“SLICE OF LIFE”

By: Jason Lafita

CHARACTERS:

JUSTIN (34M) — A software engineer. VINCE recently broke up with him, but he thinks he can get him back. Smooth-talking and smug but conflict avoidant to a fault and largely idiotic.

VINCE (34M) — Baker. JUSTIN's boyfriend, until he broke up with him due to his rampant cheating. Pretends he's sure of himself. Emotionally stunted with childish tendencies.

ROB (23M) — JUSTIN's new boyfriend. Works at the same company as him. Not the smartest, just here for a good time.

SETTING:

JUSTIN'S KITCHEN, DAY — A nice, modern-designed kitchen in his NEW YORK CITY apartment. Everything is pristine and white. Has some sort of central COUNTER and a SIDE TABLE.

PROPS:

INGREDIENTS: Bag of flour, Bag of powdered sugar, Bag of granulated sugar, Carton of eggs, Stick of butter on plate, Box for butter, Carton of baking powder
COOKING SUPPLIES: Measuring cups, Whisk, Fork, 2 mixing bowls
OTHER: Vape

NOTE: All of the stage directions involving messing with ingredients can be mimed with just a bowl and the packages, so no one has to deal with actual baking ingredients.

Q401

(LIGHTS UP on JUSTIN's KITCHEN. There is a COUNTER in the center of the stage, with a MIXING BOWL, a BAG OF FLOUR, and a CARTON OF EGGS on it, as well as a SIDE TABLE stage left perpendicular to the lip of the stage with a STICK OF BUTTER on it. JUSTIN pops up from behind the COUNTER. He is dressed in fashionable clothes (including a SWEATER or OVERSHIRT layered on top of another). He's clearly put a lot of effort into his appearance — his hair is combed neatly, and his clothes are ironed.)

(JUSTIN is holding two bags, a BAG OF POWDERED SUGAR and a BAG OF GRANULATED SUGAR. He looks between the two.)

JUSTIN
(softly, to himself.)

Cakes are fluffy, right? Yeah, there's powdered sugar. Why would they use granulated sugar>

(JUSTIN puts the GRANULATED SUGAR away. He goes to the SIDE TABLE. He examines the STICK OF BUTTER on a PLATE with the BOX next to it hesitantly and prods it with one finger like it's something disgusting, an exaggeratedly disdainful look in his eyes.)

JUSTIN
(softly, to himself.)

It's about soft enough...?

(JUSTIN picks up the BOX and studies it.)

JUSTIN
(softly, to himself.)

It’s salted butter.

(A beat.)

Salt is good in baked goods, that’s what Vince said when he tried to teach me last time. It brings out the sweetness, or whatever. A’course it is, salt is great.

(JUSTIN walks back to the COUNTER and shoves the BOX under the COUNTER. He then picks up CARTON OF EGGS, which he then accidentally drops on the ground.)

JUSTIN

Shit.

(There is a KNOCK at the DOOR.)

JUSTIN
(loudly.)

SHIT!

VINCE (O.S.)

Justin?

(JUSTIN is in a state of clear disarray. In a panic, he throws off his OVERSHIRT, wiping up any EGG on the ground, and shoves it under the counter. He then sets the eggs on the SIDE TABLE

VINCE (O.S.)
(annoyed.)

Justin, are you trying to pull something? I could leave / right now.

(/ JUSTIN rushes to the DOOR. He brushes off his CLOTHES, runs a hand through his styled HAIR, and opens the

DOOR.)

JUSTIN
(voice intentionally deeper.)

Hey, babe, c'mon in.

(VINCE enters. He is wearing casual lounge clothes. VINCE looks around the room.)

VINCE

Jeez, Justin, this place looks pathetic without all the art I bought us. It's worse than your sophomore dorm.

(JUSTIN tenses and clenches his fists, holding back his emotions, but ultimately lets the insult wash over him.)

JUSTIN
(shrugs.)

You know me.

(VINCE rolls his eyes JUSTIN. He crosses the room to the COUNTER. He studies the ingredients with mild disdain.)

VINCE

Powdered sugar? Really? Please tell me you have granulated sugar, or did you get rid of that when you went on that stupid diet that Rob from Data Analytics mentioned.

(It is clear from VINCE's tone that he thinks "Rob from Data Analytics" is more than a coworker.)

JUSTIN
(voice low and smooth.)

