

queer asfolk

EPISODE 216

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FADE IN:

1 INT. MICHAEL AND EMMETT'S APARTMENT - DAY 1

Michael and Justin sit at the table by the kitchen, working together on their comic book. Justin shows Michael a series of computer-generated, color PANELS.

JUSTIN

-- Here's where Rage and Zephyr find J.T. beaten and left for dead by a gang of gay bashers.

Michael studies the panel. It's bloody. Disturbing.

MICHAEL

It's awful gory.

JUSTIN

It's supposed to be.

Michael smiles at Justin's simple, honest reply. Meanwhile, Ben wanders into the living room, lifting cushions, looking under chairs.

BEN

I'm sure I left it here --

JUSTIN

(continuing with Michael)
Here's Rage zapping the bashers with his Mind Distorter.

BEN

With his what?

MICHAEL

(explains)
He surrounds the bashers with a Mind Distortion Field so they think they're all fags.

JUSTIN

Then they beat each other to death.

BEN

Wow! Then what happens?

Their first audience reaction -- and he's hooked! The dynamic duo show Ben a series of panels illustrating the adventure.

(CONTINUED)

1

CONTINUED:

1

MICHAEL

Rage swoops J.T. in his arms --
takes him to his lair, perched high
above Gayopolis --

JUSTIN

-- and brings J.T. back to life with a
lot of heavy kissing and deep anal
penetration.

They show panels of Rage removing his superhero costume, but
not his mask to fuck the daylight out of J.T.

MICHAEL

As you can see from the generous amount
of illustration, it's Justin's favorite
part.

BEN

I see.

(then)

Where the hell is my Palm? *

MICHAEL

Try my bedroom. Might've fallen out of
your pocket when you were falling out
of your pants.

BEN

Good thinking, Boy-Toy Wonder.

Ben gives Michael a sweet kiss, which Justin observes with a
smile, goes off to search the bedroom. Michael slips the
Palm out from under a pile of comic pages. He gestures: Shh! *

JUSTIN

You stole it?

MICHAEL

Borrowed it. Ben's got a "buddy list"
in here. I'm calling everyone on it to
come to his surprise party.

JUSTIN

When's his birthday?

MICHAEL

Next Saturday.

JUSTIN

No shit! That's mine!

(CONTINUED)

MICHAEL

Oh, yeah?

JUSTIN

Is that like the most amazing coincidence?

MICHAEL

That you guys have the same birthday?

JUSTIN

That you and Brian are both in love with guys who have the same birthday.

Before Michael can consider the cosmic significance of that, Ben comes back in. Michael quickly conceals the Palm behind his back. *

BEN

No luck in the bedroom.

MICHAEL

That's a first.

The oven timer DINGS.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Dinner's ready!

As Ben heads into the kitchen:

BEN

I know my Palm's state-of-the-art -- but it couldn't have walked away on its own! *

Michael and Justin exchange a conspiratorial grin.

MICHAEL

Stop obsessing -- I'm sure it'll turn up eventually.

(then, to Justin)

Want to stay? Ben's making Pad Thai.

BEN

(returning with the dish)

Then we're going to watch Sunset Boulevard.

JUSTIN

Can't. Brian and I are going to --

MICHAEL AND BEN

-- Babylon.

(CONTINUED)

1

CONTINUED: (3)

1

He sets the dish down on the table, leans over, kisses Michael. As Justin watches with a wistful smile and the THUMPING MUSIC of Babylon takes over:

CUT TO:

2

INT. BABYLON - NIGHT

2

Justin's now with BRIAN, who's doing a census report of the dance floor.

JUSTIN

Isn't that like the most amazing coincidence?

BRIAN

That you, Ben and "like" seventeen million other people have the same birthday?

Ted, doing his own survey, joins in.

TED

(to Brian)

So how are you planning to commemorate the Big Event? A trip to Key West? Something with four wheels and a retractable hard-top?

JUSTIN

That sounds good!

BRIAN

I'm not.

Justin's smile congeals, as Ted looks incredulous.

TED

You're -- not?

BRIAN

What the fuck's a birthday? Anyone can be born -- even you.

TED

Still, it's something to celebrate.

BRIAN

Says who -- Hallmark?
(downing his beer)
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

2

CONTINUED:

2

BRIAN (CONT'D)

The only thing worth celebrating is achievement.

TED

I seem to recall you giving Michael a surprise party.

EMMETT

That wasn't to celebrate him, it was to out him.

JUSTIN

I agree with Brian. Birthdays are silly, sentimental and unnecessary.

Brian puts an arm around Justin, gives him a kiss, as Emmett -
- wearing a tight, sprayed-on black club top with tummy cut-out -- dances (or passes) by with a HUNK.

EMMETT

(disinterested)

Thanks for the ride, sweetheart -- but here's where I get off.

As the hunk drops Emmett, leaves:

TED

Some catch. How come you're throwing him back?

BRIAN

Not big enough?

EMMETT

Oh, I'm sure he's big enough --

BRIAN

(eyeing the outfit)

Still in mourning?

EMMETT

(sighs)

I've tried boys, I've tried booze, I've tried pills -- and I'm still in the Valley of the Dulls.

TED

Well, Neely, maybe what you need is some spiritual succor.

BRIAN

You should call my mother's minister -- he gives great head.

(CONTINUED)

TED

That's not the kind of healing I had in
mind.

(then, decisively)

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

2

CONTINUED: (3)

2

TED (CONT'D)

You're coming with me tomorrow. To church.

*

JUSTIN & BRIAN & EMMETT

Church --?

*

*

CUT TO:

3

INT. THEATRE - DAY

3

On stage is gay, dynamic REVEREND BRAD -- a real showman -- finishing up his sermon for the CELEBRATION CHURCH which holds its service every Sunday in this theatre.

