

## ***Straight On Till Morning***

**Rating:** PG-13ish

**Spoilers:** Well, it's post-513, so.

**Specifics:** Brian/Babylon. And I mean that. 800 words.

**Summary:** 'This is where I live. This is who I am.' - Brian Kinney.

When the lights go on in Babylon, the shadows shift and shake, and disappear. Spots of pink and white and blue and red chase across the new walls – stronger walls, built to withstand gunpowder and flame. The white-hot gaze of hate.

Brian stands in the shrinking darkness as the people file in, one after the other. Each face is pale with uncertainty, each step is the beat of funeral dirge, and with each step whispers trickle through the crowd – four dead, wasn't it? Or was it five? And didn't one of them die right *there*?

So maybe Michael was just a little stupid when he said the club should reopen. Maybe Brian was just a little stupid, listening. Maybe he should have left a sign by the door, *Dance with ghosts. \$20 a person.*

The new bartender glances his way, and pours him a scotch. Brian remembers the last one, 27 years old and charred black to the bone. He swallows down his drink and orders another.

Then the music starts, that old thumpa thumpa, coursing through him and through the crowd like blood. Brian closes his eyes, and feels it – every beat, every note. The heat of the men nearby, the weight of their eyes on him. Walking through the crowd, he might be thirty again, he might be twenty-five. The King in his Court, the cock of the fucking walk.

(He has meetings tomorrow, presentations to make and papers to sign.

He has a loft waiting for him, empty and silent, and empty.)

Brian steps onto a podium, bathed in blue light, and he's finally coming home.

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Things change but in Babylon they remain the same. Michael said it once – the same hot guys, the same music. The illusion of constancy.

Six months later, he says it again, smiling, forehead against against Brian's chest as they dance, confetti in his hair. Glitter on his eyelashes. 2am and neither of them should be there, but the world brings them deadlines and missed shipments and the news of yet another political loss, and everything brings them back to where they started. An ocean of men around them, and the room is hot and smoky, but in the turquoise light they're swimming.

It's just like it was, and for a moment he thinks Theodore and Emmett will be waiting on the curb outside. He thinks Justin will be crossing the street.

So there it is – a shift in the tide, and the music changes. The lights shift from blue to red.

And there it is, their song playing loud, and Brian's heart beats in time with the percussion, his chest rises and falls in its rhythm. Michael smiles again, hands against the small of Brian's back.

Their song, asking them again what they've done, and why they're proud.

\* \* \*

A year comes and goes, and no one says it anymore. The ghosts aren't forgotten, but they don't linger anymore. On the anniversary of the almost-end, Emmett says a word from the stage, tears in his eyes. Brian watches from the crowd, glass to his lips and someone's hand on his shoulder, holding him up. Heads fall in reverence, or raise in defiance for one moment before the lights go dim and dimmer, then explode into silver and white.

The music plays, soft then loud. Cyndi Lauper's voice echoes and fills them up, like air in their lungs. Brian wonders if it felt this good the first time – if it felt like the world began just before it stopped.

\* \* \*

Things remain the same in Babylon - another night, another theme, another tablet of E - but outside the seasons change. Five years pass, and ten. Brian steps away from the dance floor.

The music plays – beating his heart for him, warming his skin. In the center of the room another man dances where he used to stand – tall and Nordic, or smaller and darker, it's all the same. Kings come and go, but Brian lives in these walls, has this world inside his skin. Sitting by the bar, whiskey in hand, he thinks of Peter Pan and how he never grows up, never loses his powers. He thinks there's more than one way to live in Neverland.

He traces the spot on his finger where there is no wedding band and wonders if he should regret his lack of regrets.

Every year brings new faces, new tales, but the story remains the same.

Outside, on the curb, another group of friends wait.

Across the street, another new boy is crossing.

Faces along the bar  
Cling to their average day:  
The lights must never go out,  
The music must always play  
-W.H. Auden-