I told you a million times, Vince, baby, Rob wasn't—

VINCE

Just gimme the granulated sugar and don't start this again. It won't work this time.

(JUSTIN grumbles and mutters to himself like an old man. He puts the BAG OF POWDERED SUGAR away, and pulls out the BAG OF GRANULATED SUGAR.)

JUSTIN
(with a mocking forward bow. He's joking, but behind the joke is the barely hidden feeling that JUSTIN feels like VINCE feels superior him.)

Here you go, your highness.

VINCE
(pouting, crossing his arms, like a petulant child.)

It was YOUR idea that WE bake a cake for Sophie's anniversary party. I'm just making sure the cake we serve doesn't have the texture of a protein bar like everything you try to cook.

(JUSTIN sighs and shakes his head in reply. He shuffles over to the SIDE TABLE, where there is a STICK OF BUTTER on a PLATE. JUSTIN picks it up and brings it to the counter.)

JUSTIN
(setting the plate on the counter.)

Here's the butter. I woke up early to make sure to take it out of the freezer.

VINCE
(mocking.)

Oh, it must be so hard to be you. High rise apartment in NEW YORK CITY, men throwing themselves at your feet, tech job where literally all you have to do is prompt ChatGPT, a salary that would make the people from your hometown pass out, / no student loans, actually reasonable work hours...

JUSTIN
(interrupting VINCE, loud, mocking.)

/ You could've had all of this if you didn't spend Junior Fall getting high and watching cooking shows and forgetting about all your midterms.

VINCE
(lying.)

/ You KNOW I dropped out because I realized that tech bro culture isn't my thing.

JUSTIN

Oh, come on, Vince, don't lie to yourself. You were a terrible student, you... you... never even did your homework!

VINCE
(still lying.)

Yes, I did!

JUSTIN
(triumphant, like a great gotcha moment.)

No, you didn't! I saw your grade breakdown at the end of Intro Algorithms, you had a 35% in the homework category!

(VINCE harrumphs and pouts childishly, crossing his arms. Justin sighs, standing there for a few moments, awkard, as the reality sets in that they're two 30-year-old men arguing about decade-old missing assignments.)

JUSTIN
(quietly.)

Let’s just work on this.

(VINCE grabs the BUTTER and begins putting ingredients together in the MIXING BOWL, whisking it together. Meanwhile, JUSTIN approaches VINCE, but stumbles over his shirt on the floor.

JUSTIN
(exclaimed, as he stumbles, gaining his footing.)

Ahhh!

(He backs up, head bowed, hoping VINCE didn’t see. VINCE did, and he laughs.)

VINCE
(without malice, almost kind.)

Crack three eggs into a bowl and whisk them together.

JUSTIN
(now smiling weakly.)

As you wish, babe.

(JUSTIN goes to the SIDE TABLE. He winces as he opens the EGG CARTON, and examines the contents with disgust. After finding the few uncracked eggs, he cracks them into the BOWL and combines them with a FORK.)

JUSTIN
(a little awkwardly.)

So, how’s your sister?

VINCE

About ready to egg your car.

JUSTIN

Kind of a de-escalation considering she was in favor of fire-bombing Teslas this time last year.

(VINCE laughs. It is a warm, happy sound that makes JUSTIN's entire demeanor relax.)

VINCE
(quiet, almost conspiratorial.)

You know, she didn't want me to come over here.

JUSTIN

And you went against her? Wowwww, I didn't think you had it in you to go against what anyone told you to do.

VINCE
(playfully.)

Oh, shut up.

(A beat. JUSTIN finishes whisking the EGGS, and hands the BOWL to VINCE.)

VINCE

Thanks, love— or, um, sorry.

(VINCE looks away, and pours the egg mixture in the main bowl and begins whisking it together.)

JUSTIN

It's alright, babe. Just instinct, huh?

(VINCE nods. An long, awkward beat

passes.)

JUSTIN

So, anything I could help with?

(VINCE nods again.)

VINCE
(stammering, not looking at JUSTIN.)

Uh, yeah.

(VINCE picks up the FLOUR and CARTON OF BAKING POWDER. He hands JUSTIN back the now-empty MIXING BOWL, as well as the FLOUR and BAKING POWDER.)

VINCE
(still not making eye contact.)

Combine 2 cups of flour and 2 teaspoons of baking powder. And a pinch of salt, wherever your salt is. *Remember, just a pinch.* You can mix it with the fork to keep it airy.

