigarette, Brian is beautiful. Outside, it's sparkling.

Brian looks at him, the tiny edges of a smile held down around his mouth. It's strange how content he seems lately.

He passes the cigarette to Justin. "Have I ever mentioned how fucking pale you are? You glow." His voice is softer when he says, "Anyway, I'm glad you came back." He says it as though it's a continuation of a thought. Maybe it is.

(And there are things he wants to say, things that have been building for five years, maybe longer than that. But he doesn't know if he has the words.)

Inhaling smoke, Justin leans against Brian's bare skin, damp and warm but cooling in the air, and closes his eyes.

**-end-**