REVEREND BRAD

The curtain's already gone up on the biggest show in town, in the universe, in Creation. It's called "Your Life". And it stars you. The original cast. With music and lyrics and a book that could only have been written, directed and conceived by -- God!

TED

Isn't Reverend Brad incredible?

EMMETT

(not knowing what to make of him)

He should win a Tony.

REVEREND BRAD

This isn't a dress rehearsal, kids! (he holds up a "hymnal" -- a printed booklet of lyrics) So let's sell it to the balcony -- and beyond! If you'll follow along in your hymnals.

As Reverend Brad signals the pianist --

REVEREND BRAD (CONT'D)

Hit it!

-- and the congregation joins in:

CONGREGATION

"Put on your Sunday clothes, there's lots of world out there --"

TED

You won't believe how good you'll feel!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

EMMETT

Somehow, I don't think a show tune's
gonna do it.

(CONTINUED)

He gives Emmett his hymnal. Emmett reluctantly sings along with the "original cast" and the pianist.

EMMETT (CONT'D)

"That Sunday shine is a certain sign
that you feel as fine as you look --"

As they sing, Ted searches about for another hymnal, but there don't seem to be any more. Suddenly, he hears:

LUKE (O.S.)

Here. Share mine.

Ted looks over. There's Luke -- a sweet, good-looking guy with a radiant smile. Ted melts.

TED

Thanks --

They share a hymnal and a smile, join in. Even Emmett's getting into it.

EMMETT

(to Ted)

You know, I actually do feel better?

TED

Told ya!

He & Luke continue to smile and sing.

CONGREGATION

"For there's no Blue Monday in your
Sunday clothes --!"

CUT TO:

4 CONTINUED:

4

5 INT. THEATRE - DAY

5

As the theatre empties, Ted helps Luke gather up hymnals, perhaps take down the Celebration Church banner on stage.

LUKE

I was in the Peace Corps for a few years, but then I decided what I really wanted was to work with kids.

TED

That's sweet.

LUKE

Ever teach second graders? "Sweet"'s not exactly the word!

TED

(speaking for himself as well)
I'm sure they adore you.

(CONTINUED)

LUKE

I love it. And it allows me time in the evening to volunteer at the Gay Youth Support Line, and to train for the AIDS Ride on the weekends and, of course, I help out at church --

TED

Of course!
(impressed)
I'm impressed!

They're very close now.

LUKE

But listen to me, going on about myself. Tell me about you. What do you do?

TED

Me?
(after a beat)
I run my own pornsite.

But Ted didn't really say that. Only in his imagination.

LUKE (O.S.)

Ted --?

TED

(snapping back)
Huh --?

LUKE

(with a laugh)
Where'd you just go?

TED

Uh -- nowhere. I was just thinking about what you said --

LUKE

So what do you do?

A beat then:

TED

I -- I work in computers.

LUKE

Sales? Programming?

TED

I run a dot-com company.

(CONTINUED)

LUKE
(fascinated)
Really! An entrepreneur. So what kind
of company is it?

TED
I guess you could say we're a --
service provider.

LUKE
What kind of service?

TED
Dealing with people's -- needs. You
might call it -- relief work.

LUKE
Somehow I knew you'd do something that
involved helping others. Now it's my
turn to be impressed with you.

Luke smiles at Ted, warmly. And as Ted returns it, uneasily:

CUT TO:

6 INT. LIBERTY DINER - DAY

6

Michael sits with Brian and Emmett in a booth, as DEBBIE
works the brunch crowd.

BRIAN
(to Michael)
A surprise party?

EMMETT
So what do you plan to do?

MICHAEL
"Do"?

EMMETT
You know -- after everyone jumps out of
the woodwork and screams surprise?

MICHAEL
I don't know. I thought we'd sing
"Happy Birthday", cut the cake, open
presents --

BRIAN
Any thought of nudity, drugs?

*

(CONTINUED)

MICHAEL

It's not one of your "affairs".
Anyway, , I'm not rolling in dough -- I
can't afford some elaborate party.

EMMETT

You don't need money, you just need --
a theme! What's Ben into?

MICHAEL

Yoga, Buddhism --

BRIAN

We can all meditate. That sounds like
fun.

EMMETT

Give me a minute here -- I'm thinking --
it's coming -- I'm getting an idea!

(excitedly)

Why don't we do a Geisha-sushi-Miss
Saigony kind of thing? Transform Ben's
apartment into a Far Eastern
Fantasmagoria with colored lanterns and
little pagodas?

BRIAN

Better yet, why don't you buy some
sake, a copy of the Kama Sutra and fuck
your brains out? It'll be cheaper.

EMMETT

You just leave everything to me,
sweetie -- I'll make sure it's a party
that's unforgettable.

Debbie, overhearing, comes over.

DEBBIE

Who's having a party?

MICHAEL

Nobody.

DEBBIE

Mustn't be much of a guest list.

BRIAN

It's Ben's birthday, and Michael's
throwing him a Far Eastern
Fantasmagoria.

(CONTINUED)

DEBBIE
(after a beat)
That's nice.

An awkward silence, then DING!

DEBBIE (CONT'D)
Order's up. Gotta get back to work.

She heads off. Michael turns to Brian, angrily.

MICHAEL
Why the fuck'd you tell her?

BRIAN
Why the fuck'd you keep it a secret?

MICHAEL
'Cause I don't want her giving me any
more shit about Ben!

EMMETT
Maybe if you invited her --

MICHAEL
What for?
(then)
She wouldn't come anyway.

CUT TO:

Justin's over at Melanie and Lindsay's. They're finishing up
dinner. Gus is in his high chair.

LINDSAY
What do you mean, he's not doing
anything?

JUSTIN
Brian doesn't believe in birthdays.
Not even his own.

