

Reckless

*A short story based on
The Prodigal Son*



By Scout Prior

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A short story with meaning

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Warner sat at his father's kitchen table and watched his brother Blaine through the window.

Outside, Blaine paced and smoked, smoked and paced. No time for standing still. His bloodshot eyes sometimes looked up towards Warner, but then away—always away.

Warner sighed. Why was his brother even here? But, of course, he knew the answer—money. What a loser, always looking for a handout. Warner folded back the cuff of his buttoned-up shirt, perfectly pressed even though it was a Saturday morning, and he was sitting in his father's kitchen. But it was their monthly company meeting, and even though it was informal, Warner liked to present himself well, unlike some.

He looked at his younger brother and shook his head. What a wreck. As if he had just walked out of a nightclub at 4 a.m., Blaine's clothes were crumpled over his skinny frame, shirt half untucked. Resting his chin on his hand, Warner thought, *It's possible he had come straight from a nightclub and hadn't even gone home yet.* And what was that stain on his shirt? Maybe the result of a hangover-induced stop for a kebab along the way? A classy breakfast, if ever there was one.

Blaine threw down his cigarette, ground it out, and smoothed his hair back. His greasy, dirty hair.

Warner beckoned with his muscled arm for Blaine to come inside, as one would to a toddler. "Come on, little brother, you can do it."

Blaine frowned, Warner smiled.

Blaine entered. "Why do you have to be such a dick?" he asked, leaning against the kitchen counter, the table between them.

"Why do you have to be such a fuck-up?" asked Warner.

Blaine's jaw clenched, and his eyes welled up. "You've always been mean to me. Mum never liked it when you were mean to me."

Warner's eyes narrowed. "Don't you mention her."

"It's true." Blaine nodded.

"Don't." Warner cautioned, straightening in his chair, fists clenched on the table.

"She loved me." Blaine took a deep breath. "She never loved you."

Warner exploded from his chair and rounded the table, snarling.

Blaine held up shaking hands and cowered before his older, larger brother, but it wasn't enough to stop Warner emotionally or physically.

The first blow hit him in the stomach, bending him over, the second to his cheek, dropping him to the floor.

Warner crouched down and hissed into his brother's ear, "You never say that. *You're*

the one she'd be ashamed of. *You're* the disappointment, not me."

"What the hell is going on?" asked a loud voice from the kitchen door.

Warner's face flushed, and he stood up, pointing to Blaine on the floor. "You should have heard what he said about Mum."

Quentin strode into the kitchen. "What are you, four? Get away from him."

Warner hung his head and backed away.

Quentin helped Blaine to his feet. "Are you all right?"

"I'm sick of it, Dad."

"Sick of what?"

"Sick of everything, sick of him," said Blaine, tossing his head in Warner's direction.

"He's the one—" retorted Warner.

Quentin's eyes briefly flashed to Warner. "Shut it."

He then looked back to his younger son. "What *do* you want, Blaine?"

"I want to do other things with my life. I need to get away. I can't go on like this."

Blaine's words tumbled out.

Warner frowned slightly as he followed Quentin's eyes and looked up at a picture on the wall. A picture of Mum.

"He's right you know," said Quentin. "We can't go on like this, my love." After a moment, Quentin looked back at Blaine. "Ok Blaine, what would you do if I gave you some resources to get away?"

Warner raised his eyebrows.

Blaine's eyes widened. "Well, there's a guy I know who wants to get me into some investments overseas. Hotel management, that sort of thing."

"And he wants money." Quentin sighed.

"Yeah, but he wants to train me too."

Quentin closed his eyes and took three deep breaths.

Warner's frown deepened.

Quentin opened his eyes. "I have put money aside in a trust for you later in life—that's fifty times your current salary in one lump sum. I'll arrange to put it into your account by the end of the week."

Warner's jaw dropped, and he sank into a chair. What the fuck.

"Thanks Dad," said Blaine, a grin stealing onto his face.

"It's your life Blaine." Quentin shrugged. "Go now. Find out what you need to find out."

Blaine looked at his dad, then directly at Warner. "You can't hurt me anymore." Blaine walked out.