JUSTIN

Got it, boss.

(JUSTIN walks to the SIDE TABLE with the INGREDIENTS, the BOWL, and a few MEASURING CUPS. He adds the ingredients to the bowl (without washing it out), and begins mixing with the fork.)

(A few moments pass, where VINCE's visible embarrassment and tension fade, and his posture and expression turn to contentment and visible joy. Meanwhile, JUSTIN is growing more and more disgusted as he looks at the mixture in the bowl. He looks deeply confused, clearly understanding that this is not how the dry ingredients are supposed to look but not why. JUSTIN picks up the

FORK, and shakes it out, trying to get some of the sludge out.)

JUSTIN
(quietly, while turning around and holding the bowl.)

Uh, Vince, baby?

(VINCE turns around.)

JUSTIN

Q402 Q403 10 sec after

This looks a little... wrong?

(VINCE's positive exterior falters completely. He scoffs, shakes his head, and turns around, completely ignoring JUSTIN.)

(JUSTIN, in turn, groans and shakes his head, setting the DRY INGREDIENTS down. He turns away from VINCE, nervous and running his hands through his hair. He doesn't question VINCE at first, he's clearly used to this behavior.)

(A few moments of tension pass, where VINCE is aggressively whisking the WET INGREDIENTS together, fuming and possibly even muttering to himself. Meanwhile, JUSTIN stands there, fidgeting a little, talking silently and gesturing to himself, considering his possible moves from here.)

(Finally, JUSTIN approaches VINCE slowly, crouched down a little, sort of like a person approaching a stray cat. This should be over-the-top in nature. JUSTIN puts his hand out, making sure that VINCE can see, before he sets it on his shoulder gently. VINCE shrugs him off with an over-exaggerated scoff. JUSTIN pulls his hand away and takes a

step back, giving VINCE space.)

JUSTIN
(softly.)

Hey, babe. Q404

(VINCE's head snaps up to look at JUSTIN.)

VINCE
(yelling, waving his arms.)

Stop calling me that, you know I hate it when you call me that!

JUSTIN
(gawking and gesturing at VINCE in confusion.)

I've been calling you that since... whatever.

(A beat.)

What's up, Vince?

(Another beat. VINCE glares at JUSTIN, and opens his mouth to yell again.)

VINCE

Are you stupid—

(VINCE cuts himself off and takes a deep breath. He goes back to aggressive whisking.)

VINCE

You ruined the dry ingredients. What made you think that you should put the flower in without washing the raw egg out?

(JUSTIN winces. He glances at the

audience, visibly and audibly gulping and pulling at the neck of his shirt.)

JUSTIN
(unsure.)

Sorry?

VINCE
(angry again, rapidly gesturing, caught up in his own head.)

You always do this! You act all stupid and ruin everything! You ruined the dry ingredients. You're so stupid! You can't do jack shit, Mr. Big-Shot Programmer Capitalist Technofascist Piece of Shit!

(A beat. VINCE keeps glaring at JUSTIN, chest puffed up, ready for a retort, but JUSTIN delivers none. Instead, he stays in place, head down.)

JUSTIN
(with the same urgency as VINCE.)

I didn't know. Really.

(A beat.)

JUSTIN

I thought this was to get all the eggs in the cake, or whatever. I've never made a cake before. I was just going with what you said.

(VINCE nods, still fuming but starting to calm down. He turns back to the COUNTER and pushes the WET INGREDIENTS aside.)

VINCE

Okay... Okay.

(VINCE reaches into his pocket and pulls out a VAPE. He takes a hit. JUSTIN gawks at him.)

JUSTIN

Are you vaping right now?

VINCE
(shaking his head vehemently.)

Ew, no.

(VINCE takes another hit.)

VINCE
(as if this is the most important distinction in the world.)

It’s weed, not nicotine.

JUSTIN
(exaggerated.)

Vince, can you not? I could get *evicted* for this.

(VINCE scoffs and puts the VAPE back in his pocket.)

VINCE

Evicted? Really? Everyone in this building is doing drugs harder than this. And this literally doesn’t smell like anything. Can you smell it?

(JUSTIN grumbles and turns around, arms crossed.)

JUSTIN
(quietly, mostly to himself.)

Can’t believe you need your stupid, brain-numbing pot just to bear one morning with me.

VINCE
(with a dopey smile on his face.)