MELANIE
What kind of bullshit is that?
(to Gus)
Come on, sweetie, finish your dinner.

LINDSAY
(reminding her)
He almost killed himself when he turned
30.

*
*

(CONTINUED)

MELANIE

Who's talking about his birthday?
We're talking about Justin's! What's
his problem with turning 19? *

JUSTIN

He believes in celebrating
accomplishments, not sentimental
rituals.

MELANIE

What the hell'd he do -- brainwash you?
Everybody deserves a little attention
on their birthday --

LINDSAY

Especially from the person they love.
(a beat, then decisively as she
rises to clear)
Well, if Brian's not doing anything, we
will.

MELANIE

What do you say we go to dinner and a
movie?

LINDSAY

That's not very special -- we can do
that any time.

MELANIE

Then let's have a party.

JUSTIN

I hate parties.

MELANIE

He hates parties --

LINDSAY

Besides, Michael's already giving Ben
one.

(a beat, then an inspiration)
I know! You're coming with us,
Saturday afternoon!

JUSTIN

Where?

(CONTINUED)

LINDSAY

A friend of mine who teaches in the Music Department at your school invited us to a violin recital.

JUSTIN

(making a face)

A -- violin recital?

LINDSAY

She said the student who's playing is a genius.

JUSTIN

I'm not really into classical music.

MELANIE

Maybe it's time you exposed yourself to a higher form of cultural expression than the thumpa-thumpa at Babylon.

LINDSAY

If he doesn't want to go, don't force him.

(beat)

She also said he's really cute.

JUSTIN

(a bit more interested now)

Why didn't you say so?

CUT TO:

8

EXT. LIBERTY AVENUE - GROCERY - DAY

8

Ben and Michael are coming out of the grocery, past a flower display. Ben buys a bouquet, presents it to Michael.

BEN

For you.

MICHAEL

But it's your birthday.

BEN

You know what they say -- it's better to give.

MICHAEL

(pressing up against him,
sexily)

Receiving's not bad, either. And while we're on the subject of your birthday --

(CONTINUED)

BEN

Yes, while we're on it, please --
nothing special. Let's just keep it
simple and low-key, okay?

MICHAEL

Simple and low-key it is. I thought
we'd go to dinner --

BEN

Someplace easy and casual, nothing
fancy.

MICHAEL

How about the Liberty Diner?

BEN

Not that casual.

MICHAEL

So how about I meet you at your place.
What time'll you be home?

BEN

If I had my damn Palm I could tell you
for sure, but --

(thinking)

Let's see, I've got classes 'til four,
then the doctor's, then yoga -- so I'd
say around seven. No, better make it
seven-thirty.

MICHAEL

Perfect!

Just then, a VOICE calls:

PAUL (V.O.)

Ben --!

They turn, see PAUL, 35, handsome, sturdy. He comes up to
Ben, who gives him a big hug and a friendly kiss.

BEN

Hey, Paul --!

PAUL

How're you doing, baby?

BEN

Great. You?

PAUL

No complaints.

(CONTINUED)

BEN

Paul, this is Michael --

PAUL

(recognizing the name)

Oh -- hi, Michael.

(then quickly to Ben, covering)

I heard you were seeing someone.

BEN

Word travels fast!

PAUL

(laughs)

Around here? We should get together
sometime. Why don't you give me a
call?

BEN

I will, if I can ever find my Palm. *

Michael exchanges a handshake and a conspiratorial smile.

PAUL

See you --

MICHAEL

See you.

Paul takes off, as Michael and Ben continue on their way.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Nice guy.

BEN

Paul's a sweetheart. Actually, he and
I were together -- about five years
ago.

MICHAEL

Oh?

BEN

We've stayed friends -- although at the
time it wasn't easy.

MICHAEL

Isn't that around when you found out
you were --

(CONTINUED)

BEN
 Positive, yeah.
 (then)
 He's the one who infected me.

This stops Michael in his tracks.

MICHAEL
 Holy fuck --

BEN
 No, it's okay. Really. He didn't
 know, and I should've been more
 careful. Anyway, I've forgiven him.

As Michael just stares into Ben's face, awestruck:

MICHAEL (V.O.)
 The man is -- perfect!

CUT TO:

9 INT. RIPT GYM - DAY

9

Michael works out with Ted and Emmett.

MICHAEL
 There's no other explanation. I mean,
 how else could you forgive the guy who
 infected you? *

EMMETT
 Try nuts.

TED
 If it were me, I'd want to kill him.

MICHAEL
 Ben's not like that. He's somehow
 managed to free himself from all the
 emotional baggage the rest of us carry
 around.

TED
 Wonder how he does it?

EMMETT
 My guess is he sings a lot of show
 tunes.

TED
 You weren't doing so bad, beltin' 'em
 out!

(CONTINUED)

EMMETT

You two date your saints --
(catching the eye of a wicked-
looking gym bunny)
-- I'll stick to the sinners.

CUT TO:

10 INT. BRIAN'S LOFT - DAY

10

Lindsay and Melanie are haranguing Brian, who's working on an
ad campaign. *

MELANIE

It's his birthday, for Chrissakes!

LINDSAY

Couldn't you at least have a cake?

BRIAN

I don't need any cake -- I gained three
ounces last week. Now would you get
off my back? I've a shitload of work
to do.

Justin comes over in a very sharp new sport coat and tie. *

MELANIE

Don't you look spiffy! *

LINDSAY

New sport coat? *

JUSTIN

My Mom gave it to me. *

(pointedly, for you-know-who) *

For my birthday. *

Brian looks up, notices Justin's tie's askew. *

BRIAN

Didn't your Daddy ever teach you how to
tie a tie?

JUSTIN

No, he was too busy throwing me out of
the house and beating the shit out of
you.