Quentin sat down at the table beside Warner.

"Dad, what did you just do? He's gonna lose all that money." Warner stared dully ahead, his previous energy evaporated. "And why did you reward him for being a piece of shit? I've worked hard for you. We've expanded the company together, and I don't

ask for handouts.”

“Let me ask you a question, Warner,” said Quentin, facing forward as Warner did.

“When did you start bullying Blaine?”

Warner frowned.

“Let me guess, you always have. And when your mother died, what did you do to help him. When he was struggling, I mean?”

Warner shifted in his seat.

“You did nothing. Actually, you did more than nothing—you made it worse for him. Is that what a brother is supposed to do?”

A chill hit Warner. Wait, how could his brother being a fuck-up be *his* fault?

“I did try to stop you, but I didn’t do enough. Today I decided it was enough. And now here we are. We’ve thrown him out into the world unprepared, and we may not see him again, but as your brother said, we can’t continue like this.” Quentin stood up and put his hand on Warner’s shoulder. “You’ve worked hard, a business success, but what sort of a person are you? Have a think about it son.” Quentin left the room.

Warner sat at the kitchen table, staring blindly ahead. *His* fault? Blaine had always been a little shit, hadn’t he?

He thought back.

“*You are my light,*” she used to say to him. One time he said, “*Why do you say that more to Blaine?*” She smiled and said, “*Because he needs to hear it more.*”

Warner looked down at his hand, grazed and swollen. From hitting his brother. He couldn’t even keep count of how many times he’d done it before.

He remained sitting at the table for a long time, lost in thought as he stared at the picture of his mother on the wall.

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“Welcome home, brother.” Randy smirked, putting his arm around Blaine as they walked through the doorway.

Blaine’s mouth fell open.

How was this even an apartment? There was a feature wall two stories tall, and there weren’t windows, just glass, floor to ceiling.

Light, so much light. Mum loved the light. *Blaine, you are my light.*

Randy guided Blaine to the edge. “This is the highest penthouse on the strip.”

Blaine swallowed when looking at the other luxury hotels below and along the coast.

“Won’t this be a little expensive?”

Randy snorted. “Not with the sort of cash you’ll be getting soon. I’ve set up an awesome investment plan. In fact, this hotel is one of the investments, so really, you’ll be more of a part-owner than a guest. Now, to formalities.” On the table was a stack of papers, a gold pen sat next to it. “Here are the contracts I’ve had drawn up, pretty basic

stuff. Just sign anywhere it's marked, and you'll be on your way."

Blaine sat and picked up the pen. "Thanks Randy. I don't know how I would have gotten started without you. Mum would be proud."

Randy's brow furrowed. "Uh...I'm sure she would, champ."

He started to sign. "I'm surprised you were able to set things up so fast. I only just got here."

"Why do you think I've built up an empire so quickly—when I see a sure thing, I jump—no hesitation. I can teach you that too."

Blaine smiled, then winced as his pain reminded him of Warner's anger.

"Thanks...brother," said Blaine, his eyes flickering briefly up to Randy and then away.

Randy smiled. "Sure, brother."

As Blaine signed the last page, he heard a clinking sound approaching.

"I heard celebrations were in order?" The voice came from an attractive woman in a hotel uniform, wheeling a trolley over the marble floor.

"They certainly are." Randy nodded. "Blaine, this is Frida—she's the hotel concierge."

Frida stopped near the table and pulled a magnum of champagne out of the silver ice bucket.

"Nice to meet you, Blaine." Frida smiled.

She opened the champagne and poured two glasses. Handing the first to Blaine, she winked as he took it. Blaine's face turned red.

"Well, looks like you guys have got everything under control. I'll leave you to it," said Frida and left.

Randy held his glass high and yelled, "To Blaine!"

After a brief pause, Blaine also raised his glass. "I guess, to me." A smile broke out over his face. This was as good as it got.

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"Ready babe?"

Standing before Blaine in his opulent bedroom was a goddess in a cocktail dress.

"Yeah babe," replied Blaine.