Apologies, I know you're used to your work "friends" who need three lines of coke to deal with you.

(JUSTIN grumbles louder and shakes his head.)

JUSTIN
(defensive.)

That's different.

(A beat.)

JUSTIN

Let's... let's just get this done.

(JUSTIN picks up the DRY INGREDIENT BOWL.)

JUSTIN

I'll wash this out and dry it and do the dry ingredients again, okay?

(No response from VINCE. He stands there, watching JUSTIN walk to the far end of the SIDE TABLE and mime washing and drying the MIXING BOWL. He then adds the FLOUR and BAKING POWDER once again. The two settle into a content silence, casting glances back at each other.)

(JUSTIN crosses back over a few moments later with the DRY INGREDIENTS)

JUSTIN

Can I add it and mix it?

VINCE

Yeah.

(VINCE takes a deep breath.)

VINCE

Totally, Justin.

(Another period of quiet as JUSTIN combines the TWO BOWLS and mixes them together with the WHISK. VINCE continues watching JUSTIN, almost appraising him lovingly.)

JUSTIN
(showing the bowl to VINCE.)

It looks about mixed now.

VINCE
(nodding.)

Totally.

(JUSTIN lifts the WHISK out of the bowl and positions it in front of VINCE's face.)

JUSTIN

Want a taste? Q405

(VINCE laughs softly and nods. The LIGHTS begin to FADE TO DIM, as if the show is ending, as VINCE leans forward and licks the WHISK.)

(VINCE gags and pulls away, coughing.)

VINCE
(coughing, sputtered out.)

Q406xx

What the fuck is in that batter?

JUSTIN
(still standing there, staring the WHISK, confused.)

I dunno, babe. Just the stuff you told me to put into it.

(VINCE gives JUSTIN a "I'm not buying your bullshit" look.)

VINCE

Really? Taste it.

(JUSTIN looks down at the WHISK, a disgusted expression on his face.)

JUSTIN

If you say it's that horrible, / I don't think I should eat it.

VINCE

/ Taste the goddamn batter, Justin.

(JUSTIN grimaces and leans forward, giving the whisk a tiny, experimental lick. He, too, pulls back in surprise. He makes a wretching sound, like a cat about to cough up a hairball, and his free hand comes up to fan out his mouth, as if he ate spicy food.)

JUSTIN
(rapid-fire.)

It's salty, what the fuck did you do?

VINCE
(almost cutting JUSTIN off.)

You were the one who mixed the dry ingredients, how much salt did / you add?

JUSTIN
(shaking his head.)

/ Nuh-uh, I didn't add ANY salt, since I used salted butter.

(Complete silence. JUSTIN instantly quiets as he realizes his mistake, while VINCE gawks at him, in awe of his ex's stupidity.)

(VINCE's staring turns into a glare, and he leans forward. For a moment, it looks like VINCE is about to attack JUSTIN.)

(Instead, he speaks, his voice shaky with barely restrained rage.)

VINCE

Salted butter.

JUSTIN
(nodding, hands clasped at his front, looking like a guilty child.)

I thought baked goods needed some salt to bring out the sweet, that's what you said.

(A beat.)

VINCE
(yelling.)

A PINCH of salt!

JUSTIN

How am I supposed to know how much salt is in salted

butter?

(VINCE has to turn around to stop from blowing up more.)

JUSTIN

I didn’t know, babe, / it’s an honest mistake.

VINCE
(gets in JUSTIN’s face, waving his hands like a madman.)

/ AHHHHHHH / HHHHHH

JUSTIN
(once again tenses, clenching his fists, but his emotions win out the battle.)

/ You are a CHILD, Vincent! A spoiled fucking child who’s never had to work a day in / his life.

Q407

(ROB pokes his head in from the opposite side of the door at all of the commotion. ROB’s hair is messed up, and he’s still in pajamas, rubbing his eyes, since he’s just woken up. Neither JUSTIN nor VINCE notices him.)

VINCE
(in a manner that inadvertently proves JUSTIN’s point.)

/ You just hate me because I never bought into your stupid avaricious bullshit.

(ROB enters fully, still lingering in the back of the room, looking between the two, nervous, confused and sleepy. Throughout the next part, ROB observes JUSTIN and VINCE, confused about the scene and taking it in, having comedic reactions.)

JUSTIN

Avaricious? That’s a big word for a stoner who flunked out of college.

VINCE

Oh, shut up! I left willingly!