BRIAN

Well, mine didn't teach me, either. He
was too busy regretting the day I was
born. Come over here.

(CONTINUED)

10 CONTINUED:

10

Justin goes to him. Brian expertly fixes it -- he's obviously taught himself well. *

BRIAN (CONT'D)

This isn't the birthday suit I like to see you in.

(CONTINUED)

Justin forces a smile, but it's obviously for Brian. Brian finishes adjusting the tie, careful not to make it too tight.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

There.

He pats it, then gives Justin a sweet kiss, as Lindsay and Melanie watch this unexpected moment of tenderness.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

Now go get some culture.

JUSTIN

Don't work too hard.

Brian goes back to work as they head off. But Lindsay comes back, appears.

BRIAN

(typing away)

Forget something?

LINDSAY

(a beat)

I don't understand you.

BRIAN

Few do.

LINDSAY

It's obvious how much you love him. Yet you won't celebrate his birthday because you don't consider it an "accomplishment".

(beat)

Well isn't it an "accomplishment" that he's alive, and well? Isn't that enough reason to celebrate?

He sits there for a beat, doesn't answer. She leaves. As he resumes typing:

CUT TO:

11 INT. RECITAL HALL - DAY

11

The strains of violin music fill the small recital room. Lindsay, Melanie and Justin are in the audience listening as:

ETHAN GOLD

22, accompanied by a pianist, plays intensely and with passion, rocking with emotion, eyes closed, his violin not just an instrument, but a part of his body.

(CONTINUED)

11 CONTINUED:

11

Dark and lean and sexy, Ethan is a Byronic figure in a baggy turtleneck and tight, worn jeans.

ANGLE ON JUSTIN

Captivated by Ethan. And his music. Absently, he takes a pencil from his pocket, begins to sketch Ethan on his program.

CUT TO:

12 INT. DEBBIE'S HOUSE - DAY

12

Vic comes downstairs, presents Michael with a vivid silk kimono

VIC

Found it! Wore it to the What-A-Drag-Ball in '89. Went as Cho-Cho-San, your mother went as Pinkerton.

(hands it to Michael)

I promised Emmett he could borrow it for the party.

MICHAEL

It'll make a fabulous hostess gown!

VIC

He'll be stunning!

They laugh together.

MICHAEL

(nervous)

Just don't be late.

VIC

And don't you be nervous.

MICHAEL

I just want it all to come off as planned. For Ben.

VIC

It'll be the social event of the season.

Just then, Debbie comes in from the laundry room carrying a basket of clothes, sees the kimono.

DEBBIE

What'll be the social event of the season? The Homo Hop at Babylon?

(CONTINUED)

VIC
Ben's surprise party.

DEBBIE
Oh.

She starts folding. Michael looks at Vic, who knows exactly what he's thinking, encourages him with a glance. Michael goes to her:

MICHAEL
I was just telling Uncle Vic not to be late.

DEBBIE
Uh-huh.

MICHAEL
(a beat)
You know, if you'd like to come --

DEBBIE
That's okay, I've already have plans.
I'm going to the movies with my friend,
Rosie.
(then, adding)
But wish him many happy returns for me.

MICHAEL
I will.
(to Vic)
And I'll be sure to give this to
Emmett.

VIC
See ya, Michael.

And he's gone. Vic stares at Debbie, balling socks.

VIC (CONT'D)
You haven't spoken to Rosie in twelve
years.

DEBBIE
(with a shrug)
You never know. She might call.

She holds up a bedsheet.

DEBBIE (CONT'D)
Here. Help me with this.

As Vic helps her fold it, finally:

(CONTINUED)

VIC

I thought you were going to make more of an effort, where Michael and Ben are concerned.

DEBBIE

You see me giving him any grief?

VIC

I don't see you giving him any joy.

DEBBIE

I agreed to tolerate it, not endorse it.

VIC

Maybe you could up your commitment a notch. You've got to admit Ben's been a positive influence on him.

DEBBIE

Positive. Exactly.

VIC

And despite all your darkest fears and dire predictions, they both seem to be doing just fine. So why not be a sport and make the kid happy?

Debbie looks at him, goes back to her laundry.

CUT TO:

13 INT. RECITAL HALL - DAY

13

As the Audience chats at the wine-and-cheese reception after the performance, FIND Melanie and Lindsay standing with Justin who clutches his program.

MELANIE

Was he amazing, or what?

LINDSAY

And to think he's so young.

JUSTIN

He's been playing since he was four. He studied with the great Andrei Vishnevski.

MELANIE

I thought you didn't know anything about classical music.

(CONTINUED)

JUSTIN

I read the program.

He watches Ethan chatting with a few audience members across the room, transfixed.

LINDSAY

(to Melanie)

I think we're witnessing a conversion experience.

MELANIE

Another lesbian success story.

LINDSAY

There's Susan. I want to thank her for the tickets.

Melanie and Lindsay head off. Justin stares at Ethan for a beat, then goes over to him. He hasn't felt this nervous since the night he went home with Brian. He waits for the OLDER MAN AND WOMAN who are chatting with Ethan to leave, then approaches.

JUSTIN

I -- I just want to say, I thought you were great.

ETHAN

The Ravel was passable, but the Brahms was for shit.

JUSTIN

(laughs, surprised)

I didn't notice.

ETHAN

You should. It was all your fault.

JUSTIN

(shocked, no horrified)

Me?

ETHAN

The way you were staring at me. You're very distracting.

JUSTIN

(feeling just terrible)

I'm sorry --

ETHAN

(adding)

Although not necessarily in a bad way.

(CONTINUED)

Justin smiles, relieved. And pleased.

JUSTIN
I'm Justin.

ETHAN
Ethan.

JUSTIN
(holding up the program)
I know!

Ethan notices Justin's program -- and his drawings on it.

ETHAN
What's this?