Tiara had moved in a few weeks ago, and he still didn't believe it. Athletic, tanned, and gorgeous—he couldn't imagine life before her. She moved in close, slid her hands inside his blazer, and kissed his neck.

Blaine breathed out slowly, eyes closing.

She moved up to nibble at his ear and whispered, "Does Daddy have my pocket money?"

"Hmm, oh yeah," said Blaine. He opened his eye to see Tiara had retrieved his money clip and held it in front of his face.

"You're lucky you're with me," she told him. "Some other bitch would rob you blind."

"S'pose so." Blaine shrugged with a small smile as he handed her a sizeable stack of bills.

"Thanks babe," said Tiara. She folded the cash and put it in her designer clutch. Then, she grabbed his hand and dragged him from the bedroom into the marble hallway.

"Dogs up!" Tiara shouted out. Corresponding whoops and shouts called back from various places around the suite. A primped-up dude burst from one of the rooms off the hallway, almost running into them, beer sloshing to the floor.

Randy's so-called wolf pack of dude-bros had also moved in around the same time as Tiara.

"Sorry bro," said this particular pack member who slapped Blaine on the back—Blaine didn't remember his name.

Now that he thought about it, he hadn't seen Randy in a while.

Tiara dropped Blaine's hand, grabbed the newcomer's tie, and dragged him along behind them.

"I thought we were going out to dinner, just the two of us." Blaine frowned.

Tiara rolled her eyes. "We are in the party town of party towns, babe. So loosen up a bit."

They moved through the apartment, gathering the human-dog bros until they left the apartment fifteen strong. The drinks flowed, and the night quickly became a blur, as it had pretty often recently. At some point, he remembered Tiara saying she had to catch up with some of her friends. The pack dragged him on. He woke up alone.



Blaine poured a shot of scotch, downed it, then poured another. He played with his empty money clip, eyes unfocused. The afternoon sun pierced the two-story glass, penetrating the haze of his brain.

You are my light.

He snorted and slowly surveyed the scene. Broken glass littered the suite, the fridge door hung askew, and the crowning glory of the mess—a chandelier rested on the floor.

"Sir?"

Shaking his head, Blaine squinted across the table. His shirt was ripped and covered in various alcohol stains, each of which, combined with the smell of sweat, formed a strong odour.

Frida sat across from him, paper laid out in front of her, a stern expression on her face. Her hotel uniform was immaculately clean and pressed.

"Sir." Frida raised an eyebrow. "As I was saying, we have been happy to have you as a guest this past year, but we feel the relationship has reached its conclusion. Your bank has declined your last month's invoice as your bank account is overdrawn. Not to mention"—she gestured around—"the extensive damage to the suite."

"Sir?" Blaine smiled. He gestured around with his scotch glass. "Well, it was the wolf-pack that did this. Did you ever meet them? Wild guys."

"I'm sure you understand that you are the only registered guest for the suite. Therefore, the financial responsibility is yours alone." Frida pursed her lips.

"I'm sure the wolf pack and their princess have moved on to other hunting grounds. I don't suppose my shares in this hotel count for anything?"

"Sir, you are assuredly not in any way an investor of this hotel."

Blaine shook his head. "Of course not." He took another sip of scotch.

Frida picked up a document from the table. "This is a legally binding agreement between yourself and this business, stating that all finances between us have been settled and that you are no longer allowed on hotel premises. It also contains a Non-Disclosure Agreement that does not allow you to speak about your experiences at this hotel."

Blaine looked at the document attached to the clipboard, tears in his eyes. This was it. This was where it all ended. What the hell would he do after this? Any path into the future he tried to picture ended in pain and disappointment.

The concierge continued. "Due to the substantial deposit we took, we will have enough to cover the damages with only a small loss, so it is in your best interest to sign this now, or we will be forced to pursue you for the remainder legally."

Blaine took the pen and, with blank eyes, signed his name.

"Thank you," said Frida, smiling for the first time. "We're done here."

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Blaine stumbled onto the street, one hand shielding his head from the sun, the other holding an almost-empty bottle of expensive scotch. He drained the last of it and tossed it aside.