JUSTIN

Yeah, and I don’t talk to my family anymore because we mutually agreed our lifestyles don’t align.

VINCE

Oh, so everything is about you, huh? Boo-fucking-hoo, have you ever considered that the reason your parents don’t want you is that you’re a selfish waste of space?

JUSTIN

Yeah, I’m the selfish waste of space who went against our university rules, could’ve lost my scholarship, to let my lazy drop-out boyfriend live in my dorm for over a year so he didn’t have to pay / New York rent.

VINCE

/ Yeah, and? That was your choice! Do you want me to pay you back? Would you have me as your / fucking servant?

JUSTIN

/ This is what you ALWAYS do, you never give me a chance, you interpret everything I say in the worst possible way just so you can lord it over me and pretend that everyone has always wronged you and you’ve had the most tragic, most horrible fucking life. I’m sorry you had to grow up in the suburbs with two loving parents who still pay your grocery bill.

VINCE

Stop it with your stupid fake apologies!

JUSTIN

What do you want me to apologize for, not being as big of a fuck-up / as you?

VINCE

You CHEATED on me with a college kid!

JUSTIN

He GRADUATED last year!

VINCE
(loudest he’s been.)

You fucking—

ROB
(confused, voice considerably quieter than either of them.)

Wait, why are you guys talking about me?

(Both JUSTIN and VINCE freeze and fall silent, looking back at ROB.)

VINCE

I’m leaving.

JUSTIN

Wait, Vince, babe, don’t / go.

ROB
(incredulous, looking at VINCE.)

/ Wait, you’re Vince? Damn, I always imagined you as shorter.

(pauses in thought (while VINCE grimaces) before snapping out of it and glaring at JUSTIN)

Wait, why's your ex here?

JUSTIN
(to ROB.)

Rob, Robby, please, this isn't what it looks like.

(JUSTIN turns to VINCE.)

JUSTIN
(stammering.)

Don't go, babe, look, Rob just had a little too much to drink last night, I didn't, I couldn't let him go home alone.

VINCE

Such a good samaritan, letting a poor drunk teenager sleep in your bed to keep him safe.

ROB

I'm twenty-three!

(VINCE laughs in his face.)

ROB

And I was not that drunk last night. I had, like two Long Islands. I'm the one who help Justin take the subway back to his place.

JUSTIN
(scoffing and shaking his head.)

Oh, come on, I'm an adult, I've lived in this city since 2010, I can take the subway on my own.

VINCE

I actually think he’s right, didn’t you have to take a cab back from JFK after that one business trip three months ago?

ROB

(eagerly.)

Oh! I remember that! That was the time we went to San Francisco, and Justin and I—

JUSTIN

Rob!

ROB

(trails off, glancing between JUSTIN and VINCE.)

Oh. Yeah. Sorry.

(ROB suddenly stands up a little taller, looking confused.)

ROB

Wait. You never answered, why’d you have your ex over?

VINCE

(mocking.)

Worried that you’re getting cheated on? Couldn’t imagine how that feels?

JUSTIN

Rob, love, just ignore him. I promise this was just us baking a cake together.

ROB

Wait, baking? I asked you on Sunday to make refrigerated croissants for us for breakfast and you said your oven

doesn't work.

(VINCE laughs harder.)

JUSTIN

Rob, please, I just, I was worn out—

ROB
(shaking his head.)

No, just stop. Ugh, my stupid roommate was right, I should've waited for you to show me the divorce papers instead of diving into a relationship with you like a fucking stupid chud. This is just like what happened at my internship last summer.

(VINCE howls with laughter, reaching out for the COUNTER for support.)

VINCE

Goddamn, Justin, your type really is fuck-ups.

ROB

Hey!

VINCE

No offense to you, I don't know a kid your age who isn't a fuck-up.

(VINCE approaches the exit, while JUSTIN stammers wordlessly and reaches out for him. Right before leaving, VINCE looks back at ROB, who is just glaring between VINCE and JUSTIN.)

VINCE
(pulling out his vape, to ROB.)

Want a hit?

ROB
(narrowing his eyes in hesitation.)

What’s in it?

VINCE

Weed.

ROB
(grinning and nodding eagerly, following VINCE.)

Niiiiiice.

JUSTIN

WAIT, are you both just going to—

(Exeunt ROB and VINCE. The DOOR SLAMS. Fade to black.)

Q408