JUSTIN
Oh -- nothing.

But Ethan snatches the program, sees several sketches of himself, performing. Justin's totally embarrassed.

ETHAN
It's me, in five variations! Sorry but I'm definitely keeping this.

JUSTIN
It's like a habit, you know? Can't stop myself.

ETHAN
Sign of a true artist. I play in my sleep. You go to school here?

JUSTIN
(nods)
Visual Arts.

ETHAN
Thought I recognized you.

JUSTIN
Friends brought me for my birthday.

ETHAN
Lucky you. Here. Happy Birthday. *

Ethan pulls a CD from his bag: it's self-made with a funky photo cover of himself in a leather jacket with his violin.

JUSTIN
(impressed)
Your own CD?

(CONTINUED)

ETHAN

Made it myself. A couple of Mozart sonatas, a Debussy, a little Bernstein -

JUSTIN

Nice photo.

ETHAN

(holding up Justin's drawings)
Next time, I'm using one of these.

They exchange a smile. Then as Ethan is lionized by other well-wishers ("You were brilliant!" -- "Congratulations") and Justin stands there, continuing to stare:

CUT TO:

14 INT. TED'S CONDO - BEDROOM - DAY

14

Ted and Luke finish having sex -- both really into it. As they end with a sweet kiss, lying there in each other's arms, neither wanting to part.

TED

That was sooo good --

LUKE

Better than good. You're a wonderful lover, Ted.

TED

It's easy to be wonderful when you're loving someone wonderful. The hard part is finding that someone.

LUKE

(laughs)
Tell me!

TED

In fact, I'd practically given up hope. No, the truth is, I had. I even thought it was me -- that I didn't deserve anyone.

LUKE

How could you think that? You're so nice, so sincere, so -- honest.

Unseen, Ted's eyes do an abrupt shift to the right. Or whichever direction is away from Luke.

(CONTINUED)

LUKE (CONT'D)

That's why I like you. I felt immediately, you're someone I could trust.

Luke cuddles into Ted, peacefully. Ted realizes it's now-or-never-time.

TED

I'm glad you feel that way. I feel the same way about you.

(beat)

Which is why I can tell you now what I couldn't tell you before.

Luke looks at him

TED (CONT'D)

Remember when you asked me what I did and I said I worked in computers?

LUKE

You're a service provider for a relief organization.

TED

Well, that's not quite accurate, although I can understand from the intentional ambiguity of my job description that you might assume I ship food and clothing to war-torn regions of the globe.

(off Luke's confused look)

When, in fact, the service I provide is -- a pornsite. And the relief comes from -- well, I'm sure you can figure out the rest.

There. He said it. Luke looks at him for a beat. Doesn't say anything. Finally:

TED (CONT'D)

Well, I guess we'd better get dressed --

He starts to get up.

LUKE

No, wait! Is that what you wanted to tell me?

TED

Well, I just thought -- after all you told me about yourself -- that you might --

(CONTINUED)

LUKE

I've even been on them myself, a couple of times.

TED

You have? Then it doesn't matter?

LUKE

(emphatic)

You're what matters.

Ted sighs, relieved and elated. And as Luke pulls him into a kiss:

CUT TO:

15 INT. BRIAN'S LOFT - LATE DAY

15

Justin's just returned from the concert, elated, exuberant.

JUSTIN

It was incredible!

He tears off his jacket, runs to the CD player, puts on Ethan's CD. VIOLIN MUSIC fills the loft. Brian stands watching, beer in hand.

BRIAN

Hooked on Classics, are we?

JUSTIN

And the guy who played the violin -- you couldn't believe it! He was --

BRIAN

"Incredible"?

Justin gives him a look, grabs the beer, takes a gulp.

JUSTIN

You know, it wouldn't hurt you to expose yourself to a little culture.

BRIAN

I've exposed myself to a little culture. There was this oboe player I met at the baths --

Justin gives him a slug. Brian pulls him into a playful hold.

BRIAN (CONT'D)

So are you up for another birthday treat?

(CONTINUED)

Justin looks at him, incredulous.

JUSTIN
No way! No fucking way!

As Brian leads him by the shoulders into the bedroom:

BRIAN
This way, young man --

JUSTIN
I knew it! All that bullshit about not
doing birthdays. You were just
planning to surprise me!

Justin stops, surprised all right, to see a NAKED BEAUTY
sprawled across the bed, wrapped in a big red ribbon -- and
an even bigger red bow.

NAKED BEAUTY
Happy Birthday.

Justin stands staring at him, not quite knowing how to react.
Brian steps up behind him, starts kissing him.

BRIAN
How do you like your present?

Justin can't find the words.

BRIAN (CONT'D)
Looks just like that underwear model
you like, doesn't he?
(then)
Well aren't you going to unwrap it?

Naked Beauty rises to his knees. Justin hesitates -- looks
to Brian, then he goes over, removes the ribbon and bow. As
the Naked Beauty pulls him onto the bed:

CUT TO:

16 INT. HALLWAY - BEN'S APARTMENT - FRONT DOOR - NIGHT 16

The SOUND of a GONG. The door opens. A GEISHA in white face
answers.

GEISHA
(modest, demure)
Welcome, Kind Gentlemen -- please
enter. I am your hostess for the
evening.

ANGLE ON TED AND LUKE AT THE DOOR

(CONTINUED)

TED

Emmett -- is that you?

EMMETT

Yeah, honey! Whaddaya think?

TED

You put the "gay" back in geisha!

Michael comes into frame, impatiently:

MICHAEL

Now hurry up and get in! He could be here any minute!

FOLLOW THEM as they make their way into:

17 INT. BEN'S APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

17

TED

Michael, Emm Butterfly, this is --

EMMETT

Luke, right? We prayed together at the Church of the Holy Show Song.