He fumbled around his pockets and found his phone. Unfortunately, the screen was cracked and dark, and no clumsy pushing of buttons would resurrect it.

Like a zombie, he shambled off in search of water, his ripped shirt fluttering. Finally, he satisfied that craving for water at a public fountain.

The sun beat down. He had to get out of its merciless beating.

You are my light.

Fuck! Stop saying that! Tears filled his eyes, and he tripped down an embankment.

Nearby was a bridge, and he crawled towards the cool shade.

Blaine hid away from humanity, huddled in the shade among the wet dirt and discarded plastic bags.

In shock, he replayed everything in his head.

He tried to see a way out. Any way to salvage something from this.

There was nothing. He was broke, homeless, alone, and far from home.

His thoughts ventured to his family.
He remembered growing up and the way he had been so entitled.
He remembered how he always took the easy way out while his brother tried so hard.
He remembered Mum dying, felt like he was dying.
He remembered the countless night of partying as he tried to fill a bottomless hole inside.
He thought of the times he had fucked up and how Dad had always helped him.
Shaking uncontrollably, he sobbed as each thought released more and more emotions, more pain.
Finally, he thought of his biggest mistake—turning his back on his family while squandering a considerable amount of the family legacy.
It was unforgivable. She wouldn't be proud.
Still shaking, he started at the beginning and went through the list again and again and again. Forcing himself to feel the shame and pain that had resulted from his actions.
Eventually, Blaine quietened.
Exhausted, he slept.
It was not a restful sleep, but when he woke with the early dawn, at least he knew what he had to do.



Quentin sped towards the airport, weaving in and out of traffic.
He was never this reckless.
Close now, so close. Wait, there on that bench!
Quentin slammed on the brakes, and his car obliged with a near-immediate stop. He flung open the door and leaped from the car, keys dangling in the ignition.
“Blaine!” called Quentin, running towards his son, stopping a few metres away.
Blaine sat, bearded and gaunt. A plastic bag, seemingly his luggage, rested by his side.
“Dad, I was coming to find you.”
“I know,” sighed Quentin.
Tears filled Blaine's eyes, and Quentin's heart rose to his throat.
“I lost everything you gave me—Warner was right, I've been such a fuck-up.” Blaine held a shaking hand to his mouth. “And I'm not the light of her life.”
Quentin sat down on the bench and put his arm around his son. “Do you know why she used to say that about you in particular? It's because you were so honest. She could see everything you felt. But since she left us, you've closed off, probably even from yourself, and you've punished yourself for it. There's no need for it, Blaine. You are the light of her life and mine. You've just forgotten for a bit.”
Blaine started to convulse as the sobs racked his body. “I'm so sorry.”
Quentin held him close. *My boy.* “Quiet now, you're home.”



Quentin looked out across the party.

Blaine, dressed in some respectable clothes, quietly accepted congratulations on his return. He was different. Before he left, he looked lost. Now, he looked...found.

Warner walked up to stand next to his father. "I still don't know why we needed a party. I mean, I'm glad he's back. He seems better, but a party? After all that money he blew?"

"Do you remember what he was like before he left?" asked Quentin quietly.

Warner stayed silent.

"For a long time, he was slowly dying," whispered Quentin, his words scratching at his throat. "And when he left, it was as if he was dead to us. Son, you'd already lost a mother, and a year ago, you lost a brother. But now he is back and alive again—doesn't that seem a good enough reason to celebrate, whatever the cost?"

"Well, when you put it like that, I guess." Warner nodded.

For a while, they both stood silent.

"I heard you just ran into him on the street," said Warner. "You kept an eye on him the whole time, didn't you?"

"Of course," said Quentin. "Now go talk to your brother, you've got a lot of catching up to do."

Warner smiled. "Sure." And walked towards Blaine.

Blaine isn't the only one who's changed, he thought, as the brothers smiled at each other. *Warner's more thoughtful, less aggressive.* Maybe there's hope for both of them...and me.

He looked up to the night sky. "Well, how am I doing, my love? It took me a while, but I think I'm starting to figure it out. I miss you."

You are my light.