MICHAEL

Come on in, Luke --

FOLLOW THEM into:

THE LIVING ROOM

Emmett has transformed it into -- well, nobody's quite sure what he's transformed it into. It's definitely an Asian/Pittsburgh fusion kind of thing.

TED

Jesus. I think I had a dream like this once when I ate some bad moo goo gai pan.

MICHAEL

It was supposed to be just a few paper lanterns.

EMMETT

So I got carried away! Now come in and have some sake and corn doodles.

(sheepish)

I kinda blew my food budget on the room.

(CONTINUED)

In the room are a whole group of Ben's friends, collected from the Palm, and Melanie and Lindsay. *

TED

Mel, Linz -- this is Luke.

MELANIE

So you're the famous Luke we keep hearing about.

LINDSAY

Ted thinks you're pretty terrific.

MELANIE

We think Ted's pretty terrific, too!

TED

Tell him more! Tell him more! I'll get us some sake!

He gives Luke a reassuring squeeze, heads off, leaving Luke alone with Melanie and Lindsay. Meanwhile:

ANOTHER ANGLE

Michael spots Vic.

MICHAEL

Uncle Vic --!

VIC

On time, just like you said. I hope you don't mind I brought along a friend.

MICHAEL

The more the merrier.

He steps aside, as Debbie enters the apartment.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Ma -- you came.

DEBBIE

My friend Rosie called me at the last minute and cancelled. Since I had nothin' else to do --

MICHAEL

(smiles)

I'm glad you're here. I know Ben will be, too.

(CONTINUED)

DEBBIE

Listen, baby, if he's good to you, then the least I can do is wish him Happy Birthday -- and many more.

He gives his mother a big hug.

BACK TO LINDSAY, MELANIE AND LUKE

MELANIE

It's true, Ted's just been raving about you.

LINDSAY

In fact, I don't think I've heard anyone use "est" more times in one sentence -- "the nicest, the cutest, the kindest --

LUKE

Sorry if I blush, I'm also modest.

MELANIE

He thinks you're very special.

LINDSAY

And you'd have to be -- considering what he does.

Off Luke's look:

MELANIE

The Dick Channel -- all dicks all the time!

EMMETT

(passing through)

This sounds like by far the most interesting discussion in the room!

LINDSAY

We're just saying how great it is that Luke's so open-minded about Ted's pornsite. Not everyone would be.

LUKE

I admire someone who's passionate about what he does.

EMMETT

Oh, he's passionate, all right. Eats, drinks, sleeps porn, 24-7.

(CONTINUED)

MELANIE

And knowing our little entrepreneur,
he's not going to stop here.

LINDSAY

He's far too ambitious for that --

EMMETT

I'm sure he's got dozens more websites
planned --

MELANIE

His own film studio --

LINDSAY

Even a theme park!

*

They all laugh, including Luke, as Ted returns with a couple
of drinks.

TED

Sake?

LUKE

No, thanks -- I don't drink.

TED

Is he the nicest, the sweetest, the
cutest --

LINDSAY

What did I tell you?

They all laugh. Ted looks a little confused, then puts a
loving arm around Luke, gives him a kiss.

TED

(lovingly to Luke)

Which I guess makes me about the
luckiest guy in the world!

Just then, Michael runs over, announces in a loud whisper:

MICHAEL

Someone's coming up the stairs! It's
him -- hide everybody!

EMMETT

This is it!

(CONTINUED)

Emmett TURNS OUT the lights. Everyone goes to hide. The door opens slowly. A figure comes into the light. The lights GO ON. Beat. It's Brian -- and Justin close behind. Everybody groans, moans, "That's not him -- Shhhit!:

BRIAN
(undeterred)
Surprise!

MICHAEL
(pissed)
It's seven-twenty. You don't show up
"fashionably late" for a surprise
party!

BRIAN
We were busy having our own little
celebration.

Melanie and Lindsay pounce on Justin, pull him aside.

MELANIE
You had a celebration?

LINDSAY
Brian came through after all?

JUSTIN
(after a beat)
He got me a hustler.

MELANIE
What --?

LINDSAY
Are you serious?

They look over at Brian, see red.

OVER BY THE DOOR

Michael's peering through the crack, listening. He softly
shuts it.

MICHAEL
(whispers)
He's coming! This time it's really
him! Quick, everybody hide!

Everyone takes their place, places, Emmett TURNS OUT the
lights, wait for a beat. The lights COME ON. Everyone jumps
out, screams:

(CONTINUED)

ALL

Surprise!

Ben stands there for several beats, stunned. Michael comes over to him with a huge grin, gives him a big kiss.

MICHAEL

Look at you! We really surprised you!
(to the crowd)
We really surprised him!
(back to Ben)
Happy Bir --

BEN

(cutting him off)
What the fuck's going on?

Michael's thrown. Not exactly what he was expecting.

MICHAEL

What do you mean? It's your birthday
so I called all your friends and --

BEN

How do you know all my friends?

MICHAEL

I borrowed this. *

He takes out the Palm, shows Ben. *

BEN

You've had it all this time? *

MICHAEL

I'm the culprit. *

Ben grabs it out of his hand. *

BEN

You had no right! *

There's silence now, as everyone watches. Michael, self-conscious and totally thrown, doesn't know what to do.

MICHAEL

Look, I -- I'm sorry, I was just --
(then, under his breath)
What the hell's the matter with you? *

BEN

(not bothering to lower his
voice)
I told you I didn't want a party!
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

17 CONTINUED: (6)

17

BEN (CONT'D)

I don't want to celebrate my goddamn
birthday!

*

(CONTINUED)

MICHAEL

And here I am, thinking he's so wise, so together. That he lives on some higher spiritual plane than the rest of us poor, dumb mortals. Boy, did he have me fooled. Was I fucking stupid--!

Brian finally grabs him, stops him.

BRIAN

You finished?

MICHAEL

Why? In a hurry to pick someone up?

BRIAN

Just tired of listening to you play "Variations on a Theme of Poor Little Mikey" --

MICHAEL

I'm so sorry to bore you!

BRIAN

Then try another song.

MICHAEL

(now pissed at him)

What did I do, besides throw him a goddamn party?

Brian looks at him for a beat, realizes he's clueless.

BRIAN

Never mind. Forget it. Go to Woody's. Get drunk. Throw up. Pass out. You'll feel better in the morning.

MICHAEL

No, tell me!

Brian considers -- then finally tells him.

BRIAN

You want too much. You expect too much. Then when your hero disappoints you, your little heart gets crushed.

MICHAEL

And what's the alternative? To want nothing? To expect nothing? Like you?

(CONTINUED)

18 CONTINUED: (2)

18

And with that, he zooms away from Brian down the street.

CUT TO:

19 INT. TED'S WAREHOUSE - DAY

19

Ted's at command central, communicating with his jerkatworkers:

TED

Billy, Walter from Tallahassee's wondering if you'd shoot no-handed.

(switching channels)

Jack and Gilles, we've got Rolf from Dusseldorf online. Wants you two to do a little double-headed dildo action. Danke!

Ted turns , sees:

LUKE

standing there, watching. Ted lights up.

TED (CONT'D)

Hey! What a nice surprise!

He grabs Luke in an embrace, gives him a big kisseroo.

TED (CONT'D)

Better than nice.

LUKE

Did I come at a bad time?

TED

(making a joke)

Around here, there's no such thing! Let me give you the VIP Tour.

He keeps his arm around Luke, starts to show him around.

TED (CONT'D)

This is my kingdom. You see the boys are doing their little thing -- with their big things --

(then)

Easy, guys. You've got another fifteen to go -- pace yourselves, pace yourselves!

*
*

He looks at Luke, giggles, tipsy with love.

(CONTINUED)

TED (CONT'D)
God, you are the cutest! If my members
took one look at you --!

Luke looks a bit alarmed.

TED (CONT'D)
Don't worry. Nobody gets you but me.

He starts to kiss Luke again -- but Luke backs off.

TED (CONT'D)
(confused)
What --?

A beat, then:

LUKE
I -- I came to tell you -- I think
we're moving too fast.

TED
Too -- fast?

LUKE
(nods)
In fact, maybe we shouldn't see each
other for a while.

TED
You're kidding, right?

He's not. A beat, then:

TED (CONT'D)
(stunned)
But why?

He looks at Luke, who doesn't answer. And in his silence,
Ted knows instantly.

TED (CONT'D)
It's because of this, isn't it?

LUKE
I thought it wouldn't mean anything --
I tried not to let it. I even told
myself, it's just a job, like any other
job. You're providing -- a service.

TED
That's all it is.

Luke looks over at the JerkAtWorkers, on the job, then at Ted.

LUKE
That's not all it is.

*

He starts to leave. Ted stops him.

TED

No, wait --!

LUKE

Please don't make this more difficult -- *

TED

Look, I'm willing to do whatever it takes. Anything. You name it. I'll give it up --! *

LUKE

No --!

(a long beat, then)

You shouldn't have give up doing what you love. *

(touching Ted)

Besides, it's not your problem. It's mine. *

TED

Maybe we could work on it -- together. *

LUKE

I'm sorry, Ted. *

He gives Ted a kiss, then hurries out. Ted stands there for a beat, listening to the moans and groans. As he stares off: *

TED

Easy, guys. Pace yourselves -- pace yourselves -- *

CUT TO:

20 EXT. HOME DEPOT - PARKING LOT - DAY

20

Brian, loaded down with a pile of 2x4's, and Melanie and Lindsay schlepping cans of paint and other shit, make their way across the parking lot.

BRIAN

So now you're Leda's gofers.

MELANIE

She's doing us a favor.

LINDSAY

We had to volunteer.

He dumps the wood in the back.

(CONTINUED)

BRIAN

Next time, do yourselves a favor -- and
me. Hire a pro.

MELANIE
(pointedly)
You know all about that.

LINDSAY
(suddenly remembering)
Oh, shit -- I left my credit card!

MELANIE
You sure?

LINDSAY
Be right back!

She runs off. Brian leans against the car, impatiently, lights a cigarette. Melanie looks at him for a beat, decides to say something.

MELANIE
So I hear you finally broke down and got Justin something for his birthday. A hustler.

BRIAN
He really got off on it.

MELANIE
Just what he needs -- to get laid.

BRIAN
I didn't hear him complaining.

MELANIE
Of course not -- he wouldn't dare!

BRIAN
Then why are you?

MELANIE
Because I'm not in love with you.

BRIAN
(relieved to hear)
Finally -- someone who isn't.

MELANIE
You might've given him something a little more thoughtful.

BRIAN
Save the Jewish mother guilt trip bullshit for my son.

(CONTINUED)

MELANIE

Fuck you, Brian. I'm just trying to tell you that's not what he wants.

BRIAN

And what does he want, mama?

MELANIE

Something -- romantic.

Brian laughs. Or gags. It's hard to tell which.

BRIAN

Jesus, what do you think we are -- a couple of dykes?

MELANIE

You should be so lucky!

BRIAN

How about I send him a dozen roses?

MELANIE

Why not?

He gives her a look, ditches his cigarette, then:

BRIAN

He's not my wife. We're not married. And we're not straight.

MELANIE

Couldn't you bend your holier-than-thou, "I'm gay and if you don't like it you can suck my dick" principles just once? Let him know you care? *

BRIAN

I thought he did. *

Just then, Lindsay comes running back, waving her credit card. *

LINDSAY

Got it!

CUT TO:

21 INT. MUSIC BUILDING - HALLWAY - DAY

21

As the SOUND of music pour out of practice rooms, STUDENTS pass toting flutes, french horns, etc. FIND Justin, wandering, portfolio in hand, peeking through windows in doors.

(CONTINUED)

21 CONTINUED:

21

He stops when he hears violin music. He looks in, sees Ethan, practicing his fiddle.

Heart pounding, Justin takes a breath, goes in.

22 INT. MUSIC BUILDING - PRACTICE ROOM - DAY

22

Ethan's at a music stand, a ratty old scarf wrapped around his neck, sheaths of music spilled everywhere. As at his recital, he's totally absorbed in his music. He plays not just with his hands but with his entire body -- eyes closed. Justin watches for a beat: curious impressed, excited. Sensing someone's presence, Ethan opens his eyes, sees Justin. He stops playing, smiles.

ETHAN

Thought you were the maintenance guy.
There's no heat.

JUSTIN

Sorry --

ETHAN

Maybe things'll warm up, now that
you're here.

Justin smiles, embarrassed by Ethan's directness. Not that he minds.

JUSTIN

I was just cutting through the music
building, and I heard someone playing --
thought it might be you. So I popped
my head in and --

ETHAN

And what do you know, you found me.
Tea?

He offers Justin some from his mug, but Justin declines.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

You have no idea how difficult it is to
play Le Tambourin Chinois when there's
ice forming on your bow.

JUSTIN

I just wanted to say thanks. For the
CD.

ETHAN

You listen to it?

(CONTINUED)

JUSTIN

Six times! You're -- incredible.

ETHAN

(dismissing it -- and loving
it)

I know. So how was your birthday?
Have a big party?

JUSTIN

Not really.

(beat)

My boyfriend doesn't think being born
is a reason to celebrate.

ETHAN

That sucks.

JUSTIN

I didn't want one, anyway.

ETHAN

I mean that you have a boyfriend.

JUSTIN

Oh.

ETHAN

'Cause if I was your boyfriend, I'd
give you a birthday you'd never forget.

JUSTIN

Like what?

ETHAN

Like first I'd bring you breakfast in
bed. Strawberries dipped in chocolate!

JUSTIN

Dark?

ETHAN

Is there any other kind? Then I'd play
you one of Ravel's Valse Nobles et
Sentimentals, because that's how I see
you -- noble and sentimental.

Justin looks down. Ethan takes up his bow, puts the tip
under Justin's chin, raises his head.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

Then we'd make love a couple hundred
times.

(CONTINUED)

JUSTIN

All that before lunch!

ETHAN

But then I'm not your boyfriend.

They look at one another for a moment, then:

JUSTIN

Got to get to class --

Justin takes off, a bit flustered. Ethan watches him go. Then as he resumes playing -- appassionato:

CUT TO:

23 OMITTED

23

24 INT. MICHAEL AND EMMETT'S APARTMENT - DAY

24

Michael is making himself a sandwich or bowl of cereal, when there's a knock at the door. He answers it. Ben's standing there. Michael's chilly, doesn't ask Ben to leave -- but doesn't ask him in either.

BEN

(finally)

I've missed you the last few nights --

MICHAEL

I thought it'd be best if I slept alone. In fact, I think it'd be best if I sleep alone from now on.

BEN

Michael, please -- I know I got a little upset at the party --

MICHAEL

"A little upset"? You were a fucking monster -- humiliating me, humiliating yourself --!

BEN

I know that, too.

MICHAEL

And after all the trouble I went to. For you!

BEN

I know.

(CONTINUED)

MICHAEL

Well, I'll never do that again! Not that it matters, since I doubt we'll be spending any more birthdays together --

BEN

(blurting)

My t-cells went down.

Michael stops, looks at him.

MICHAEL

What --?

BEN

And my viral load's back up.

MICHAEL

How -- up?

BEN

125,000.

Michael tries to blink back the rush of fear.

BEN (CONT'D)

That's where I was, before I came home. At the doctor's. Getting the results. (a beat) The cocktail's not working. My body's become resistant.

MICHAEL

Well, can't they change the drugs?

BEN

They already have.

He takes out a cigarette, lights up.

MICHAEL

Since when do you smoke?

BEN

Since I'm nervous.

Michael watches him exhale in silence.

BEN (CONT'D)

Would you stop looking at me like that? I'm not perfect, you know.

(CONTINUED)

MICHAEL

I'm finding that out.

BEN

Although God knows I've tried. Eastern religion, meditation, yoga -- you name it, I've practiced it. Hoping to achieve some state of -- "Inner Harmony".

(beat)

Then this happens, and I realize the only thing I've achieved is to convince myself I believe all this bullshit.

MICHAEL

It's not bullshit.

BEN

I hurt you, Michael. I hurt the one person who means more to me than anyone else in the world. For which there is no excuse. No excuse at all.

Michael looks at his lover. Not a god. Not a saint. Just Ben. He takes him in his arms.

MICHAEL

Sure there is. You're human.

CUT TO:

25 INT. BRIAN'S LOFT - NIGHT

25

Justin is at his computer, drawing. He stops, thinking of something -- or someone -- else. He picks up Ethan's CD, puts it ON. Listens to it fill up the loft.

CUT TO:

26 EXT. LIBERTY AVENUE - GROCERY - NIGHT

26

While the MUSIC CONTINUES UNDER the scene, Brian walks by the grocery. He looks at the flower bins outside the store, pulls out a bouquet of roses. Sniffs them.

GROCER

Those are nice.

BRIAN

(nodding)

Hmm.

GROCER

Shall I wrap them for you?

(CONTINUED)

Brian considers them for a moment, then after a beat, places them back.

BRIAN
No. Thanks.

As he turns and walks away:

FADE OUT.

THE END